Misogynists Have Feelings, Too: An Analysis of Circulating Affect in The Red Pill

Samantha Pinson Wrisley

Georgia State University

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical discourse analysis that seeks to identify and understand the various affects circulating within the anti-feminist, reactionary group, The Red Pill. The central argument is that, despite The Red Pill’s desire to cultivate an emotionless “essential masculine,” affect is made visible in these environments when it moves or circulates in the form of emotionally charged discourse.

INDEX WORDS: Masculinity, Affect Theory, Emotion, Sara Ahmed, Men, Reactionary Movements, Misogyny, Sexuality, Patriarchy
MISOGYNISTS HAVE FEELINGS, TOO:
AN ANALYSIS OF CIRCULATING AFFECTS WITHIN “THE RED PILL”

by

SAMANTHA PINSON WRISLEY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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MISOGYNISTS HAVE FEELINGS, TOO:
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SAMANTHA PINSON WRISLEY

Committee Chair: Susan Talburt
Committee: Megan Sinnott, Jennifer Patico

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DEDICATION

To George Wrisley. Not all men, after all.
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Thank you, first and foremost, to Susan Talburt for allowing herself to be attached to this dreary project, for commenting all my drafts, for answering all my emails, and for providing kind and generous feedback and theoretical guidance. Thank you to my committee members, Megan Sinnott and Jen Patico, for pushing me to clarify my arguments and concepts. Thank you to my mentor, Julie Kubala, for her personal encouragement and practical guidance. Thank you to George Wrisley for arguing with me about the nature of truth and affect as a concept. Thank you to my dear friends, Lacey Botsford and Blaise Parker, for helping me grapple with the cultural components of The Red Pill’s unique brand of masculinity. Last but not least, thank you to my cohort—Jainey Kim, Quita Tinsley, Lesia Pagulich, Sarah Abdelaziz, and Candice Merritt—for always being there to crack a joke, get a drink, or give a hug when it was most needed.
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1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary feminists produce various forms of feminist thought in an established and ever-expanding field of feminist Tumblr blogs, Twitter accounts, and the like. These outlets offer a constant, digital stream and varied forms of critical feminist theory, resulting in countless access points to feminism. However, the Internet has also allowed for the creation of spaces in which opposition to feminism and hatred of women can flourish. Feminists acting online frequently encounter and clash with their oppositional counterparts—those concerned that the sociopolitical goals of feminism are negatively impacting men. Often these individuals—overwhelmingly heterosexual, white men—identify with and/or claim membership in various groups that exist to disseminate their anti-feminist/misogynist messages and encourage men to adopt their masculine-centric life philosophies. These groups can be located within the hopelessly named “manosphere,” a loosely collected, androcentric group of blogs, websites, and forums dedicated to analogous misogynist ideologies. The “manosphere” is called so because these sites are deemed “male spaces.” Often women are quickly jettisoned, blocked, or shouted down if found participating. These spaces combine with the inherent conditions of the Internet—assumed anonymity, constructed identities, and conditions that encourage certain levels of performance—to produce astonishingly magnified levels of anti-feminist and anti-woman rhetoric. In the manosphere, feminism is an ill-defined societal boogeyman that defies masculine logic, reason, and objectivity. Frequently outlined as a vague permutation of feminine rage, feminism is not just “sexist”; it is, “[…] nothing more than a female supremacy movement posing as one of humanist egalitarianism,” and men are “soldier[s] of differing kinds, individuals that have learnt to repress fear and hone the adrenaline it elicits to evolve.”¹ It quickly becomes clear that, in the manosphere, gender and “gender justice” aren’t about equality. They represent a

¹ Illimitable Men, Sections 2 & 20 of “The Red Pill Constitution,” Jan 2014.
zero-sum game where every “win” by women—no matter how personal, tiny, or globally insignificant—represents a loss for men everywhere.

The largest of these groups, Men’s Rights and The Red Pill, and others reside mainly on the website Reddit, a social media and social news aggregation site that operates almost exclusively through user-created content and participation on forums (i.e., subreddits) and their individual threads. While these groups are predicated on the idea that feminism (so-called “third-wave feminism,” in particular) is a “disease,” a “cancer,” and/or a tool of social control constructed to oppress men, their approaches to this idea and their accompanying theories are distinct. For example, Men’s Rights is primarily concerned with the political and legal implications of feminism for men. Members often focus on issues such as alimony, child support, custody battles, divorce law, domestic violence laws, and women murdering men, arguing that the legal system, the “mainstream” media, and the workplace are colluding within a “feminist society” to oppress men. The Red Pill, on the other hand, is more focused on the sociocultural implications of feminism. They believe that women, empowered by feminism, are rejecting their biological destiny and subverting gender and gender roles, resulting in a devastating corruption of Western society. Because of this, The Red Pill is primarily concerned with how feminism is affecting intergender, mainly heterosexual, interactions between men and women.

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2 Men’s Rights has approximately 125,000 readers, while The Red Pill boasts around 190,000 active users.
3 The emphasis on “third-wave” feminism appears to be an unvoiced, extremely reluctant approval of a few of the goals of second wave feminism. Third-wave feminism is presented as the wave that took “women’s rights” too far.
5 The Red Pill’s name is derived from the 1999 science-fiction film, The Matrix. In the film, the elusive Morpheus asks protagonist Neo if he wants to take the red pill or the blue pill. The blue pill will return Neo to his old, miserable, corporate life whereas the red pill will allow Neo to see reality for how it really is, i.e., a constructed Matrix.
The Red Pill is fundamentally reliant on notions birthed out of biological essentialism and social determinism—i.e., men and women are necessarily different as a result of biological and social programming. To summarize their philosophy: 1) Men are superior both physically and in terms of their ability to be rational/logical; 2) Men have an innate, uncontrollable biological drive to sleep with as many women as possible. If they are successful in this, they are considered “alpha” males. If they are unsuccessful, they are labeled (allegedly by women) as “beta”6; 3) Women, in this gender paradigm, are also driven by their biological drives. They are inherently overly emotional and manipulative, seeking to exploit men for their reproductive capabilities and their “resources” (i.e., shelter and money); 4) Feminism and the West’s subsequent transformation into a “feminized” society have intensified the degree to which “bad behavior” (i.e., exploitive, manipulative actions) on the part of women is tolerated, even rewarded. TRP’s concerns range from women using discarded condoms to impregnate themselves without their partner’s consent, how to obtain a hyper-masculine body, to dismantling the idea that gender is a social construct.7 Feminism, in The Red Pill, is never clearly defined, beyond labeling it as a diametrically opposed, feminine brand of The Red Pill.8 However, when reading Red Pill literature, it becomes clear that the feminism the men of The Red Pill are condemning is the slow progress society has made towards gender justice, for example, addressing the gender wage gap, fomenting women’s independence, and putting an end to rape culture and slut-shaming.9

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6 Beta men have internalized the narratives of a feminized society and, thus, have failed to embody their “true” maleness. They are often called “beta bitches,” “beta bucks,” and/or “cucks,” and ridiculed for being submissive to the demands of women. There are other categories of “maleness” as well, including omega, gamma, and sigma, but these are unnecessary for having a general understanding of TRP philosophy.


8 See page 45.

9 In Chapter 3, I illustrate the ways in which the men of The Red Pill are interesting in reestablishing a form of cruel patriarchy, in which women are completely subjugated and objectified.
Subgroups often emerge from these spaces. Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) is a group comprised of individuals who have internalized Red Pill philosophy, but have failed to achieve “alpha” status. Often, MGTOW goes further than The Red Pill, arguing that women in the West have become so tainted by feminism that they are untouchable and no interaction with them is worth the risk of being taken advantage of or having a false-rape accusation leveled in their direction. Thus, they avoid interactions with women unless these interactions can be precisely quantified, generally in the form of prostitution or an unambiguous sex-for-resources arrangement (e.g., a mail-order-bride situation). Otherwise, the majority of their philosophy is predicated on cultivating an essential maleness: independence, wealth, intellect, and satisfaction through pseudo-monastic isolation.\textsuperscript{10}

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Despite the sheer volume of their vitriol and their ineluctability online, these contemporary iterations of the men’s movement have failed to receive any significant attention from academia, and even less from feminist scholars. The goal of my thesis project is to explore online “gender reactionary” groups—specifically The Red Pill.\textsuperscript{11} Through an affective reading of their discourse, I will expose: 1) how the issues put forth by gender reactionary groups like The Red Pill are fundamentally reliant on a problematic application of both biological essentialism and social determinism as these concepts pertain to gender and sex; 2) how The Red Pill’s theoretical framework and discursive practices repackage male dominance and patriarchy through discourses of “truth”; 3) how The Red Pill’s theoretical framework serves as a method for the intellectualization of misogyny and displacement of negative emotions onto women; and, 

\textsuperscript{10} I revisit MGTOW in Chapter 3 of this thesis as a means of querying what it means to either “succeed” or “fail” in The Red Pill.

\textsuperscript{11} I’m explicitly using the terminology of “reactionary” in an attempt to accurately capture the reactionary nature of these groups; specifically, these groups often spring up as a reaction to feminism and what they perceive as “heteropatriarchy” being turned upside-down.
finally, 4) the role “affective wells” and the circulation of affect play within the discourses of
gender reactionary movements.

I chose to confront this issue for several reasons. First, both academic and popular
feminism often go out of their way to avoid acknowledging these oppositional movements, as if
doing so would lend them undue legitimacy. There is good reason for thinking this; feminism’s
goal is not to engage with specific, online-based hate groups whose arguments rely on flawed
logic, but to fight systemic patriarchy and other forms of oppression. However, I believe that
because The Red Pill are reacting against the cultural and social shifts that feminism is
attempting to stimulate, their contempt, vitriol, and their very existence can be read as evidence
that gender, gender roles, and feminism are destabilizing patriarchy on a fundamental level—to
the point that men are conceptualizing gender and, specifically, heteropatriarchy, as being turned
upside-down, making “normal” heterosexual relations impossible.

Second, I believe subterranean affects flowing through these groups are evidence that the
destabilization of gender and gender roles is creating strong, emotional dissonance. Men are
being forced to reckon with the negative effects of patriarchy (e.g., toxic masculinity,
constraining gender roles, etc.) in a time when women are encouraged to question the patriarchal
system and its influence on their romantic relationships. Thus, they retreat to homosocial arenas
like the manosphere where their confusion at the reality of dating/sex is validated only when it
reveals itself as contempt for the other sex and feminism, not the system that creates the
perceived constraints—patriarchy.

Third, I believe that these “affective wells”—deep seated and unnamed but profoundly
operative parts of one’s emotional inner-life—provide fertile ground for the proliferation of hate
and, potentially, violence. In his 141-page manifesto, Isla Vista mass shooter, Elliot Rodger wrote:

The Spring of 2013 was also the time when I came across the website PUAHate.com.\textsuperscript{12} It is a forum full of men who are starved of sex, just like me. Many of them have their own theories of what women are attracted to, and many of them share my hatred of women, though unlike me they would too [\textit{sic}] cowardly to act on it. Reading the posts on that website only confirmed many of the theories I had about how wicked and degenerate women really are. […] I tried to show it to my parents, to give them some sort dose [\textit{sic}] of reality as to why I am so miserable. […] When I sent the link of PUAHate.com to my parents, none of them even bothered to look at the posts on there.\textsuperscript{13}

Rodger would, a few months later, stab his three roommates, fatally shoot two Delta Delta Delta sorority sisters, wounding a third, and fire randomly into a deli, killing a student inside. At the end of his spree, which culminated in his suicide, fourteen people were wounded, and six were dead. While Rodger was clearly a disturbed individual from the start, when individuals like him engage with desensitizing material and discussions that dehumanize women—transforming them into objects that “give sex” when presented with the correct combination of shallow dating tactics and “resources” —and masculinity is enacted only through externalizing anger and repressing pain, sadness, and loneliness, violence against the perceived object of those unwanted emotions becomes a possibility.

Finally, I believe that there is a potential here for a better understanding of how social justice movements generate specific (and potentially predictable) forms of backlash by those whose privileges are being “attacked.” Rather than “accepting” that fringe misogynist groups are

\textsuperscript{12} A now-defunct misogynist forum that was based on Red Pill philosophy. PUA stands for “Pick Up Artistry,” a pseudo-biological/psychological method for manipulating women into having sex.

\textsuperscript{13} Elliot Rodger, \textit{My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger}. 2014, 117-118.
always going to exist, we should make it a point to explicitly examine and interrogate the deeply embedded normativity of male entitlement to both female bodies and gender privilege.

Further, The Red Pill promotes rational, independent masculinity through an affectively loaded language of feelings and reaction to femininity. The paradoxes present in The Red Pill’s ideology—particularly in those discourses that frame women as innately and entirely ruled by their emotions and men as hyper-logical yet simultaneously render women as cynical and manipulative and men as soft-hearted, hopeless romantics—loom over this project and frame the way these discourses are both produced and received. Like many politically ideologies, there are gaps and contradictions in The Red Pill’s reasoning that go unexplained and unexamined. This is a phenomenon with which feminists are particularly familiar (e.g., despite her actions, a woman will be framed as either a whore or a Madonna).

As I present the discourses of The Red Pill, I will acknowledge these paradoxes and points of tension. However, I do not want this project to be a theoretical exposition of how completely backwards, wrong-headed, and misogynist online cultures are. Clearly, that is a tempting narrative to construct, but also a glaringly obvious one. One only need spend a few minutes on The Red Pill’s subreddits to come to this conclusion, and one only need to consider their views for a few minutes to realize that there are some deep emotional issues at play despite their hyper-logical, phlegmatic veneer. Further, I hope it will become clear that my desire to observe these groups is not rooted in some masochistic interest in hateful men and how they perceive women like me, but a belief that there are complex, subterranean narratives surrounding gender, power, hate, and affective tendencies within these groups that are begging to be unearthed and examined.
1.2 Literature Review

The following literature review is organized into the three sections. First, I explore the link between gender reactionary movements and men’s movements of the past, particularly the mythopoetic movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In doing this, I show how contemporary gender reactionary philosophy is ultimately derivative and, because of this, often makes the same logical mistakes as its predecessors. Second, I briefly analyze and compare two pieces of academic writing about contemporary gender reactionaries—specifically determining if it is more effective to engage them as a “compassionate interlocutor” or a “critical outsider.” Finally, I explain my theoretical approach and the origins of the notion of “affective wells,” using Sara Ahmed’s work on circulating affects and affective economies. Viewed together, this literature review will situate The Red Pill and related reactionary movements in their historical context and lay the theoretical groundwork for my thesis.

1.2.1 Origins of “Essential Maleness”

Just as feminism can trace its origins within a time (or wave)-delineated web of feminist thought, so can we locate common threads concerning the well-being of men in an ever-feminized society and “essential maleness” that predate TRP. The pseudoscientific foundations for much of gender reactionary group philosophies persist through time, despite legitimate evidence that suggest those studies are flawed. One only need do a five-minute Google search to locate studies and counter-studies that suggest men and women’s personalities are rooted in differences in their brains—specifically that women are natural nurturers and slaves to their biological clocks, while men are natural protectors/providers and slaves to their libidos. This is an ongoing, highly public quasi-scientific and quasi-philosophical debate; how much of our behavior can we boil down to our biology, our brain’s “hardwiring,” and what does this mean for
ordering society? I will not spend much time here summarizing the argument between biological essentialism versus social constructivism, though it is a fundamental, logical argument underpinning much of gender reactionary discourse online that can be summarized as “women, inspired by feminism, are rejecting their natural place and subverting gender roles and causing men and society harm.” However, I will explore these discourses in the context of others invoking it as an argument either for or against “masculinism.”

A more interesting place to begin might be the unexplored link between contemporary misogynist men’s groups and the mythopoetic men’s movement. The mythopoetic men’s movement is a loose collection of theorists of culture, society, and philosophy that, like today’s gender reactionary movements, began largely as a response to the feminist movements of the time. The mythopoetic’s de facto leader, poet and author Robert Bly, is credited with producing much of the theory that informed the foundations of the movement. In his 1990 book *Iron John*, Bly employs psychoanalysis, folklore, and the Jungian theory of archetypes to argue that (American) men have become alienated from one another and their “true nature,” a nature captured in his imagery of the “wild man,” *Iron John*. This alienation, Bly argues, has been brought upon men by modernity, industrial society, the anti-war movement, and Second Wave feminism. Bly argues that feminism has muted the voice of men and led to unnaturally strong mothers and absent fathers, culminating in the “feminization” of a new generation of men who embody either the “soft males” or “hyper-masculine” types. Soft males are characterized almost as ghosts of masculinity—living in a male body, but failing to actualize their maleness. Hyper-masculine males overstate their masculinity by focusing on stultifying and shallow “masculine” activities—football, drinking, and cars, for example—never accessing their “true” masculine

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14 Masculinism is invoked here as it is defined in *Webster’s Dictionary*: “an advocate of male superiority or dominance.”
potential. Inhabiting either of these roles prevents men from expressing their emotions fully, leaving women to become their emotional arbiters, and further isolating men from one another and themselves. He writes:

In the seventies I began to see all over the country a phenomenon that we might call the “soft male.” Sometimes even today when I look out at an audience, perhaps half the young males are what I’d call soft. They’re lovely, valuable people—I like them—they’re not interested in harming the earth or starting wars. There’s a gentle attitude toward life in their whole being and style of living. But many of these men are not happy. You quickly notice the lack of energy in them. They are life preserving but not exactly life-giving. Ironically, you often see these men with strong women who positively radiate energy.\textsuperscript{15}

Bly’s “essential masculinity” appears to be intrinsic to the male sex, something that is eroded through a lack of positive male interaction and a surplus of feminine energy/power, typically flowing through the mother figure. Further, Bly argues, men are suffering due to accusations of sexism against them from feminists. These familial and social elements, he argues, have led to widespread grief, strife, isolation, and dissatisfaction with the various accouterments of “comfortable” male, middle-class life in men and, thus, men need to return to their roots, explore their “deep” (i.e., essential) masculinity, and reacquaint themselves with their psychic ancestors and one another through masculine ritual.

There are four glaring problems with Bly’s work and the mythopoetic movement that was constructed around it. First, the notion of the “deep masculine” is fundamentally reliant on the idea of an essential maleness and an ontological difference between men and women. All mythopoetics share the notion that this difference is not socially constructed and is not culturally

relative. Like contemporary misogynist men’s groups, the mythopoetics conceptualize men and women as virtually a different species, struggling against their biology to communicate and understand one another. Of course, this view ignores one of the most critical insights of social science: that gender is constructed by and through human action and interaction, and “our definitions of masculinity and femininity are the products of social discourse and social struggle.” 16 Thus, performing masculinity and “being a man” is a different thing than “being male.”

Second, Bly seems convinced that he is contributing to rather than detracting from the long-term goals of the feminist movement despite the fact that 1) Iron John and the mythopoetic movement more generally have been resoundingly rejected by feminists as reinforcing patriarchy through the atavistic masculine, and 2) Bly implicates the women’s movement as the source of “feminization.” Although he writes, “I want to make clear that this book [Iron John] does not seek […] to return men to the domineering mode that has led to repression of women […]”, 17 simply stating that one “does not seek” to contribute to the domination of women and then going on to make an argument that reinscribes social structures that explicitly contribute to the domination of women is not sufficient for washing one’s hands of the sociopolitical implications of one’s argument.

Third, in his attempt to side-step implicating women and the women’s movement in the suffering of men, Iron John and the mythopoetic texts that came after it left a large, conspicuously empty space on the topic of patriarchy. bell hooks writes (responding to the men’s movement):

Instead, the focus of this branch of the men’s movement seems to be more on the production of a kind of masculinity that can be safely expressed within patriarchal boundaries. It emerges more as a critical response to feminism than as a critical commentary on patriarchy.¹⁸

Helen Gremillion takes this point further in her article, “Feminism and The Mythopoetic Men’s Movement,” writing, “The lynchpin of these various critiques is the point that mythopoetic men’s movement discourse fails to acknowledge socio-political, economic, and ideological realities of privilege that accrue to hegemonic masculinity and that reproduce structural gender inequalities.”¹⁹ Gremillion goes on to underline the frustrating *tu quoque* that the mythopoetic men’s movement and its offspring commit by pointing out the following passage from Sam Keen’s 1991 book, *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man*:

> Until women are willing to weep for and accept equal responsibility for the systematic violence done to the male body and spirit by the war system, it is not likely that men will lose enough of their guilt and regain enough of their understanding of their sensitivity to weep and accept responsibility for women who are raped and made to suffer the indignity of economic inequality.²⁰

Finally, in avoiding discussion of patriarchy, the mythopoetics insist on staunch apoliticality. bell hooks writes, “The most frightening aspect of the [mythopoetic] men’s movement, particularly as it is expressed in popular culture, is the depoliticization of the struggle to end sexism and sexist oppression, and the replacing of that struggle with a focus on personal

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self-actualization.”21 This displacement of political responsibility is recapitulated in the philosophy of The Red Pill, and the emphasis on self-actualization, i.e., the cultivation of an essential maleness, is a central focus on their group philosophy. hooks elaborates on this (in response to Keen, as quoted above):

[Keen’s statement] was not meant to encourage men to assume greater responsibility for their participation in the perpetuation and maintenance of male domination, of sexist thought and action. And indeed there is an implied critique of that aspect of feminist movement that rightly sees men as directly accountable for their continued support of patriarchy.22

By focusing exclusively on self-actualization within the current gender hierarchy, the mythopoetic movement depoliticizes gender in a way that obscures feminism and its goals, transforming feminists into “the enemy and women [into] the group to be resisted or attacked.”23

One can identify threads of anti-feminism and misogyny present in mythopoetic texts that carry through to contemporary misogynist group thought. Take the following example and comparison: in the conclusion of King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine by Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette (who dedicate the work to Robert Bly), they write:

In this book we have been concerned about helping men to take responsibility for immature forms of masculinity. At the same time it is clear that the world is overpopulated with not only immature men but also tyrannical and abusive little girls

21 hooks, “Men In the Feminist Struggle,” 113.
22 Ibid., 115.
23 Ibid.
pretending to be women. It is time for men—particularly the men of Western civilization—to stop accepting the blame for everything that is wrong in the world.²⁴

Compare this language with a 2013 quote from a corporate lawyer turned “Men’s Rights” activist, Den Hollander: “[it’s] clear that there are now two classes of people in America: one of princesses—females, and the other of servants—males.”²⁵ Or from a pro-Men’s Rights female blogger, “ShieldWife”: “Women have become […] spoiled brats. They are getting all of the things that they want and as opposed to making them happy, this has only made women more demanding, entitled, angry, and unhappy.”²⁶ Infantilizing language is invoked in all three of these passages; however, in the latter two quotes, we see a move toward 1) discounting male accountability through the omission of men and 2) political and interpersonal implications for men who wish to interact with these “spoiled princesses.” Additionally, like Keen above, all three writers implicate women as the source of both male suffering and the continuation of patriarchy or, in Hollander’s case, establishment of matriarchy. The paradigmatic shift occurs in the discounting and then complete elimination of male responsibility. While Moore and Gillette defensively assert “that the world is overpopulated with not only immature men but […]” and then go on to implicate “tyrannical and abusive” women, Hollander and ShieldWife eliminate the male component altogether. This is a common theme in contemporary gender reactionary philosophy: men are just trying to be men and fulfill their “natural” role within the “natural” patriarchal order while women are constantly attempting to disrupt the “natural.”

Further, Bly and other mythopoetics like Keen underline the supposedly critical nature of the father/son, initiator/initiate relationship through its emphasis on ritual and rites, cementing

²⁶ YouTube user and blogger “ShieldWife,” “Women are Spoiled Brats,” (2014).
patriarchy as a crucial aspect of men’s mental and social well-being, while minimizing and avoiding its implications for women. Keen writes that the antithesis of Jung’s king/warrior/magician archetype is the feminine powers of goddess/mother/creation. These archetypes wield a strong entrapping force, “which men must learn to identify and escape, rather than to react defensively and unconsciously.”

This position preceded the similar arguments put forth by The Red Pill and, specifically, MGTOW.

The Red Pill seeks to wake men up (i.e., to take The Red Pill) and make them realize that all women should be treated with extreme suspicion and caution, lest they be trapped into marriage, fatherhood, or alimony/child support payments. While they both emphasize the importance of “identifying” the entrapping force, it is MGTOW that emphasizes the “escape” piece, only interacting with women on a superficial level or avoiding them all together. The concept of “escape” will reemerge when we come to Ahmed’s discussion of how corporeal and psychological “apartness” creates conditions for hate to bloom.

1.2.2 Writings on Gender Reactionary Groups and Comparing Positionality

To date, there has been relatively little scholarly investigation into gender reactionary groups online, and nothing written about The Red Pill. However, there has been some exploration of Men’s Rights Activists due to their outwardly political stance and their minor visibility on college campuses. In my analysis of the following two readings about gender reactionary groups, I am also going to focus on the question of author/researcher positionality in relation to these groups as a means of evaluating the necessity of revealing my own position.

In his book, *Angry White Men*, sociologist Michael Kimmel interviews several self-identified “men’s rights activists,” explicitly positioning himself as a pro-feminist man genuinely

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desiring to better understand the lived experience of men. One of the men he interviews (mentioned above), Den Hollander, believes that “The Feminazis have infiltrated institutions and there’s been a transfer of rights from guys to girls.”\textsuperscript{28} Kimmel, despite his efforts to remain objective and open-minded in these conversations, quickly begins handling MRAs like Hollander with kid gloves, taking brief asides to “wink” at his readers (who ostensibly know better than to take these men seriously). Thus, Kimmel fails to carry the thread of concern for the material implications of these groups throughout his book; he spends time carefully considering the “aggrieved entitlement” of mass shooters and the Klan, yet dismisses upper-class Den Hollander and other men’s rights sympathizers, writing:

Men’s rights guys don’t know if they want to be restored patriarchs or liberated men. And as a result, their websites and pamphlets are clogged with howls of anguish, confusion, and pain. (That confusion, I believe again, is real, but not necessarily true. These men feel a lot, but their analysis of the cause of their feelings strikes me as decidedly off.)\textsuperscript{29}

For Kimmel, the men of “Men’s Rights” have simply not yet done anything to warrant intense scrutiny—they are relegated to a corner of the Internet amidst their “howls of anguish.”

However, we have recently experienced a very abrupt shift in the discourse surrounding the “disenfranchised white male.”\textsuperscript{30} The anger of anti-political correctness patriots and deposed patriarchs have colluded with the resurgence of white nationalism to create the Alt-Right, an amalgamous, largely Internet-based group of 4chan and 8chan threads, blogs, podcasts, and news sites such as Breitbart News. In November, it became clear that though the Alt-Right is small in

\textsuperscript{29} Kimmel, \textit{Angry White Men}, 109.
numbers, they wield a great deal of political and social power. Given this, it should not be surprising to find rampant approval of Donald Trump in the manosphere, not necessarily because of his politics, but because he is a bona fide “alpha”: assertive, wealthy, unapologetically offensive, with three attractive wives under his belt, so to speak. Predictably, after Trump’s win in November, The Red Pill exploded in celebration. As one Red Pill user stated on November 12th, “the paradigm shift toward natural masculinity in America has begun” and “Trump win was a win for TRP and a victory for men as a whole.”31 Further, this user hypothesized that a Trump presidency would usher in a period of increased femininity among American women, meaning that they will be “more receptive to our natural and masculine behavior.”32 Through these expressions of triumph, we can see that the social forces that have come together to create “Make America Great Again” and the Alt-Right are one in the same with the forces that have created the men of TRP. Thus, it appears their “howls of anguish” herald real political and social ramifications for the rest of us.

Kimmel’s failure to fully consider the broad social consequences of men’s rights rhetoric can be attributed to the fact that Kimmel is writing for the public, not for feminist scholars, other sociologists, or academics. His explication of his methodology reflects this audience, as well. His book is written in narrative style, and his data is an amalgamation of formal and informal interviews, journalistic analysis of news stories, blogs, websites, and other fragments of rhetoric from men’s rights, white supremacists, and other angry men. His positionality is addressed explicitly only once: he does not locate himself within academia or feminist studies, but instead chooses to align himself within masculinity as a compassionate interlocutor, writing, “I do not

31 JimProphetMGTOW, thread titled “NOW THAT TRUMP IS OUR PRES LIFTING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING A MAN CAN DO,” r/TheRedPill, posted November 12, 2016. [Please note: Because URL’s frequently change on Reddit, I will not be including URL’s in my citations. To locate specific posts, simply search the title of the post along with the username of the author.]
32 JimProphetMGTOW, ibid.
consider myself a breed apart from these men, as if I were a scientist examining the specimens of some esoteric species.” While he casually identifies himself to readers as Jewish when interacting with neo-Nazis and as “pro-feminist” when talking about MRAs, he does not adequately explain how these identities contribute to his analysis or how they relate to knowledge production. Again, this omission may be attributed to his narrative style and the fact that this book is written for a wide audience; thus, it is not meant to stand up to an academic-style probing of validity.

Compare Kimmel’s book with Jonathan Allan’s article, “The Phallic Affect, or Why Men’s Rights Activists Have Feelings.” Appearing in the journal *Men and Masculinities* April 2016 volume, Allan’s work is a discourse analysis through the lenses of affect theory and a psychoanalytic framework. He is primarily concerned with the men’s rights movement in the context of academia, most notably their increasing presence on college campuses and their creation of the pseudo-academic journal *New Male Studies*. The material to which Allan applies his affective/psychoanalytic method is limited to “men’s rights activist literature,” or literature produced and endorsed by and about men’s rights. Allan’s argument is that the common affective utterances in men’s rights rhetoric (e.g., “I feel,” or other declarative statements to this effect) “become phallic” in the men’s rights movement. Further, he argues that affective utterances, like the penetrating phallus, cannot be denied. He writes:

> I do not believe it is an accident that White men are turning to affective utterances to mark their claims; indeed, there is something remarkably political about these claims. These claims become indisputable precisely because affects cannot be read, one can only experience them; and in this regard, the men’s rights activists become essentially phenomenological, “my experiences are my experiences and you cannot deny them

because I believe them to be true.” That is, even if quantitative, qualitative, and factual research demonstrates that the apparent cause of these affects is incorrect, wrong, misguided, we can still not deny the veracity of the affect.34

Affect, then, assumes the symbolic role of the phallus (the phallus, of course, being the undeniable symbol of masculinity and maleness) and, more specifically, the “turn to affect” in men’s rights discourse is “provoked by a castration anxiety that has become central to men’s rights and the turn to affect thus returns the phallus to male subjectivity.”35 In this paradigm, affect is “filling the void” that is left by feminist castration. Affect becomes a method of recuperating the emasculated patriarchy through the impossibility of its denial.

Allan does not address his positionality in relation to his topic beyond locating himself “as a critical theorist working at the intersection of affect theory and critical studies of men and masculinities […] writing from the vantage of the North American (Canadian) academy.”36 He identifies himself online as a straight, white, cis-man working within Queer Theory. Like Kimmel, Allan’s position “inside” maleness/masculinity uniquely positions him to critically reflect on both claims of victimization and affective utterances as they occur in men’s rights discourse. However, Allan’s theoretical analysis through the lenses of affect and psychoanalytic theory allows for a deeper exploration of masculinity than Kimmel was able to provide in his surface-level cultural analysis.

Reviewing these articles through an analysis of their methodology has allowed me to constructively reflect on my own positionality as I approach this particular topic. Should I proclaim a feminist standpoint? A “woman” standpoint? The former will certainly become

36 Ibid., 24.
obvious in my writing, regardless of whether I proclaim it or not. Further, my feminism shapes my methodology, as I will illustrate. My gender I will leave open to reader interpretation, partially because I believe it will be easily discernable and partially because my gender is inextricably tied to my feminism and my work.

1.2.3 Theoretical Underpinning

The central theory I deploy derives from Sara Ahmed’s work on affective economies and “circulating” affect. One can easily identify the trend within these groups to obfuscate hate and other affects with a hyper-logical approach meant to exorcise emotions from the issues. Nonetheless, when talking about issues such as dating, rejection, sex, long-term relationships, cheating, and divorce, emotions become a profoundly critical component to the discussion. Within TRP, all women are thought to have certain characteristics. They are manipulative, opportunistic, irrational, and to be objectified. Interactions with women often elicit affective responses: anger, confusion, grief, and insecurity. These affects circulate in these discursive environments, despite the overtly masculinist nature of these communities and the insistence on logic (because women are the emotional gender, not men). Ahmed writes, “emotions may involve ‘being moved’ for some precisely by fixing others as ‘having’ certain characteristics. The circulation of objects of emotion involves the transformation of others into objects of feeling.”

One only need probe TRP’s narratives a bit to see the ways in which affect circulates and “sticks” to the object (in this case, women). Ahmed writes that “The object may stand in for other objects, or many be proximate to other objects.” An example of this is the common RP

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term, “AWALT,” which stands for “all women are like this.” AWALT is often deployed when a report of cheating spouses, high-maintenance girlfriends, flaky prospects, or women otherwise “behaving badly” comes to the group. When this happens, a member of the group will generally remind readers “AWALT.” This generalization is used to justify TRP’s collective anger and project it outward onto other women. Thus, negative affects stick to women, making them the source of anger, confusion, insecurity, and fear. Of course, as Ahmed writes, “Feelings may stick to some objects, and slide over others.” Generalized anger for a certain group is not necessarily sustainable when 1) that group makes up 50% of the global population and 2) one wants to have sex with some of them. It under these conditions that the “stickiness” of TRP’s disdain for a woman appears entirely opportunistic and somewhat arbitrary. This concept resurfaces in my discussion of the intellectualization of misogyny in Chapter 2.

Ahmed also writes about the physical boundaries between self and other that contribute to the production of hate. Often, men come to TRP because they are looking to change something about themselves in order to become more sexually successful with women. A common narrative is that a man was formerly an “eternal virgin” before becoming part of TRP, but now he knows how to properly “handle” women. Thus, prior to TRP, he was separated from women in a way that made him frustrated, angry, insecure, and fearful. But rather than encouraging the formation of a healthy approach to women, TRP merely gives the new user a reason for his affective pain, “sticking” those negative emotions to the perceived source—women. Ahmed writes:

Hate is involved in the very negotiation of boundaries between selves and others, and between communities, where “others” are brought into the sphere of my or our existence as a threat […] We can now see why stories of hate are already translated into stories of
love. [...] boundary formations are bound up with anxiety not as a sensation that comes organically from within a subject or group, but as the effect of this ongoing constitution of the “apartness” of a subject or group.39

We can see, here, the groundwork on which to establish the unique relationship between the subject (man/hater) and the object (woman/hated). Because the language and philosophy of TRP often defines women as being so completely apart from maleness and, indeed, *humanness*, TRP inspires men to maintain or create new boundaries between themselves and women, not to dismantle them. These boundaries render ordinary women almost mystical (or, as Ahmed would put it, “fantastic”), further reifying them as the source of male confusion and anxiety.40 Women become so othered that they can only be enjoyed at a certain emotional distance as the object, certainly never treated as equals or spoken to as adults.

Thus, Ahmed’s discussion of hate, particularly the hatred of the object that is needed, is pertinent to deconstructing misogynist narratives that emphasize the “dangerous” aspects of interacting with women. She writes, “The subject may need the destructive relation to that object: One may be attached to the attachment of hate.”41 I will situate this argument against the backdrop of the men of The Red Pill recognizing that male/female sexual interactions is a biological need, yet believing and acting as if women are very nearly intolerable. If men have an innate drive that requires they interact with women—a group they consciously loathe—are these ripe conditions for hate to bloom and intensify?

In this project, affect functions as both a conceptual framework and a term of analysis. Affect, which I understand to be that which is prior to or underpins emotions, is difficult to see.

39 Ibid., 51.
40 Though, one might argue that women were already mystical, fantastic, or confusing to the men of The Red Pill—otherwise the “women-as-other” philosophy of The Red Pill is rendered quite useless.
Its elusiveness is one of the primary points of tension in affect theory and one I am comfortable letting stand. Attempting to verbalize or articulate affect in common terms requires one give name to the particular affects one believes to be circulating. This recognition and naming transforms or moves affect into the realm of emotion. Emotion, which I understand to be the affective manifestation of a memory of similar feelings felt under specific circumstances, is also a conceptual framework for this project. Emotions and feelings are easier to see than affect, often because feelings are signified with emotionally loaded words or phrases (e.g., “I feel,” “I hate,” “I’m afraid,” etc.). These conceptual frameworks overlap in this project and it is my belief that this tension is productive.

1.3 Research Questions

As I have documented above, there is a significant lack of research into modern misogynist men’s groups and, specifically, sites of discourse online. While researchers like Kimmel and Allan have conducted explorations into the ideology of more visible misogynist groups like Men’s Rights, there has been no inquiry into those groups that focuses on the sociocultural implications of feminism’s destabilization of gender, gender roles, and, subsequently, heterosexual relationships like The Red Pill. Thus, I seek to answer the following questions: First, what discourses does TRP use to construct gender roles and heterosexual relations? Second, what discourses do TRP circulate to characterize feminism’s effect on gender and heterosexuality? Third, how does affect circulate in these discourses?

1.4 Methodology

As I approach The Red Pill as a group to study, I am very much aware of the debates within linguistics, anthropology, and rhetorical studies regarding how much meaning and significance can be derived from online discourse. A decade and a half into the 21st century, it is
clear that our lives are saturated with technology. Further, the ways in which we are situated in relation to this technology (i.e., our access to it and familiarity with it) frames our engagement with one another and influences our view of society. For example, a 25-year-old may find far more meaning in online social interactions and find that those interactions on Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter shape their identities more so than a retiree who only uses the Internet for the occasional email. Annette Markham writes:

The computer-mediated construction of self, other, and social structure constitutes a unique phenomenon for study. In online environments, the construction of identity is a process that must be initiated more deliberately or consciously. Offline, the body can simply walk around and be responded to by others, providing the looking glass with which one comes to know the self. Online, the first step toward existence is the production of discourse, whether in the form of words, graphic images, or sounds. But as many scholars have taught us, we understand our Self only in concert with Other, a continual dialogic process of negotiation and a great deal of faith in shared meaning.42

As we engage in the process of enfolding ourselves/our identities into the digital, the line between the discourses produced online and the ways in which those discourses shape our “real life” interactions becomes increasingly blurred. The blurriness of this line becomes especially important when we consider online communities such as The Red Pill, whose discourses are intended to change how men view the world and their behavior in relation to it. Further, because the set-up of The Red Pill is explicitly and sometimes confrontationally interactional, identities are co-constructed by not only the discourses produced within Red Pill literature and theory, but

also socially imparted values and norms that are often revealed in the form of criticism and advice.

To take the implications of these discourses out of the individual level, we must look again to the ways in which online-originating discourses shaped the electorate in the 2016 presidential election. The Alt-Right, which began and largely remains online, has influenced voter behavior, the media, and activist responses to the election with discourses of white nationalism, the feminization of America, and anti-PC culture. Though a researcher could ostensibly go to a Men’s Rights convention or meet-up (and I attempted to—though those meet ups, like most in-person gatherings that originate in the manosphere, were unceremoniously canceled), the real “work”—at least for right now—is being done online.43 44

1.4.1 What I Mean by “Discourse Analysis”

Because there is a great deal of interdisciplinary confusion and consternation about what exactly it amounts to, I will briefly explain what exactly I mean when I say “I am conducting a discourse analysis.” James Paul Gee writes, “If I had to single out a primary function of human language, it would be not one, but the following two: to scaffold the performance of social activities […] and to scaffold human affiliation within cultures and social groups and institutions.”45 These two functions are not independent. Human activities construct and structure cultures, groups, and institutions, which in turn influence human activities and behavior. It is through this process that discourse comes to shape group identity through the ways in which it captures and makes intelligible appropriate behavior, values, and thoughts. Mary Bucholtz and

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Kira Hall write, “Identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon.”

Further, discourse is a way for people to recognize themselves in one another and to get beyond the “small talk” of everyday conversation. To engage in discourse, one must know the “language” and, as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein points out, the culturally embodied nature of its use. Without knowing its “habitus,” the words themselves become meaningless. “We may understand the language, but we ‘do not understand the people.’”

Discourse is necessarily political—not in the sense of “Democrat” versus “Republican,” but in the ways we discuss how “social goods” should be distributed and used. Gee uses “social goods” to describe “anything that a group of people believes to be a source of power, status, or worth.” The discourse of The Red Pill is shaped by the cultural context in which it occurs (primarily Western and Euro-centric), users’ heterosexual experiences (or lack of heterosexual experiences), and the social institutions that form users’ assumptions about how the world “should be.” The political implications of The Red Pill discourse are clearly present, particularly in those discussions about how society treats the genders. For example, a common Red Pill discourse is how society grants women passes on bad behavior and denigrates men for acting in their natural accord. The “social goods” being distributed here are social good will, control, and

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power—things typically viewed as intangible, but that have real social implications for those impacted by them.

Red Pill discourse and theory is constantly engaging in conversations surrounding power struggles, disenfranchisement, and control. Because of this, I am interested in developing a “critical discourse analysis” (CDA), in which the primary foci will be: 1) what constitutes knowledge in TRP; 2) who is allowed to produce this knowledge in TRP; 3) how these discourses construct and are constructed by social institutions (primarily patriarchy, but also capitalism and white supremacy); and, finally, 4) how discourse creates and maintains culturally specific ideologies. I am relying on Norman Fairclough’s “three-dimensional framework” of critical discourse analysis, “where the aim is to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another; analysis of [written] language text, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution, and consumption), and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice.”

Fairclough is useful here because his framework is partially constructed on Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, which “highlights both how power relations constrain and control productivity and creativity in discourse practice, and how a particular relatively stabilized configuration of discourse practices constitutes one domain of hegemony.” While The Red Pill’s primary focus is restoring “natural” patriarchy, Red Pill discourses are not occurring in a vacuum in which male-privilege grants one the right to say anything; there are still constraints imposed by other hegemonic structures like one’s “alpha” status, for instance. While critical discourse analysis is not necessarily a method on its own, I believe deploying CDA as an analytical framework is useful here because it goes deeper to tease out the assumptions, unquestioned knowledge, and social norms behind the discourse.

In order to link the various texts, the discursive practices that they represent, and the circulating affects that they signify, I will engage in an intertextual analysis of The Red Pill. Intertextual analysis forms the bridge between the words and the context in which the words are being produced. Doing this will allow me to link TRP’s discourses not only with the political, but also the affective. Affect is profoundly contextual and our ability to “see” it is much like a cat’s ability to see a mouse: it is easiest for us to see it when it moves. Thus, when a user submits a “rant” about his trouble with dating feminist-contaminated women, intertextual analysis allows me to identify, not only the political implications of his rant, but the affective energy circulating within that particular discourse and the various discourses that surround it and promote its construction. Further, I will be using discursive signifiers as a means of identifying affective circulations. Take, for example, the title phrase of a post by user int3rnetz: “Can some one explain why I feel terrible after understanding the true nature of women? […]”53 The phrase “I feel,” clearly indicates an affective discourse, wherein affect circulates through and away from the speaker. Words like “feelings,” “emotions,” “hate,” “insecurity,” and “afraid,” allow insight into not the way affect works to construct discourse within The Red Pill, but also the way Red Pill theory works to legitimize those affective circulations.

1.4.2 The Workings of Reddit and The Red Pill

Reddit is a social media, social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion website. Users can submit and comment on content such as text posts, web links, photos, images, and videos. Other users can then “up” or “down” vote the content. This organizes the posts, making “upvoted” content more visible (see fig. 1). Subreddits are categories and areas of

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53 int3rnetz, “Can some one explain why I feel to terrible after understanding the true nature of women and how to interact with women. When confronted with the duality of people, not only women, I feel some sort of questioning resentment. Help me decipher,” ASK RED PILL, r/TheRedPill, 2014.
interest that range from food, fitness, lifestyle, personal narratives, advice, sports, films, comics, and more. As of September 2016, Reddit had 542 million monthly visitors (234 million unique users), ranking #11 most visited website in US and #26 in the world.\(^{54}\) In 2015, Reddit was the site of 82.54 billion pageviews, 73.15 million user submissions, 725.85 million comments, and 6.89 billion upvotes from its users.\(^{55}\)

My research is focused on one of these subreddits, The Red Pill (TRP) or /r/TheRedPill. TRP has just over 167,000 active users as of September 2016. Like the front page of reddit, TRP’s “home page” is organized according to which posts are getting the most attention at the present moment. Posts that are upvoted or receiving a lot of comments appear on TRP home page (see fig. 2). Generally, this means that these posts are in the process of being accepted by Red Pill users.


Figure 1. Reddit’s “Front Page,” captures on April 15, 2017. In the red circle, one can see how many times the content has been voted on. In the black box, one can see the post details, such as the time the content was submitted, the user name of who submitted it, and which subreddit is hosting the content (r/food).

As I have captured below in figure 2, submissions are sorted by “flair.” For the purposes of this project, I am interested in those posts that fall into the “flair” categories: Red Pill Theory, Rant/Venting, Red Pill Examples, and the canonized texts/“required reading” that appear in the side bar (see fig. 3). In doing this, I will weed out those reactionary posts (e.g., “Boy Band Member Hides Behind His Model Girlfriend”) and focus on those posts that either demonstrate affect related to gender or contribute to Red Pill theory (e.g., “Why Feminists Are Heartless”). Specifically, I am looking for those posts that theoretically probe the foundations of Red Pill
thought, gender and gender roles, and those posts that have the potential to provide insight into member/group affect (e.g., “TRP ruined my game”).

In order to identify the crucial themes present in Red Pill discourse, I will examine both the canonical “Required Reading” section and the aforementioned flair-sorted sections for keywords or discursive signifiers. For example, The Red Pill has several static testimonies in the “Required Reading” sidebar that do not change. These testimonies are deeply personal and, because of this, they are profoundly affective. By reading these and other testimonies posted to The Red Pill, I can get beyond Red Pill theorizing about dating tactics and “sexual strategy” and gain insight into the affective motivations behind the self-help nature of The Red Pill’s discourse. Further, I will take advantage of Reddit’s the search feature to isolate those posts that contain keywords such as “emotion,” “feelings,” “testimonial,” “insecurity,” “truth,” or “dark
it was triad,” and use those upvotes, comments, or place within the canonical texts to determine whether or not that strain of theorizing was accepted by the group, rejected, or ignored.

Figure 3. Sidebar mainstays. These are the “required reading” texts that make up the majority of The Red Pill accepted theory production. On the left we have the canonical texts. These are relatively static linked posts or PDFs that provide the “language” or “habitus” one needs in order to participate in the discourse. On the right, we have “flair,” the Reddit sorting system. This is how The Red Pill manages their many posts and how they are categorized based on content.

It is worth mentioning here that I did not insert myself into these spaces as an active participant. Doing so would have either required some amount of deception (because I am a woman attempting to enter a man-only space) or self-sacrifice (because these communities are known to commit cyber attacks against women who infiltrate or criticize them). Further, I believe that a woman entering these online spaces—particularly a feminist woman—would significantly disrupt the more interesting dynamics in the groups (i.e., sharing experiences, debate on Red Pill philosophy, etc.) because they would all be busy attacking me, the feminist.
Left alone, these groups talk about their life experiences and are constantly co-constructing a philosophy and responding to one another within what they perceive as male-only space. Thus, observing as a passive and, indeed, *invisible* researcher allows for the greatest insight.

### 1.5 Thesis Organization

My thesis is organized into four chapters. The second chapter explores themes as they appear in the posts and illustrates their significance. The third chapter constitutes the weighty, “discourse analysis” and theoretical portion of this project. In this chapter, I tease out circulating affects, clarify “affective wells,” and other significant findings. In the concluding chapter, I ask what it means to either “succeed” or “fail” in The Red Pill, and explore the implications my work may have for women and for feminism as a social movement.

### 1.6 Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, one goal of this project is to show how the existence of groups like The Red Pill are evidence that, through increased destabilization of gender, men feel uncomfortable inhabiting traditionally accepted aspects of patriarchal masculinity. In many circles, it is no longer socially acceptable to participate in rape culture, to treat women like objects to be exploited, and to tie someone’s overall worth to how sexually attractive they are. However, rather than probing gender in a constructive way that may further disrupt their own relationship to masculinity, members of The Red Pill double-down on patriarchy, reifying and strengthening the hold it has on their lives. In doing this, they displace the feelings of inadequacy, jealously, and loneliness that traditional patriarchy often brings upon men and “stick” them onto women, believing them to be the harbingers of emotional pain. Feminists are seen as agitators in this sequence; disrupting the natural construct of gender. Thus, groups like The Red Pill become diametrically opposed to feminism. They do not exist without it.
In reading this, one might think that my work may constitute some oppositional research into anti-feminist groups. This is technically true. But for the most part, my research is inspired by a desire to understand reactions to attacks on privilege and the ways in which perceptions and affective responses to these perceived attacks shape identities and how we interact with the world. An entirely appropriate affective response to these groups would be disgust, anger, annoyance, and avoidance. However, I think it is important to probe and potentially set aside our own affective responses and ask ourselves: why do these groups exist and why are they so popular?

I am drawn in and inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s concept of reparative reading as it applies to these groups.\(^56\) I desire to understand their condition, their experience, their “truth,” their visions of utopia—\textit{even if} I could not possibly agree philosophically or intellectually. I believe I have a space within myself for understanding that can be opened up over the course of this research, and it is my hope that my writing can open the minds of my audience and, potentially, reach the members of these groups in even the most marginal way. And, though my explicit goal is to expose the ways affect is circulating within and leaking out of misogynist groups, I am not focusing on these groups as a way of reaffirming (or, as Sedgwick would perhaps put it, “self-confirming”) my own “vindicated” politics or feminism more generally. For me, exploring The Red Pill is a matter of political survival and academic curiosity, not a matter of personal self-righteousness. I believe exposing the paradoxes and/or the reactionary affective utterances within The Red Pill will expose it for what it is: a homosocial (yet astoundingly homophobic) echo-chamber of woman-hating, woman-obsessed, conspiracy theories, and political noise operating within an affective economy of aggrieved entitlement, anger, and fear.

But merely “exposing” does not necessarily constitute “understanding.” My hope is to engage in a genuine, deep examination—going beyond the weak attempt at restorative justice scholars like Kimmel engaged in—and reveal what is underneath the affect, how it circulates, and what the implications are for not only feminists and feminism, but for modern masculinity. We cannot further goals of feminism without expecting or predicting some form of resistance from those that have benefited from—even if they have not always comfortably fit within—patriarchy.
2 IDENTIFYING THE PRIMARY DISCURSIVE THEMES IN THE RED PILL

Despite the Red Pill’s insistence on dampening emotion and affect in order to uphold norms of masculinity and masculine rationality, the root of Red Pill philosophy is necessarily and profoundly affective. This is due, in part, to the unspoken “self-help” purpose of The Red Pill. Men come to The Red Pill to express deep emotional dissatisfaction with the state of gender relations and the decline heteropatriarchy. While there are many discursive themes present in Red Pill discourse, there are three that speak directly to the affective underpinnings of the group’s formation and popularity: 1) biology, objectivity, and the discourses of “truth,” 2) the intellectualization of misogyny, and, finally, 3) “The Dark Triad” and emotions as weakness. Often, these themes occur concomitantly and support one another. For example, discourses of truth/biology/pseudo-science often serve as the foundation for the intellectualization of misogyny and The Dark Triad is often explained using biology and pseudo-science.

In order to identify these themes, I analyzed the entirety of The Red Pill’s canonical texts or “Required Reading.” These particular themes stood out to me for several reasons. First, they occur frequently across the various canonical texts, indicating that they represent widely accepted discourses and discursive practices within The Red Pill. Second, they identify common experiences, perspectives, and feelings that bring men to The Red Pill. Finally, they speak to the affective motivations or affective wells behind the production of the discourse within The Red Pill. In Chapter 3, I use what I term “discursive signifiers” to identify the tacit circulations of affect present in these discursive themes. That said, the following themes are best read as already affective in their production and their acceptance as “Red Pill truth.” These are not spontaneously produced examples of theorizing; they either represent or are predicated on a large canon of Red Pill theorizing that is, in part, constituted by affective motivations or reasoning.
2.1 Biology, Objectivity, and the Discourses of “Truth”

This place is about seeking the truth. It's not for the faint of heart. There are no compromises and no negotiations. The world is how it is. This isn't the place for half-truths, two-third-truths, or even three-quarter truths. The 100% truth always comes first, and your beta, socially-conditioned, [...] feelings come second.\(^{57}\)

The Red Pill gets its name from the 1999 sci-fi film, *The Matrix*, wherein the mysterious Morpheus tells protagonist Neo he can either take the red pill and see how reality really is (i.e., a constructed matrix) or the blue pill and go back to his boring, unfulfilled life. When Neo takes the red pill, he is thrust into a disturbing nightmare landscape, where nefarious-looking machines produce and harvest humans for their bioenergy. Neo’s quest is to destroy the Matrix and the machines that have enslaved human beings. The Red Pill’s use of this symbolism is heavy-handed yet not at all overstated. After all, they believe that feminism has constructed society in such a way that women have enslaved men, exploiting them for their resources and sperm. To take the Red Pill means to see “the truth” and reality how it really is: patriarchy is a lie, feminism has been institutionalized, women are weak and emotional, and yet men have allowed themselves to be enslaved by them.

Truth in The Red Pill is characterized by its relationship to reason, objectivism, and logic. Thus, the truth is what can be observed and proven through empirical methods and “science.” To contribute to theorizing in The Red Pill, particularly when it comes to differences between the genders, users must appeal to “science,” particularly biology, evolutionary psychology, and neuroscience. Doing so not only problematically conflates gender and sex, but also roots social

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\(^{57}\) busyalterego, “TRP is not another PUA. You can’t use it as a technique to land a girlfriend/wife. Truth cannot be compromised. You need to do the work and really change your thinking to reap the rewards,” RANT/VENTING, r/TheRedPill, 2015.
behaviors in differences in brain structures and the circulation and production neurotransmitters. This discursive theme within The Red Pill recalls the tradition of scientific racism, wherein philosophers like Voltaire and Schopenhauer pontificated as to the biological differences between the races and how these differences pointed to a natural inferiority. That is, women cannot help that they are hopelessly irrational and incapable to higher thought; their biology simply prevents them from achieving the thought capacity biologically conferred upon men. Thus, treating them as if they are less-than is permissible, because it is true.

Because men, in this paradigm, are the gatekeepers of rationality and logic, they are the only ones capable of determining what is and is not true. Men are inherently objective in The Red Pill and, thus, their observations and experiences are never biased. Women, on the other hand, are entirely subjective creatures, incapable of objectivity or rationality. Such reasoning is familiar, especially as it manifests in the political realm, wherein feminists and feminism are also frequently cast as enemies of the truth. Ahmed writes:

Feminists who speak out against established ‘truths’ are often constructed as emotional, as failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to form the basis of ‘good judgment’. Such a designation of feminism as ‘hostile’ and emotional, whereby feminism becomes an extension of the already pathological ‘emotionality’ of femininity, exercises the hierarchy between thought/emotion. […] This hierarchy clearly translates into a hierarchy between subjects: whilst thought and reason are identified with the masculine and Western subject, emotions and bodies are associated with femininity and racial others. This projection of ‘emotion’ onto the bodies of others not only works to

exclude others from the realms of thought and rationality, but also works to conceal the emotional and embodied aspects of thought and reason.\textsuperscript{59}

In The Red Pill, this narrative is deployed by rendering every aspect of femininity and womanhood as suspect. Indeed, women’s very embodiment is ruled deceptive. Adept in making huge argumentative leaps (yet equally adept at side-stepping opportunities to make the connection between women, the beauty industry, and patriarchy), The Red Pill makes an explicit link between women’s altering their appearance to women’s deceptive nature:

Make-up, push-up bras, hair dye, press-on nails, colegen [\textit{sic}] and breast implants, high-heels, etc. Almost everything about women is fake - what the fuck would they know about ‘truth’? [\textit{sic}]\textsuperscript{60}

And:

Good Lord! Everything about most women is a lie. Between hair products, makeup, push-up bras, spanx, & cosmetic surgery they project nothing but a lie. Then, they rate and congratulate each other on their camouflage. And that's just the superficial aspect. I will say there were a few I've known that were just as attractive waking up as any other time. They more often turned out to be the keepers and were generally more honest.\textsuperscript{61}

That is to say, women do not embody falsehoods simply as a matter of deceiving men, tricking them into providing them with resources; they embody falsehoods because their aversion to truth prevents them from being authentic in any capacity. Thus, the defining “womanly” characteristic of inauthenticity/anti-objectivity permeates every aspect of woman’s existence, from her romantic relationships to the way she apprehends the world:

\textsuperscript{60} p3ndulum, comment on “Men like truth, women like lies,” RED PILL THEORY, r/TheRedPill, 2015.
\textsuperscript{61} Duh_Mad_Botanist, comment on “Men like truth, women like lies,” RED PILL THEORY, r/TheRedPill, 2014.
Women are more likely to subscribe to religion, fate, and supernatural beliefs than men. Studies show it time and time again. The quote I despise the most, "Everything happens for a reason", is the anthem of women everywhere.

Metaphysical beliefs are comforting and emotional - Your good deeds are rewarded in life, god always forgives you if you are truly sorry (there are no consequences for your actions), evil people will burn in hell for an eternity, kids with terminal cancer are going on to serve a greater purpose somewhere... the list goes on. Note that this kind of thinking also removes personal responsibility for choices and actions. If you think that "everything happens for a reason" or "fate" or "god has a plan for me", then literally nothing that happens is ever your fault or due to you making a bad choice.

Get serious. The red pill tastes like shit and gags you all the way down. Before you can get it down you even try to throw it back up. The truth hits harder than anything. […]

Yes, you get to know how things really are, but in exchange, you have to deal with the emotional firestorm that comes with it. Basically, you sacrifice short-term pain for long-term gain. A choice that only rational and strong willed minds can make. Humans are wired to act on pleasurable impulses."62

The emphasis on truth informs every aspect of The Red Pill’s overarching philosophy and orientation towards emotion. While there remains an implicit awareness that emotions are a powerful part of one’s inner life, they are characterized as ultimately useless and, indeed, a hindrance to someone wishing to live a “true” existence. Thus, emotions—the feminine, the subjective—become enemies of the truth and The Red Pill, and they must be expelled or

dominated. The importance of truth becomes apparent in the ways truth manifests itself in the following themes.

2.2 **The Intellectualization of Misogyny**

Because the Red Pill is first and foremost focused on aspects of heterosexual intimacy (primarily but not only sex), the vast majority of affective and emotional resonance one encounters in their discourse originates out of dissatisfaction with the quality of or lack of heterosexual intimacy in user lives. This process is most easily observed through the testimonials that are either posted to the group or canonized in the Red Pill side bar. One could think of these the canonized speakers as the prophets of The Red Pill’s self-help evangelizing, the proof in the pudding. Unsurprisingly, these narratives typically outline how someone came to The Red Pill and the miraculous ways in which The Red Pill ideology and mode of thinking changed their lives. Often writers in these testimonies are eager for a method of displacing negative emotions from themselves onto others and, thus, their experiences resonate enthusiastically with the readers of The Red Pill, firmly establishing a feedback loop. More than that, The Red Pill offers an entire belief system structured on the worship of masculinity and the immutability of truth through masculine objectivity and reason. I explore this “displacement” more fully in Chapter 3 through a discussion of subject/object relations and, specifically, the ways in which affect is discharged and made to stick to objects while simultaneously ordered to signify other objects.

Testimonials—though not explicitly called so—are specific narratives, cherry picked by the moderators of The Red Pill to represent “success stories” or successful deployment of Red Pill ideology. Testimonials are canonized in the “Required Reading” sidebar based on the trajectory of their narrative and the intense affective similarities captured in their language. All these testimonials have a common arc: A man is depressed, lonely, an eternal virgin, struggling
with unrequited love. There is a “breaking point,” wherein he is summarily rejected by the object of his desire. In this period there is often suicidal ideation and a very nearly homoerotic obsession with the men the woman chooses over him. He develops a fundamental distrust of all women and an envy of attractive, “alpha” men. He then comes across The Red Pill or a similar ideology, and it opens his eyes to “the truth,” when—in reality—it serves as an ideological structure that allows him to displace the responsibility for his suffering onto objects outside himself. Take, for example, “M3” and his enormously popular testimonial “Confessions of a Reformed InCel.” In just under six thousand words, M3 recounts the isolation, loneliness, depression, and suicidal thoughts that plagued him before coming to The Red Pill. He writes:

From the age of 18-29 i [sic] traveled a road that lead me to believe i [sic] wasn’t human, wasn’t worthy of love, wasn’t deserving of companionship and that i [sic] would probably be better off dead. For all intents and purposes i [sic] was an evolutionary failure. With so much FAIL, my body began to realize it was not going to fulfill it’s [sic] primary biological function of reproduction and had begun to contemplate ways of me to expedite my removal from the gene pool. Death felt like my only answer. […] It’s not just about ‘sex’. (well, for me anyways) It’s about the connection sex implies. Of being wanted, desired, to be loved both mentally and physically, to be validated, to share, to connect, feel alive, be human. Or maybe i [sic] just view sex differently than your average slut if they only view it as ‘just sex’.

Another canonized testimony by user “Michael” states:

I remember how much it hurt to be rejected by one girl in particular I had my open hopeless romantic heart set on… We had allot [sic] in common. I pursued her like a complete gentlemen – and was eventually turned down. That same weekend after getting

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turned down I got to hear her getting fucked hard and loud in the room next door. The guy who lived there was a super scraggly unattractive heavy drug user covered in tattoos majoring in “music studies”. This girl was young hot thin beautiful in her physical prime. I never said anything. But I felt so hurt she turned me down for casual sex with a guy like that.

[…] When this kind of thing happens to me over and over all through my life…. it hurts me and makes me doubt senses. What is wrong with me that my heart is telling me she is a good person when she is clearly not?

In both of these excerpts, one can see a common thread that connects one’s worth and purpose with one’s ability to capture the object of one’s desire (particular women). When one is unable to accomplish this, he imbues a level of conspiracy into the object. However, because of the reliance on evolutionary psychology in the arc of these narratives, women’s agency is erased. Thus, there is a tension in this paradigm. The object of one’s desire is cold-heartedly and agentically denying the user—the “nice guy”—in favor of a bad boy, while simultaneously surrendering to the purported biological imperative. We can see this as M3 continues below:

One of the final straws was me being in stuck in an LJBF [“let’s just be friends”] with a person whom i [sic] had mad loving feelings for. […] She chose to fuck someone who cared not one bit for her and only used her for her vagina instead of someone who loved her. But it was OK because she was only looking for fun and not a relationship. My world shattered.”

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64 Michael, comment on “More grim news for carousellers [sic] hoping to jump at the last minute,” originally posted November 25, 2013.
65 M3, “Confessions of a Former InCel.” [emphasis mine]
This tension creates ripe conditions for the extrapolation of negative feelings about one woman onto the entire gender. Quickly, these narratives snowball into wild generalizations. For example:

“Men believe that love matters for the sake of it. Women love opportunistically […] She’s not incapable of love in the way she defines it, she’s incapable of love as you would have it. She doesn’t lack the capacity for connection and emotional investment, she lacks the capacity for the connection you think would ideally suit you.”

Thus, the universal “she” is established. In the self-help discourses of The Red Pill, the men seeking help from The Red Pill are always the subject, not only because they are speaking from a first-person point of view, but because they are men; they are objective; anything they experience is not clouded by their own emotional perception, even after imbibing The Red Pill (which supposedly releases him from his emotional tethers).

Identifying all women as the source of negative feelings is a critical step towards the intellectualization of unwanted emotions. The Red Pill fails to explain the tension between what the signified “woman” is saying versus what she is doing. Rather, they root women’s apparent inability to love, again, in evolutionary psychology/biology, claiming that their innate sense of “hypergamy” demands they constantly search for the next-higher level mate. Women, rarely privy to the clarity that The Red Pill offers, are unaware of their “true” motivations and the biological reasons behind their contradictory behaviors. The Rational Male attempts to explain this tension, writing:

“The problem inherent in women’s Hypergamous sexual strategy has always been the balance of optimizing the best breeding potential (Alpha Fucks) with the best long-term security potential (Beta Bucks) in men. The capacity for a woman to optimize this

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balance is determined by her sexual agency (attractiveness & sexual availability) with men.”

Feminism, through its insistence on normalizing respecting women’s sexuality and ending rape culture, is seen as the evil actor. In this pseudo-scientific Red Pill paradigm, women are simultaneously clueless about the nature of sex and relationships while also having it “all figured out” regarding the best method to subjugate and exploit men.

Feminism is a sexual strategy. It puts women into the best position they can find, to select mates, to determine when they want to switch mates, to locate the best dna [sic] possible, and to garner the most resources they can individually achieve. In the manosphere, the positive, self-acceptance rhetorics of feminism are conceptualized as a vast conspiracy meant to subjugate men through the stifling of their biological nature. With this logical jump, the intellectualization of unwanted emotions is complete. Not only do users have an object to blame for their feelings of loneliness, they have an entire system to explain the subjugation of others and, more disturbingly, they have a ideological basis on which to predicate their superiority. They have taken the Red Pill, therefore they have access to the truth and will never be made to suffer as other men (i.e., betas) who live unquestioningly under the oppressive feminist regime clearly do. This point relates back to The Red Pill’s investment in the discourses surrounding “truth” I illustrated in the above section.

The effectiveness of The Red Pill as an ideology is partially due to the fact that it is packaged, not only as a discourse of truth, but also as a framework on which to predicate one’s existing beliefs, values, and biases. As shown above, the affective groundwork is already laid for misogyny to flourish. However, because of The Red Pill insistence on objectivity and reason,

67 Ibid.
misogyny cannot simply present as a flurry of emotion or rants cast in a disorganized manner. The attacks on women must be precise, “evidence based,” and—most importantly—they must reaffirm what is already thought to exist in the canon of The Red Pill. In fact, this final point is the first tenet in The Red Pill’s official rules:

Anyone who does not share [our] goal will be banned the instant we detect them. We are not interested in debating or defending our experiences to those who disagree with the red pill, nor do we want to clog up our threads defending the morality of our choices.69

Subjective experience is valued in The Red Pill because of the group’s insistence on logic and reason. Like the vast majority of the theorizing done on The Red Pill, it is used to reinforce already existing belief structures. Indeed, “Field Reports” are a highlighted thread of continuing Red Pill discourse, wherein a man reports his “findings” from enacting Red Pill strategy out in the real world. This quasi-empirical structure of discourse, by default, casts women as the object—sometimes quite literally framing them as the “object of one’s desire” (see above)—or as a sum of their body parts gifted with only a small amount of self-awareness. This discursive strategy allows users to not only project or displace their negative emotions onto the object, but also differentiate between themselves and the object. The latter can be found in posts like the following:

Speak to women as though they are children - because emotionally, they are. […]

When you're in seduction mode, don't talk to a bitch in pure information as if she were an adult. Instead, tantalize her the way you would a child. Be vague whenever you can, and leave the task of filling in the details to her imagination. She'll always make your stories bigger in her own mind than you could possibly accomplish as a boring fact-slinging braggart. […] They have the same small passions and cravings for fantasy that children

have - *girls just want to have fun.* Whether you believe the evopsych explanation for this or not is irrelevant, because you can speak to women as though they are children and observe first-hand that they respond identically to children.\(^7^0\)

M3 writes, “Misogyny. It doesn’t appear out of thin air.”\(^7^1\) Rather, misogyny develops when there is a perceived injustice occurring, most commonly, in these narratives, at the hands of women. The establishment of such firm boundaries between self and other (i.e., man and woman), lends itself to the formation of hierarchies, wherein (particular) men are highly evolved and women remain at the base level. However, while the men of The Red Pill will bemoan the power differentials in society, claiming that women have the upper hand due to feminism, they fail to adequately explain how women—with the apparent emotional constitution of a child—have surreptitiously come to rule the world.

Once The Red Pill establishes that women are innately manipulative, exploitive, untrustworthy, and emotional, the next and perhaps most important step in the intellectualization of misogyny is applying those attributes to *all* women, wherein the “bad acts” of one woman come to represent the nature of all women. It is through this process that the universal “woman” is established—a heuristic that is proximate to all other women. M3 lays this thought process out:

Everytime […] i *[sic]* could have taken corrective action, i *[sic]* was lied to. Each time my buddies told me that I *[sic]* had to become an asshole, (their way of saying don’t listen to what a woman wants, do what they go for) i *[sic]* was once again led astray by a woman.

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\(^7^1\) Ibid.
By my mother. By my teachers. By magazine articles. By other girls I asked for advice.
By Oprah. By my friendzone crush and object of my desire. (and yes.. by my marriage
counselor.

Unequivocally.
I can still remember getting mad enough after a while that i [sic] started acting like a
dick. After all what i [sic] was previously doing wasn’t working.. try something new
right? And what did the girl i [sic] crushed on tell me when she didn’t like my new
attitude?

“YOU DON’T WANT TO BECOME AN ASSHOLE LIKE THAT, I KNOW YOU
TOO WELL, DON’T CHANGE, YOU’RE SUCH A NICE PERSON INSIDE, DON’T
RUIN YOURSELF.”

That line reverberated in my head everytime [sic] i [sic] knew my asshole friend was at
her place fucking her like an animal.

Hence all the THINGS I FEEL at the start of this post. It’s visceral. I can’t control it. It’s
a part of me now. I can only manage it. But to each and every one of those women who i
[sic] used in the above THINGS I FEEL section, it is my firm belief that you simply
have NO CLUE what loneliness is unless you’ve contemplated what gun metal tastes like
as it rubs against your tongue pressing into the roof of your mouth.

[…] i [sic] followed my feminist programming and female advice off a cliff into hell.

Feminism taught me a lot throughout the 80’s and 90’s. It taught me not to question
women’s sexual choices. It taught me to treat them with deference and respect. It taught
me not to accost them for sex aggressively, but to treat them as human beings. It taught
me that i [sic] MUST control my shallow, greedy, dangerous impulses but allow a
woman the right to indulge in hers. It taught me to be nice for the sake of being nice and not expecting sex in return. To give all my emotional and platonic ability and not dare ask for intimacy in return.

It taught me everything i [sic] needed to be creepy, unattractive and doormat ready.

And it was re-enforced by EVERY woman i talked to.72

Women are depicted as players in some elaborate ruse, privy to information men are not, the end goal being to dominate men by tricking them into forgoing their biological destiny in favor of a beta lifestyle. M3 explicitly states that all the women he came into contact with “unequivocally” misled him. It is through this recollection that women come to signify one another. The signified “woman,” through misogynistic heuristics comes to represent all the emotional pain and rejection felt by these men. Women they have not met take on the destructive traits of women they have met. Further, women come to represent “apartness”—the gap of understanding—between men and women that can never been filled. However, it is difficult to hate “apartness” as a feeling in-and-of itself. It is even more difficult to implicate oneself in the development of that “apartness,” an activity that undoubtedly contributes to the chronic loneliness expressed in The Red Pill. It is much easier to hate the object of one’s desires—especially when that object is seemingly bucking all messaging surrounding love, sex, and partnership. Further, the boundary between self and other, wherein the other comes to signify not just one person, but also an entire gender, is fecund ground for hate to proliferate. I spend time clarifying the affective process by which signification this occurs and the role corporeal and emotional apartness plays in the maintenance of misogynist spaces in Chapter 3.

72 M3, “Confessions of a Former InCel.”
2.3 The Dark Triad and Emotions as Weakness

A lonely man might feel validated by the ideological rationale provided by The Red Pill. As I have illustrated above, it is an attractive line of thought that puts the source of unwanted emotion outside the user, allowing men to shirk responsibility for bad feelings. Their feelings, in this case, come to “stick” to women, constructing them as the source and harbinger of unwanted emotion. However, the purpose of The Red Pill is not to rid oneself of women—quite the opposite. The central point of The Red Pill, as one user recently pointed out, is “sexual strategy,” that is, how to navigate relationships and sex. Locating “women” as the source of pain and yet still trying to sleep with them is the main tension in Red Pill philosophy. Further, revealing the root of loneliness and isolation is often not sufficient for ridding oneself of their impact.

To cope with this tension, Red Pill ideology identifies emotions either as weaknesses—chinks in the carefully cultivated masculine frame—or powerful tools of sexual and interpersonal manipulation. Thus, strategies to rid oneself of emotion, particularly negative ones, become prime directives of Red Pill philosophy. This narrative can be invoked in a post as simple as “How to Control Your Emotions Around Women,” a relatively innocuous self-help post, reading:

Do you sometimes have trouble controlling your emotional responses to women? You know, a woman rejects you or says something that makes you feel bad, and you either shut down emotionally or start getting nervous?

If so, you might think that you are doing a pretty good job of hiding it from her. But guess again...Have [sic] you ever been able to read an emotional response in someone
even though they were trying to hide it? If so, take that memory and magnify it by a factor of 10....that's [sic] how much more intuitive women are than we are.\footnote{aswjacob, “How to Control Your Emotions Around Women,” RED PILL THEORY, r/TheRed Pill, December 2016.}

The men of The Red Pill seek to obliterate their own emotional feelings for the sake of making themselves impervious to the loss of control associated with emotionality. The goal of the cultivation of “aemotionality” is termed “The Dark Triad.” In psychology, The Dark Triad is the name for a grouping of undesirable character traits that are hosted under the umbrella of the three primary characteristics: narcissism, Machiavellism, and psychopathy.\footnote{P.K. Jonason, & J.D. Webster, “The Dirty Dozen: A Concise Measure of The Dark Triad,” \textit{Psychological Assessment} \textbf{22}(2)(2010): 420-432, accessed March 3, 2017, doi:10.1037/a0019265} Clinically speaking, if one were to fully embody these traits, one would be thought to be socially dangerous, overly aggressive, impulsive, attention- and admiration-seeking, callous, insensitive, and manipulative. Indeed, the philosophy of the Red Pill dovetails nicely with these traits. Red Pill men are encouraged to be sexually aggressive with women, “escalating” interactions with physical contact (e.g., touching her arm, then her lower back, then kissing her, etc.) so she will be more compliant. Impulsivity is seen as a virtue in the minds of men who extol the natural and trusting one’s “instincts.” Attention and admiration seeking is also folded into the natural; it is \textit{natural} for a man to seek validation from women—and that validation is always sexual. Masculine aemotionality is characterized as the natural state of man in The Red Pill. The emphasis on the natural encourages men to fall back on (rather than actively cultivate) this hypermasculine sexuality. If they fail to do this, they are not living up to their full masculine potential and, thus, they become “beta” or something less than a man. However, the emphasis on the natural fails to account for the desire to cultivate the other traits of callousness, insensitivity, and manipulation,
which are not necessarily natural. Again, we encounter a tension in their reasoning.

IllimitableMan writes:

These men see power embodied within specific personality traits and they want to know “how can I be like that?” “How can I be the successful asshole?!” The truth of the matter is that if you did not neurologically develop a dark triad personality as a child, you will never be completely dark triad in the truest sense of the classification. The dark triad is essentially not something one can be trained to become, however it can be reverse engineered and emulated.75

Conversely, advocates of this lifestyle maintain that women have a natural attraction to psychopathic traits, particularly impulsivity and the ability to “ruthlessly exploit”:

This lack of ability to feel guilt or fear as consequent of their personal choices is a great source of the dark triads power (the power of fearlessness.) It’s this ability to ruthlessly exploit people which addicts [sic] women to dark triad men. […] Dark triad men who are abusive and have women pining for them, wanting to fulfil [sic] their every whim do so by emotionally addicting said women. Their very presence causes said women to have rushes of dopamine/serotonin/cortisol/oxytocin as well as other neurochemical shit I don’t know about. It’s this hormonal cocktail of an emotional rollercoaster (better simplified as: drama) which causes women to form an addiction to said man. […] By associating the systematic release of these neurotransmitters and hormones with the company of a specific man who acts as the stimulus for these releases, they become biochemically addicted and thus mentally dependent upon him. The removal

of such a powerful man from a woman’s life can thus elicit withdrawal symptoms similar to that of a drug comedown.\textsuperscript{76}

Such reasoning keeps women’s nature at the center of The Red Pill quest for behavioral modification. Men must “reverse engineer” themselves to cope with women’s “natural” histrionic emotional constitution. Often this reverse engineering is as simple as “pretend makes perfect.” If one is callous and insensitive when it comes to women long enough, soon it will become second nature; one will eventually cease to feel guilty when one has made a woman cry or angry. As IllimitableMan writes, “With training and study, one can demonstrate borderline or sub-clinically dark triad qualities.”\textsuperscript{77}

Emotions in The Red Pill are thought to dictate one’s moral compass. An emotional response is elicited when an injustice has been done. For example, if one feels as if they have been wronged—say if they have been exploited by the object of their desire—then the negative feeling they are experiencing as a result of that wrong is couched in language of both justice and morality. It was morally wrong for that person to hurt them in this way and, thus, their negative feelings towards that person are justified. The Red Pill, steeped in worship of objectivism, aemotionality, and “sexual strategy,” seeks to divorce itself from the complications of morality all together.

My point was that sexual strategy is amoral. You might stick to your values, but those who have sex .. \textit{have sex. [sic]}

It's best illustrated through our ancestors. The idea was that whether or not we like the methods used- whoever procreated made children, and those who didn't… didn't.
Your understanding of how morality works is a bit flawed here. You see, there is no universal morality. There is nothing in the universe applying any law other than those of physics. The rest is abstraction.\(^78\) In this amoral framework, rape is not “wrong” intrinsically or a priori, but rather “Obviously […] a poor decision because it goes against the personal freedom social contract we currently live by.”\(^79\) Rather than relying on an emotionally rooted morality ethics, The Red Pill teaches users to rely on one based on a twisted version of the liberal notion of a “social contract”—that is, “do whatever you want, but do not violate anyone else’s personal freedom.”

However, there is some conflict in The Red Pill regarding the tension between morality and free will versus the biological determinism so touted by the group. For example:

Philosophers have been debating morality for thousands of years, but now we've got neuroscience so we can see what's going on in the brain when people make moral choices.

The reason we don't generally murder each other isn't because of a social contract, it's because we have a part of our brain that seems to be based on Kantian deontological ethics, the concept that there are moral imperatives and you do not break these rules no matter what. This area is located in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and contemplates the emotional implications of a moral choice. The rules against your examples of murder, theft, rape are actually hardwired into our brains. Unless you're a psychopath, in which case this area of the brain has significantly lower activity than in non-psychopaths.\(^80\)

\(^{78}\) redpillschool, comment on “Puppies randomly punished/loved develop strong affections,” RED PILL THEORY, r/TheRedPill, 2014.

\(^{79}\) Ibid.

\(^{80}\) Gentle-Mang, comment on “Puppies randomly punished/loved develop strong affections,” RED PILL THEORY, r/TheRedPill, 2014.
Regardless of this tension, The Red Pill reliance on neuroscience and evolutionary psychology dictates that one’s emotions originates not from outside oneself but from one’s brain. In order to alleviate one’s emotional bias against amorality, particularly when it comes to women, one must divorce oneself from one’s emotions as a means of becoming and staying purely objective. “Become amoral rather moral vs [sic] immoral. Once you get to this point, Dark Triad is just around the corner.”

The narcissism component of The Dark Triad is tied to a fundamental component of the broader Red Pill “self-help” philosophy. The concept of “unconditional positive self-regard” is a cornerstone of developing the “frame” so important to Red Pill users. A twist on the concept developed by humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers in the 1960s (unconditional positive regard or UPR), intended for use in the clinical setting between a psychologist and a patient, unconditional positive regard is the idea, “that the individual has within him or her self vast resources for self-understanding, for altering her or his self-concept, attitudes, and self-directed behavior […]” and is intended for therapists who seek to help their clients accept and take responsibility for themselves. Within the Red Pill, UPR is twisted into “the way some people are able to maintain political and social dominance even after they betray or fuck over their supporters.”

However, the concept of unconditional positive self-regard is not deployed as a framework of “taking responsibility” within The Red Pill. Rather, it is presented as a method of avoiding self-reflection that goes beyond one’s own selfish ends. It discourages self-criticism that, when used effectively, is the cornerstone of the positive character development in our society, particularly as it relates to social interactions and oppression.

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81 TRPsubmitter, “Multiple studies support the sex appeal of Dark Triad personalities,” RED PILL THEORY, r/TheRedPill, 2014.
As the men of The Red Pill rid themselves of emotion and develop their amoral callousness, they are encouraged to learn tricks to manipulating the emotional gender: women. Because emotions are conceptualized as the language of women, posts abound that seek to explain women’s emotional inner life—not for the sake of understanding or respecting—but to transform it into a tool for exploitation and manipulation. In a post titled, “Solipsism, Emotions, and Arguments,” moderator IllimitableMan writes:

You do not argue with women when you wish for them to comprehend, comply or agree. You cannot argue against woman’s feelings, only manipulate them. Argument necessitates reason, but reason is ineffectual in conflict with women. In non-political matters, where a man will yield to superior logic, a woman will not. And so man must manipulate woman’s emotions in a way that makes her cooperative, or he should not engage her at all.84

But yet another contradiction in Red Pill ideology arises when the discussion centers on emotion. Women are cast as the emotional gender and, to account for this, countless pages of discourse are dedicated to theorizing about how to “deal with” this. However, significant space is also dedicated to coping with the emotions of men. For example, in their testimonials, men freely admit that they were insecure and came to The Red Pill in a quest for confidence. User PragmaticRedTruth writes, “I had to think back to the days I was insecure. This, of course, is the type of insecurity no one realized I had. Most of the time, I was quite stoic about it. It's the type

84 IllimitableMan, “Solipsism, Emotion & Arguments,” The Illimitable Man, 2016. Bubbling up from below this discourse is the tacit recognition that these tactics constitute some form of emotional abuse, particularly gaslighting: “There's obviously potential for you to gaslight people as a game tactic […] I personally think this behaviour is incredibly abusive, […] but it's up to you.” (nugboots, “Gaslighting in the sexual marketplace, RED PILL THEORY, r/TheRedPill, 2016.)
of insecurity that came around once and a while. No one could see it, but I knew it was real.”

The irony of this contradiction is clear in this post by IllimitableMan:

Even the t tamest critiques and concerns can result in ill feeling, largely by merit of woman’s inability to handle such things. And so the trap of arguing with a woman is always there, should a man express himself without filtering himself. Often a man knows not how such benign comments result in such grave offence. But such unsophisticated sensitivity is intrinsic to femininity.

One would not be mistaken for thinking I am describing the insecure, rather than women per se, but then it would be disingenuous to assert that the vast majority of women are anything but insecure. So are these things traits of women, or traits of the insecure? I would say both. But then I would also assert that women are intrinsically insecure, and that many arguments take place because a woman is demanding her insecurity be assuaged in spite of the overwhelming importance of the issue at hand. Men who exhibit similar behaviours are likewise womanlike in their mental frailty.

One could potentially make the argument that The Red Pill’s insistence on purging emotion is an attempt to resolve this tension and get back to the essential masculine. However, this response still fails to account for the ways in which Red Pill ideology relies on aggrieved and emotional appeals to logic and reason for an answer to fundamental questions about sex, dating, and gender differences. Contradictions abound in The Red Pill, and while it is not my purpose to point out the various fallacies that crop up in Red Pill discourses, recognizing they are there allows us to see the role emotional dissonance plays in the creation and maintenance of reactionary movements such as The Red Pill.

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85 PragmaticRedTruth, “Insecurities will eat you alive. Don’t continue to throw bandages over wounds, fix it once, and fix it the right way,” RED PILL THEORY, r/TheRedPill, December 2016.
3 CIRCULATING AFFECT IN THE RED PILL

“If the demand for love is the demand for presence, and frustration is the consequence of the necessary failure of that demand, then hate and love are intimately tied together, in the intensity of the negotiation between presence and absence.”


Because The Red Pill exists to theorize about the nature of heterosexual relationships—relationships that are so emotionally fraught for the users doing the theorizing—The Red Pill becomes the site of intense affective circulation. Affect, which I understand as that which is prior to or underpins emotion, provides the motivation for the establishment and maintenance of such an online space. It both brings people to The Red Pill and keeps them there, searching or creating the next intellectualized rationale for displacing negative feelings to the object: women. While emotions and feelings are relatively fleeting insofar as they reside in the person, affect is both fleeting and enduring. It is fleeting in how it manifests in the person—prior to either the identification of the affect (when it becomes a feeling) or the displacement of the affect, when it circulates away from the individual. Affect is enduring in how it remains active or lives on through circulation in the ongoing discursive practices of the group. In this chapter, I illustrate how affect circulates and operates in The Red Pill, from the role specific forms of affect play in the establishment and maintenance of the discursive environment, to how the circulation of affect intensifies and transforms emotions in The Red Pill and, finally, to the goal in The Red Pill of inoculating oneself against affective circulations through the “choking off” of emotion. I conclude by asking what it means to either “succeed” or “fail” in The Red Pill and exploring the implications this project has for the goals of feminism and gender equality more broadly.
3.1 The Primary Affects Circulating within The Red Pill and Affective Wells

In order to clarify the ways in which affect circulates within The Red Pill, it is important to first identify the affects/feelings/emotions most crucial to the discursive practices and theoretical framework of The Red Pill: hate/anger, fear, and insecurity. In doing this, I will also clarify the distinctions I believe to exist between affect, feelings, and emotions.

Arguably the most palpable feelings present in The Red Pill are hate and anger. I understand “feeling” to be an awareness of affect. I have lumped hate and anger together because they often occur simultaneously and/or concomitantly within the discourse of The Red Pill. Hate as a feeling is easily identifiable in The Red Pill: through discursive signifiers such as “Rant/Vent” posts, the intellectualization of misogyny, or the degrading precepts of The Red Pill’s brand of “sexual strategy,” sketched briefly above. Ahmed writes, “Hate is an intense emotion; it involves a feeling of ‘againstness’ that is always, in the phenomenological sense, intentional. Hate is always hatred of something or somebody, although that something or somebody does not necessarily pre-exist the emotion.”

Hatred in The Red Pill is about women, but it is equally about the feminization of society and “female privilege.” Thus, “Hate may respond to the particular, but it tends to do so by aligning the particular with the general; ‘I hate you because you are this or that’, where the ‘this’ or ‘that’ evokes a group that the individual comes to stand for or stand in for.”

When reading the discourses of The Red Pill, it is tempting to imagine the authors as intrinsically and perpetually angry men, bound up in their hate, isolation, and loneliness in ways that permeate every level of their existence. Otherwise, how would they be able to produce such vitriolic theory and contribute so much to the intellectualization of their own misery? However,

88 Ibid.
while people often conceptualize “angry people” in this way, this is not the way emotions work. If I were to describe an adult as “hating her father,” we know that person is likely not actively seething with hatred towards her father all while going to work, taking her children to school, and doing her laundry. However, if I were to approach that person and ask, “How is your father?” such a mention might activate that hatred and lead her to become angry all over again, in the present. The affective potential for anger was always there, but my mention causes it to move again, joining itself with the memories of being wronged by her father and memories of feelings previously felt because of being wronged by her father. The latter brings us into the realm of emotion, which I understand to be the affective manifestation of a memory of similar feelings felt under specific circumstances. She is not “made angry,” she is remade angry by the discursive circulation of affect, wherein her anger has circled back to her through the mechanism of my mentioning her father, which subsequently causes her to recall previous episodes of angry feelings associated with her father. This nearly instant affective phenomenon results in the emotion we/she would recognize(s) as anger.

In The Red Pill, hatred and anger manifest in obvious ways. For example, in M3’s testimonial, he writes, “When i [sic] hear a woman tell me that she’s gone through a dry spell and not had sex in over X weeks/ months.. i [sic] feel like putting my fist through her face. […] When i [sic] hear a woman tell me that she just picked up a random guy for a night of fun because she was lonely, i [sic] feel like i’m [sic] glad i [sic] don’t own a gun.”89 When not directed at a particular woman, anger is directed at the above-mentioned signified “woman.”

Fear works analogously to anger in how it circulates. If a person has a fear of spiders, living on the 22nd floor of a new, urban apartment building will probably keep them from experiencing that fear regularly. However, the affective potential for that fear is always there and

resurfaces when that person is exposed to conditions that make it likely they will either be in close proximity to a spider, for example, if they visit their parents and their mother asks them to retrieve something from the unfinished basement. In fact, the very mention of retrieving something from the basement is enough to move fear back onto the person.

In The Red Pill, fear is tacitly expressed and, thus, harder to explicitly identify. Ahmed writes, “[…] fear is linked to the ‘passing by’ of the object […] Fear’s relation to the object has an important temporal dimension; we fear an object that approaches us.”90 Fear manifests temporally in The Red Pill when it moves and surfaces in discourses surrounding fear of “never feeling the warmth of a woman’s skin” or “never again being validated as a sexual human being,” as illustrated above in user M3’s canonized testimonial.91 Fear is couched in the discursive language of “missing out,” “never experiencing,” or fear of eventually being exploited by women.

Fears are often attached to feelings of insecurity. Insecurity is often triggered by the perception that one is vulnerable or “less than,” which threatens the ego. Unlike anger and fear, insecurity is first and foremost a judgment one makes about oneself and, thus, it has implications for one’s self-image and ego. Insecurity’s inward-facing nature means it has more affective power to transform the insecure person’s behavior in ways that other emotions may not. That is, insecurity has the potential to inflect one’s emotional orientation towards the world, changing the way they experience interactions with others. This means that, not only is insecurity defined by one’s relationship to the self, it is defined by one’s relationship to others. Thus, insecurity can be theorized relationally. An insecure person is less likely to take risks, assert themselves, challenge injustice, and connect emotionally with other people, as such actions are perceived increasing

90 Ahmed, 65.
91 M3, November 17, 2012.
vulnerability and, thus, the risk to the ego. Moreover, insecurity’s inward-facing nature makes it less likely to circulate through the same channels as anger and fear. When it does move, insecurity circulates through the identification of desirable characteristics, leaving those without those characteristics vulnerable to judgments coming from either the inside or the outside and, thus, open to insecurity.

Users of The Red Pill often express intense feelings of insecurity prior to coming to The Red Pill. Unlike fear, insecurity is openly expressed, but always in the past tense; an admission of insecurity after imbibing The Red Pill would amount to some form of failure to fully embody The Red Pill’s dictates. Insecurity often serves as the affective impetus for seeking out The Red Pill, i.e., “I was insecure, the I found The Red Pill, and I learned not to care about my imperfections.” Thus, The Red Pill is characterized as the cure for one’s insecurities.

There’s no doubt that The Red Pill is a powerful coping mechanism that allows users to displace the responsibility for their own negative emotions onto women. Despite this (or, perhaps even, because of this) emotions like anger, fear, and insecurity become hyper-visible in the manosphere. Thus, I have come to think of the bundle of tacit emotions at play in The Red Pill as “affective wells.” Affective wells are unspoken but deeply seated and profoundly operative parts of one’s emotional life. They inform one’s emotional orientation to the world around them, including one’s interactions with the object of one’s desires and society more generally. One might have several affective wells related to different experiences, which have then come to inform their emotional inner life. For example, the affective well associated with one’s childhood may be entirely different than the affective well associated with one’s first divorce. Taken together, these affective wells play a critical role in shaping the way we interact with the world;
whether we are open, or closed off; whether we are perceived as an angry person or an affable person.

Additionally, part of the way affective wells function is, if we take seriously the idea that judgments play a central role in determining the content of any particular affect, and if those judgments are judgments about how the world is, for example, the judgment that one has been wronged, which is central to one being angry, then the affective wells function as a source of predetermined judgments that the world is “thus and so.” That is, not only are affective wells made up of our emotions and experiences, they are also, at least partially, made up by our sense of justice. Thus, when anger is circulating in The Red Pill, it is not doing so simply because users are angry that their masculinity is not being validated in the ways they think it ought to be. Rather, anger circulates because of this and the belief that women should act in very particular ways; most significantly, women should be invested in the performance of gender roles that validate men’s masculinity. For example:

As a result of everything I’ve seen and experienced in my life I would like to make an announcement to all the desperate 30+ year old women out there: I would rather suffocate and die then [sic] spend my hard earned income, love, trust, and substance on you. Your [sic] entitled, ageing [sic], feminist, jaded, baggage laden [sic] and brainwashed. And if I cannot marry a women in her 20’s I REFUSE TO EVER GET MARRIED.92

The self—one that persists through time—uses all relevant previous experiences to make a judgment, one that is deeply entangled in emotion. When women do not perform their role “correctly,” users make a judgment about being wronged. This judgment is both tied up with and reaffirmed by the ideological structure of The Red Pill, wherein beliefs about gender and sex are

92 Michael, comment on “More grim news for carousellers [sic] hoping to jump at the last minute,” originally posted November 25, 2013.
reinforced by not only “science” and “truth,” but also justice. Taken together, affective wells—the experiences, the emotions, and the judgments—are why, despite the insistence on objectivism and reason, the circulation of affect in The Red Pill is so intense.

3.2 How the Circulation of Affect Transforms Negative Feelings into Misogyny

How does the desire for the object get transformed into intense hatred for the same object? To answer this question, one must first establish the groundwork on which such relationships are predicated. Ahmed writes, “[…] boundary formations are bound up with anxiety not as a sensation that comes organically from within a subject or group, but as the effect of this ongoing constitution of the ‘apartness’ of a subject or group.” As I have sketched above and in Chapter 2, discursive signifiers present in many of the testimonials in The Red Pill indicate that one of the impetuses for seeking out The Red Pill is a deep dissatisfaction with the corporeal, emotional, and intellectual “apartness” many of these men experience. For example:

College: Extreme social promiscuity, cheating, drama, drugs, and parties. I was an observer but NEVER a direct participant because my heart would not let me. This eventually caused me to stick out as a third wheel observer on campus. Someone who was always “not mixing” or “participating”. As a result I never enjoyed the benefits. I rarely dated. Instead I was sneered at. Cute girls flicked their fingers at me. I was used by women as a person to tell their problems to. I was passed over. I was seen as “weak” “lame” and “boring”. I was ignored in the hallways, library, classes, by these women.

In other words, they are isolated. This is partially why Red Pill ideology is so attractive; its ideology uses biological essentialism and social determinism to make sense of the already felt

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93 Ahmed, 51.
94 Michael, comment on “More grim news for carousellers [sic] hoping to jump at the last minute,” originally posted November 25, 2013.
boundaries between men and women/the subject and the object. More than that, it reifies emotional and intellectual boundaries by constructing women as simultaneously incapable of higher thought and inherently emotionally manipulative.

The biological imperative so touted by The Red Pill makes for a disturbingly productive tension in the way it renders women fantastic while simultaneously suggesting they are too corrupt to be treated with any modicum of respect. Ahmed writes:

[…] hate involves the negotiation of an intimate relationship between a subject and an imagined other, as another that cannot be relegated to the outside. […] the self projects all that is undesirable onto another, while concealing any traces of that projection, so that the other comes to appear as a being with a life of its own.95

For these men to “conceal” that projection, they must adapt a logic that lends itself to differentiating themselves from the object and, thus, the boundaries are further reified. Once the object appears “as being with a life of its own,” there is a distinct object to hate.

The next step in the transformation of negative emotions transforming into misogyny is extrapolating the negative feelings felt for one object to all objects. Ahmed writes, “Hatred may also work as a form of investment; it endows a particular other with meaning or power by locating them as a member of a group, which is then imagined as a form of positive residence (that is, as residing positively in the body of the individual).”96 In The Red Pill, this occurs through the logic of “AWALT,” which stands for “all women are like this.” AWALT “[…] means that women are hard wired, biologically/Evolutionary condition [sic] to respond to [a] [sic] certain situation in [a] certain way. They will react in that way not because they are evil.

95 Ibid., 50.
96 Ibid., 49.
But because this is there [sic] nature.” The Red Pill’s reliance on biology and evolutionary psychology allows them to substitute one woman for all women. Further, women’s socialization in a “feminized” society simply reinforces their biologically rooted “bad” traits (manipulativeness, hypergamy, etc.). It is through this logic that the behavior of one woman recounted in The Red Pill comes to signify the nature of all women and, thus, women serve as stand-ins for one another.

However, this logic, in reality, represents the abductive reasoning behind The Red Pill’s less evident/articulable rationale: The Red Pill’s affective reasoning. As I have established previously, there is a general trajectory that the majority of Red Pill testimonials follow: man experiences unrequited affection, man is scorned, man becomes angry/fearful/depressed. This process is significant because it sets women up as the object of emotional/affective reasoning. Ahmed writes, “Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension.” Affect sticks to women as the site of anger/fear/insecurity. That is, they become the site of negative emotions experienced by men who are forced to interact with them. Displacing negative emotions in this way allows the men of The Red Pill to abdicate responsibility for their bad feelings. Essentially, they are looking for someone to blame for their misery.

Such reasoning is undergirded by the ways “stickiness” plays out in real or imagined interactions between men and women in The Red Pill. Ahmed writes:

[…] we can think of stickiness as an effect of surfacing, as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs. To relate stickiness with historicity is not to say that some things and objects are not “sticky” in the present. Rather, it is to say

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97 Bortasz, “AWALT, NAWALT allow me to explain,” RED PILL THEORY, r/TheRedPill, 2015.
98 Ahmed, 14.
stickiness is an effect. That is, stickiness depends on the *histories of contact* that have already impressed upon the surface of the object.\(^9^9\)

The histories of contact between the men of The Red Pill and women as a group are crucial to the discursive practices of The Red Pill. This is evident in the ways in which Red Pill testimonials often place a “mythical” woman or object of desire at the center. Histories of contact between the men of The Red Pill and women often serve as the affective impetus for seeking out The Red Pill; that exposure to women is seen as wounding. Sharing experiences or “histories of contact” with women is one of the primary channels through which affect circulates.

“Rants/Venting,” sharing “Field Reports,” and seeking advice from others regarding these histories of contact is one of the primary affective purposes The Red Pill serves. For example, user OneRedSock recollects:

> My 7 year BP [blue pill] relationship from college ended on mutual terms, but a point of contention was definitely when I saw that her coworker was texting shit like "I bet you look good naked" and her responses were smiley faces and "Oh, you..." types of responses. I quickly found a history of many texts from him like this, and not once did she rebuff him.

> I only happened to see it pop up on her phone one day, otherwise I never checked her shit -- trust and all that. When confronted she played it off as "Oh, he's just kidding. It's no big deal" The usual bullshit.\(^1^0^0\)

58 comments follow this recollection (a large number for a sub-comment in a loosely related post), all affirming OneRedSock and escalating the relatively innocuous affect through which the first comment was communicated:

\(^9^9\) Ahmed, 90, (emphasis mine).
\(^1^0^0\) OneRedSock, comment on “AWALT confirmed. Thanks Red Pill I owe you one,” r/TheRedPill, March 30, 2017.
[From user Robotemist] As did my ex. She would check my phone whenever I left the room, come to find out she was flirting with another dude.

Them cheating and acting inappropriate makes them realize how possible it is for it to happen to them. Ironically they find it acceptable from their part but they he [sic] damned if you do it.

Me being the beta at the time came up with every excuse for her. Never again.¹⁰¹

To which user Lazysaurus responded, “It gives them good feelings when they do it. It gives them bad feelings when you do it. It's that simple.”¹⁰² Lazysaurus’s rationale is affirmed by Eat_Animals, who writes, “Women don’t think. They feel.” Keithmcd901 takes it back to Red Pill theory writing, “Don't house wife a whore gents, and they are all whores.”¹⁰³

On the surface, these histories of contact are used both to underpin Red Pill gender theory and provide an empirical groundwork on which to predicate that theory. However, what is also/actually happening here is the circulation of affect between subjects through the sharing of experiences. The affect being circulated is a commonly shared feeling that approaches betrayal. More crucial in these conversations is the tension between the subject and the object, wherein the subject consciously loathes the object, while simultaneously recognizing that they need the object to fulfill either, on the surface, a biological need or, affectively, a need for emotional human connection and affection.

Hatred for the object that is needed is a relationship the United States is particularly familiar with. It is the affective core of institutions like white supremacy, especially in the U.S.

South, where the basis of the economy was predicated—and in many cases still is—on the labor of Black slaves and other hated bodies. Benevolent patriarchy skirts the boundaries of this contradiction, noting that women, while certainly lesser than men, have a place in the world and have good, emotionally oriented qualities like motherhood and care labor. However, The Red Pill is not remotely benevolent. Its tilt towards radical liberalism (i.e., libertarianism) obscures the social utility of emotional labor, and its insistence on ridding oneself of emotion devalues the status women would otherwise have under a more benevolent form of patriarchy.

3.3 The Dark Triad: Choking off Affective Circulations

As I illustrated in Chapter 2, one of the primary discursive themes of The Red Pill is how to rid oneself of emotion. Emotions, in The Red Pill, are viewed as the realm of women and, thus, weaknesses and impediments to achieving a higher form of masculinity. Despite this, the discourses of The Red Pill are profoundly affective. These are points I have established above.

The goal of inhabiting The Dark Triad is to rid oneself of the vulnerabilities associated with emotionality. In short, “if you can’t feel anything, no one can hurt you.” In many ways, such an orientation towards emotion reflects the ideal presented in many realms of American consciousness. For example, capitalist business enterprises, which are often viewed as aemotional and neutrally rational, are shielded from the emotional appeals of those most affected by them by capitalism’s insistence on the object/aemotionality of the market. After all, it’s business; it’s not personal. Of course, thinking of the market and currency circulations in this way is a fallacy; people make monetary decisions all the time based on their feelings. A man might buy a sports car because it makes him feel desirable; a single mother might avoid opening the credit card bill because it makes her fearful. Such responses are common and shape our economic landscape in countless ways.
The intersections of and parallels between the capitalist economy and affective economies are not lost on users of The Red Pill. Capitalist exploiters such as Donald Trump and Jordan Belfort, on whom the film *The Wolf of Wall Street* was based, are frequently venerated in The Red Pill. These men have been able to selfishly manipulate the emotions of others in order to elevate themselves, where they hoard power and wealth and benefit from those who wish to be closely aligned with power and wealth.

Users of The Red Pill conceptualize emotions and relationships as working with the same false objectivity many bestow onto the capitalist economy. However, in this paradigm, women—the emotional gender—are the power hoarders, able to manipulate emotions like financial bankers manipulate currency. For example, in this suspiciously convenient recollection:

One of my plates [a female hook-up among several other female hook-ups] texted me last night saying she needed to meet with me immediately and that it was "an emergency". I tell her to swing by after work. Meanwhile, I'm racking my brain all day trying to figure out what this is all about. When she finally gets to my place she looks me right in the eye and says, "I'm pregnant. It's yours."

No hesitation and spoken in a matter-of-fact way.

Now six months before I met this chick, I had a vasectomy done, so there's virtually no chance this kid is mine. Inside I'm furious because I know she's fucking some other guy (or multiple guys behind my back). I remain calm however and with a smug smirk I tell her all about my vasectomy and how that basically rules me out as the father of her unborn spawn. I also use that moment to confront her.

"So who else have you been fucking?"
At that moment the waterworks come out. She's crying and blubbering all over the place (trying to elicit sympathy I imagine) telling me how she was banging this guy from work but she doesn't love him and I'm the one she "loves". I guess she saw me as beta bucks? Lucky me.  

Women are conceptualized as shamelessly exploiting their biologically-instilled emotional power. Emotions are the capital, women are the high interest credit cards, (Blue Pill) men are the impoverished:

I really, really, really hope the myth that girls are the hopeless romantics gets kicked to the curb ASAP. Everyone needs to realize that men are the “romantics pretending to be realists” and women; [sic] vice versa.  

In order to alleviate this power differential, men of The Red Pill seek to “choke off” the emotions that flow in the affective economy of heterosexual relationships. In doing this, emotions leveled at them, like in the example above with the “blubbing” woman eliciting sympathy, would fail to enter the subject and effect an emotional response. The Dark Triad, with the characteristics of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism, ostensibly inoculates Dark Triad men against the affective circulations inherent to heterosexual relationships. This inoculation “grants high social status, tight control over interpersonal social dynamics and elicits intense sexual attraction.” Men who are in “control” of their emotions and the emotions circulating around them are less likely to be exploited by opportunistic women. Frequently, women are perceived as leveling attacks against men, targeting their emotional weakness. These

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105 Fartholomew Simpdaughter, comment on xsplat’s “Men value love, women love value,” posted December 19, 2011.
“attacks,” which are often emotional themselves (e.g., crying, expressions of jealousy, appeals for commitment, etc.), flow in the affective economy, contextualized by all the messaging and programming we receive in a heterosexual society. Ideally executed, The Dark Triad chokes off this flow, ending this circulation, making the person immune to the personal affects of emotion.

However, more frequently, attempts to embody The Dark Triad lead users to simply “act out” the traits of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellism in clumsy ways. Doing this fails to stop the affective circulation present in interactions. Rather, it tends to obscure the affects present within the various circulations. Again, this “jump” from one emotional expression to another is a familiar trope within patriarchy: the man who is actually sad acts out in anger because anger is the only appropriate emotion for men to have. In the context of The Dark Triad, a prime example lies in how narcissism and the aforementioned concept of “unconditional positive self regard” operate in The Red Pill. Red Pill “philosopher” TheIllimitableMan writes of narcissism:

> Excessive self-love as well as ridiculously high, bordering on, or far exceeding, obnoxious self-confidence. Dark triad individuals are egotist [sic] incarnate, this component of the triad forms the superficial glazing which [sic] masks and distracts one from the murkier depths of the dark triad persona. It is this device that achieves a dark triad individual baseline social acceptance in most social situations, for people are innately drawn to those who exhibit vast self-confidence.107

Narcissism, or excessive self-interest, is embedded in the very purpose of The Red Pill. The Red Pill’s self-help directive is premised upon an excessive self-interest—chasing happiness and sexual satisfaction regardless or even in spite of women’s feelings. For such an ideology to take hold, one would need to negate the humanity of women. This is completed through the proliferation of misogynist discourses, told through the language of biology and evolutionary

107 Ibid.
psychology, illustrated above. Negating the humanity of women absolves one from emotionally harming them, allowing users to turn towards the self and identify the self as a site of intense interest. Ahmed writes:

Hate involves a turning away from others that is lived as a turning towards the self. We can now see why stories of hate are already translated into stories of love. Of course, it is not that hate is involved in any demarcation between me and not-me, but that some demarcations come into existence through hate, which is felt as coming from within and moving outwards towards others.\(^{108}\)

That is, in The Red Pill, to hate women is to love oneself.

However, if the traits of narcissism and unconditional positive self-regard were really as rampant in The Red Pill and, indeed, as intrinsic to “natural” masculinity as users would like readers to believe, would there be a need for The Red Pill to exist? And if one really imbibed the lessons and benefits of The Red Pill, particularly The Dark Triad and unconditional positive self-regard, then when does one cease to bother with heterosexual relationships altogether?

\(^{108}\) Ahmed, 51.
CONCLUSION: NEGOTIATING SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN THE RED PILL AND “RADICAL AWARENESS”

It is difficult to determine what success looks like in The Red Pill. The very nature of the community lends itself to performative displays of masculine prowess, obscuring and twisting reality or adherence to Red Pill ideals. The Red Pill’s emphasis on “sexual strategy” would ostensibly mean that success means embodying all the masculine traits so touted by The Red Pill, including The Dark Triad, unconditional positive self regard, and “lifting.” Doing so would mean becoming a “higher type” in regards to masculinity, sleeping with many women, and never being “pinned down” or letting a woman take advantage. It seems that those who claim to have achieved this higher form hang around The Red Pill both to boast and receive affirmation that their lifestyle is desirable. However, one could do all the things The Red Pill prescribes either rightly or wrongly and still fail to achieve the happiness, meaning, or life satisfaction that The Red Pill purports to serve up. What happens to these men?

Failure in The Red Pill takes on two forms. First, there is “Coughing up The Red Pill”: those former users of The Red Pill who have rejected Red Pill ideology. One can find many post-Red Pill testimonies online, wherein self-described former misogynists explain why and how The Red Pill drew them in. Many claim the ideology exploited their existing insecurities. Some use the word “cult” to describe the mechanics and hierarchy of the sub-Reddit. There has even

109 I’m using “higher type” here as a nod to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, for whom, along with Schopenhauer, The Red Pill has an intense affection. Indeed, Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil is required reading in MGTOW’s subreddit.
110 “If you go to Red Pill and you say something that those guys don't really like then they will just delete your comments or just say that you are a ‘mangina’ or a ‘feminist’ or a ‘cuck’,” [...]“They have this social influence mechanism where they pre-emptively invalidate all criticism by criticising people back… and it is typical of cults to do this.” (“João,” quoted in Amelia Tait’s article “Spitting out the Red Pill: Former misogynists reveal how they were radicalised online,” The New Statesmen, February 28, 2017.)
been a sub-reddit established for those who became disenchanted with The Red Pill. With almost 3000 subscribers and post titles such as, “Red Pill Detox First Aid Kit – Start Here,” “How can I stop looking for a magic solution to my dating problems?,” and “I've never really bought into TRP anger, but I feel like there are fundamental issues with American gender dynamics, and I don't know how to feel,” r/EXREDPILL is actively attempting to undo or grapple with many of the logical fallacies, pseudoscience, and emotional abuse present in The Red Pill’s discourses. Some even admit they were using the hyper-masculine ideology of The Red Pill to conceal queer feelings, same-sex attraction, and gender dysphoria.

User BigAngryDinosaur writes:

As a regular reader of TRP, I have felt for a long time that there is a definite repressed sexual tension between many of the members. I want to launch into an amusing segue of conversations between members comparing how fit and muscular they are, aggressively [sic] boasting about their sexual prowess to each other and so on, but for the sake of keeping this sub respectable I'll just say that some [of] the extreme masculinity grandstanding and hyper-compensation that many members express has a very strong note of sexuality in confusion or even crisis. Maybe not full-blown hidden homosexuality, but there are definitely a lot of confused young men there trying to get a handle on their feelings towards the opposite sex, the same sex and sex in general.

Discourses surrounding queerness and homosexuality, in general, are often scrubbed or erased from the discourses that circulate in the homosocial environment of The Red Pill. Such discourses simply do not fit The Red Pill’s narrative of biological determinism in regards to

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111 r/EXREDPILL, hosted by reddit.com.
112 keinalu, comment posted on “Did anyone of you find out that you’re actually repressing same sex attraction,” r/EXREDPILL, July 2016.
113 BigAngryDinosaur, comment on “Did anyone of you find out that you're actually repressing same-sex attraction?” r/EXREDPILL, September 2016.
heterosexual relationships. Although much could be written about this erasure, this topic goes beyond this scope and purpose of this project.

Of course, “coughing up The Red Pill” is viewed as failure within The Red Pill. It is viewed as capitulating to the demands of women and a feminist society. The second, much more honorable path is to double down on the ideology of The Red Pill. In 2013, “Men Going Their Own Way,” or MGTOW, was established, a subreddit dedicated to the same self-improvement techniques featured in The Red Pill, but without the emphasis on sexual strategy. In fact, M3, whom I quote extensively in this project, has “gone his own way,” and given up on The Red Pill’s unspoken dedication to finding satisfaction within heterosexual relationships. In short, MGTOW is a pseudo-monastic ideology that simultaneously worships “natural” masculinity and deems women too corrupt or “dirty” to interact with at all. To cope with the tension between these two edicts, MGTOW dictates that all sexual relationships should be transactional. MGTOW extols the virtues of using sex workers for sexual release and features advertisements for “East Asian” dating and marriage sites on their sleek hub, “MGTOW.com.” Disturbingly, because MGTOW sees absolutely zero value in interacting with women, the discourses present in both their subreddits and in MGTOW sections of the manosphere are much more misogynistic than those of The Red Pill. And because MGTOW represents both a doubling down of Red Pill ideology and forsaking of the “sexual strategy” component, MGTOW shifts the subject of their discourse from individual heterosexual relationships to gender politics more broadly. Significant theorizing could be dedicated to exploring MGTOW and the other emotional and material consequences of imbibing The Red Pill’s ideology. Again, such an exploration goes far beyond the scope of this project.
The primary goal of this project has been to explore if subterranean affects revealed in The Red Pill pointed to a form of emotional dissonance, particularly as it relates to the ways in which gender and emotion operate in our society. The dissonance within The Red Pill is palpable and it contributes to the production of remarkably magnified forms of misogyny. Indeed, part of the reason why The Red Pill is so popular is, rather than originating out of nowhere, The Red Pill simply reflects back a magnified version of misogynist ideologies already present in the discourses of our patriarchal society. This is why the discourses presented in this project are so shocking, yet so astonishingly familiar. If we are going to take seriously what The Red Pill means as a site for the proliferation of misogyny, beyond the context of negotiating success and failure as I have sketched above, then we must also take seriously how gender informs our orientation towards emotions and how Red Pill ideologies leak out of or are reflected back onto mainstream discourses about the differences between the sexes.

What implications do such discourses have for women? On the individual level, the ideology presented in The Red Pill, namely that women are the emotional gender and hold the vast majority of power in society, creates a tension in which women are simultaneously hated yet needed for their sexuality and their perceived ability to “handle” emotions, more so than men. That is, the dichotomy The Red Pill constructs between the aemotionality of men and the over-emotionality of women makes women responsible for the vast majority of emotional labor needed in a traditional heterosexual relationship. Of course, such an arrangement is unhealthy for both parties. It forces men, who are often explicitly misogynist, to invest emotionally in someone they neither trust nor respect. It forces women to find ways to cope with a relationship that, at least on the surface, approaches the definition of emotional abuse.\textsuperscript{114} However, these

\textsuperscript{114} NowBecoming, “Asserting Dominance in a LTR (and other thoughts pertaining to LTRs and TRP),” LTR, r/TheRedPill, 2015.
implications are not very different than the implications of adhering to a particularly cruel form of patriarchy. Again, The Red Pill is retrograde, and often explicitly so.

The implications such ideologies have for feminism as a social movement are much more interesting. Feminism, in its goal of ending sexist oppression, is necessarily concerned with how women are viewed and treated in society. Further, as Ahmed writes:

Feminists who speak out against established “truths” are often constructed as emotional, as failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to form the basis of “good judgment”. Such as designation of feminism as “hostile” and emotional, whereby feminism becomes an extension of the already pathological “emotionality” of femininity, exercises the hierarchy between thought/emotion [...] This hierarchy clearly translates into a hierarchy between subjects: whilst thought and reason are identified with the masculine and Western subject, emotions and bodies are associated with femininity and racial others. This projection of “emotion” onto the bodies of others not only works to exclude others from the realms of thought and rationality, but also works to conceal the emotional and embodied aspects of thought and reason. […] the “truths” of this world are dependent on emotions, on how they move subject, and stick them together.  

Concern, tenderness, sympathy, empathy, soft-heartedness—these are all affective/feeling/emotional states one would have to be at least familiar with in order to align oneself with the justice-oriented goals of feminism. The Red Pill, in its insistence on excessive self-interest, radical individualism, and outright touting of “unfeelingness” as a virtue, is diametrically opposed to the goals of feminism. It is no wonder that feminism is cast as the enemy in this oppositional paradigm—they simply have no choice. Doing otherwise—probing the foundations of Red Pill “truth” and comparing those truths to feminism’s goals (i.e., not just

115 Ahmed, 170.
straw-manning feminism) — would require shaking the very foundations of truth so cherished by The Red Pill. For those who have so much of their identity invested in the discourses of The Red Pill, especially those who have found a method of displacing negative feelings and emotions that signal a deep dissatisfaction with themselves, the price of moving beyond a dualistic worldview into one that grapples with the various nuances of oppositional ideologies is too high.

However, unlike The Red Pill and concurrent ideologies like MGTOW, Men’s Rights, and others, “feminism cannot be reduced to that which it is against, even if what it is against is irreducible. Feminism is also ‘for’ something other, a ‘for-ness’ that does not simply take the shape of what it is against.”

Midway through this project, Donald Trump was elected President of The United States. The feelings I experienced were disgust, disappointment, and a deep demoralization. These affects circled back upon me every time I was forced to visit The Red Pill, whose users were in full-on celebratory mode for months after the election. More disturbingly, since beginning this project, I have watched The Red Pill subscribers swell from just over 164,000 active readers to nearly 200,000. I waivered on my intent towards reparative reading I dedicated myself to in Chapter 1 and, for awhile, I was set against framing this project in any light that would lend these men any degree of the humanity that they intended to deny me and those I care about. I considered reframing my method, transforming it from “academic curiosity in the spirit of understanding” to “cold, diametrically opposed research in the spirit of exposing.” However, at the risk of appearing dualistic in my own thinking, I came to realize that while I was angry, disgusted, and all these other emotions, I still was not paranoid.

Paranoid readings “sets a thief (and, if necessary, becomes one) to catch a thief; it mobilizes guile against suspicion, suspicion against guild; ‘it takes one to know one.’”

By

\[116\] Ibid., 178.

centering affect in this project, I attempted to avoid simply reporting on the activities of The Red Pill and focusing on the paradoxes present in their ideology. Most importantly, I did not want to lose the contributions to affect theory I believe to be present in this text to the illegibility of paranoia. Sedgwick writes:

> The vocabulary for articulating any reader’s reparative motive towards a text or a culture has long been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary […] No less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic, the reparative reading position undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks.\(^\text{118}\)

Doing this kind of work necessitates placing oneself in a position of affective discomfort. This, in and of itself, is a risk. However, is that not the risk we all take when we open ourselves up to the pain that comes with awareness? Feminism demands that we make ourselves radically aware of the injustices in society, not as a means of absolving ourselves from the responsibility of being complicit in such injustices, but to identify points of weakness in the leviathan and create methods of resistance. Radical awareness demands that we look not only downwards, but upwards, critiquing both those who are in power and those who are attempting to align themselves with power or, perhaps more apropos, those who are attempting to force us back to a time when power is perceived as easier to come by for certain people. Being radically aware of the role emotions, feelings, and affect play in constructing, not only our political realities, but also personal identities and interpersonal relationships means that we can establish a commonality that supersedes difference. Commonality, for better or worse, is the key to empathy. Empathy is often the first step on the way to justice. “Justice is not simply a feeling. And feelings are not always just. But justice involves feelings, which move us across the

\(^\text{118}\) Ibid., 149-150.
surfaces of the world, creating ripples in the intimate contours of our lives. Where we go, with these feelings, remains an open question.”\textsuperscript{119} 

\textsuperscript{119} Ahmed, 202.
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