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Antifeminism Online

MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way)

Jie Liang Lin

Introduction

Reactionary politics encompass various ideological strands within the online antifeminist community. In the mass media, events such as the 2014 Isla Vista killings[1] or *#gamergate,*[2] have brought more visibility to the phenomenon. Although antifeminism online is most commonly associated with middle-class white males, the community extends as far as female students and professionals. It is associated with terms such as: "Men's Rights Movement" (MRM),[3] "Meninism,"[4] the "Red Pill,"[5] the "Pick-Up Artist" (PUA),[6] *#gamergate*, and "Men Going Their Own Way" (MGTOW)—the group on which I focused my study.

I was interested in how MGTOW, an exclusively male, antifeminist group related to past feminist movements in theory, activism and community structure. I sought to understand how the internet affects "antifeminist" identity formation and articulation of views. Like many other antifeminist

1 | On May 23, 2014 Elliot Rodger, a 22-year old, killed six and injured 14 people in Isla Vista—near the University of California, Santa Barbara campus—as an act of retribution toward women who didn't give him attention, and men who took those women away from him. Rodger kept a diary for three years in anticipation of his "endgame," and subscribed to antifeminist "Pick-Up Artist" videos. http://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/26/justice/california-elliot-rodger-timeline/ Accessed: March 28, 2016.

2 | *#gamergate* refers to a campaign of intimidation of female game programmers: Zoë Quinn, Brianna Wu and feminist critic Anita Sarkeesian, from 2014 to 2015. http://time.com/3510381/gamergate-faq/ Accessed: March 28, 2016.

3 | cf. https://fightingfeminism.wordpress.com/

4 | cf. http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-25462758

5 | A term appropriated from the popular film *The Matrix* (1999). I will discuss this later.

6 | cf. http://www.returnofkings.com/

groups, MGTOW comprises of mostly straight, white, middle-class men from North America and Europe. Unlike other antifeminist groups, MGTOW espouse the abandonment of women and a Western society that has been corrupted by feminism. The existing system, to them, is impossible to amend, so MGTOWs are "going their own way."

MGTOW believe that they are victims of "gynocentrism," that the male gender role entraps men as silent breadwinners. Through technological advancement, men as a "race," have essentially dug their own graves by creating technological advances leading to public spheres and digital phenomena such as "selfie-culture," wherein females are privileged and rewarded for their "narcissistic tendencies," while rendering "the average guy" inconsequential. Convinced that feminism will ultimately bring about societal demise, MGTOW vow to expunge themselves of gynocentric influences, and to nurse their besieged masculinities with the support of other men online. At the core of their philosophy is a neo-individualistic dogma to live on one's own terms at all costs. There is discussion of "actualized" masculinity, and nostalgia for American vistas and the old frontiers. The MGTOW community has its own figures, video feeds, websites, *Facebook* groups and *subreddit*[7]. In his video "Double Standards," Sandman, a prominent MGTOW *YouTube* content creator airs:

> Double standards, cock-blocking and pecking order all go in hand in hand, and it's human nature and there's nothing we can do about. All we can do is accept it and realize its a bunch of bullshit, plain and simple...The evolutionary and scientific arguments for MGTOW has been laid. The theoretical framework has been laid down for MGTOW for the most part. The new world has been discovered and explored, but it hasn't been settled and colonized. The first MGTOW's were like Christopher Columbus, who discovered the new world, or James Cook, who provided the first map of the Pacific Ocean, or even like Lewis and Clark who explored the interior of the North American Continent. But now it's time to settle that landscape, and tell our own stories, make MGTOW about our personal journeys. If any of you have driven down I-95, the busiest highway in the East coast of the United States, you'll know you can drive all the way down from Canada all the down to Florida in about 24 hours. And along the way you'll see a lot of fast food joints and motels to stop along the way[...]

7 | A classified area of interest on *Reddit*. cf. https://www.reddit.com/reddits/

Literature Review

In his "Lectures in Ethics," Immanuel Kant (1920[1997]) defined objectification as the use of a person as a thing. Kant provides the example of concubinage, wherein the female concubine gives herself over fully to the man, while the man, who has multiple concubines, does not fully submit to her. This unequal relationship sets the basis for the man to use his concubine as a thing in a dehumanizing way. For Kant, marriage was the only moral *commercium sexuale* in which both parties can morally yield to their sexual impulses.

> (I)f a person allows himself to be used, for profit, as an object to satisfy the sexual impulse of another, if he makes himself the object of another's desire, then he is disposing over himself, as if over a thing, and thereby makes himself into a thing...Now since the other's impulse is directed to sex and not to humanity, it is obvious that the person is in part surrendering his humanity, and is thereby at risk in regard to the ends of morality. (Kant 1997: 157)

Following Kant's line of argument, objectification is immoral because the body cannot rightfully be separated from the self.

Second-wave feminist Catharine McKinnon built on Kant's link between sex and objectification for an anti-pornography campaign. In "Feminism Unmodified," she charges that pornography educates men to view women on objectifying and violent terms.

> Gender emerges as the congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women [...] Aggression against those with less power is experienced as sexual pleasure, an entitlement of masculinity. For the female, subordination is sexualized, in the way that dominance is for the male, as pleasure as well as gender identity, as femininity. Sexism will be a political inequality that is sexually enjoyed, if unequally so. (McKinnon 1987: 7)

In "Gender Movements," Cynthia Pelak, Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1999) designate the popularized perception of rape—as being more than just a sexual act, but actually as an act of violence—as a success of the Feminist movement (ibid: 159).

Second-wave feminists promoted two types of organizational structures: first was the bureaucratic, democratic structure of larger organizations—such as the National Organization for Women (NOW)[8]; second was the smaller, collective structure led by feminist radicals. Bookstores, theater groups, music collectives, poetry groups, art collectives, publishing and recording companies,

8 | cf. http://now.org

spirituality groups, vacation resorts, and self-help groups were largely maintained by feminist lesbians and nurtured a feminist collective identity in the 1980s and 1990s (Pelak et al. 1999: 158-159). Feminist collectives organized themselves in a way that reflected or prefigured their values. Feminists strove to construct a women's culture "valorized by egalitarianism, the expression of emotion and the sharing of personal experience" (ibid.). They made decisions by consensus, rotated leadership and other tasks among members and shared skills to avoid hierarchy and specialization. The attempt to form a women's culture also furthered a larger social movement community outside formal organizations (ibid.).

Within the climate of re-emergent feminist activity, it also became possible to conceive of a "men's liberation." Men's liberation rhetoric and literature "optimistically posited men's liberation as the logical flip side of women's liberation" (Messner 1998). In the 1970s, men in colleges and universities across America organized male consciousness and collectivity workshops, groups and newsletters for men, which were sometimes included in women's liberation gatherings. Tensions and limitations in men's liberation discourse soon split the men's liberation movement into divided camps: antifeminists and pro-feminists. Problematically, men's liberation groups attempted to criticize male dominance and power over women in society, while at the same time professing to be oppressed by that same line of power (Messner 1998).

By the late 1970s and 1980s, the career woman became a popularized image and a feminine ideal in mass media. The implication was that feminism had achieved its ideals, and that women no longer needed a protest movement. Scholars declared the 1980s and 1990s a "post-feminist" era. In the early 1980s, the number of feminist organizations rapidly decreased. Funding for women's organizations such as rape crisis centers, shelters for battered women, abortion clinics and job training programs were cut and forced to close. Roe vs. Wade (1973) was curtailed in 1989 by the Supreme Court's decision Webster v. Reproductive Services.[9] Consequently, limits were set on abortion rights, such as "informed consent laws", 'parental consent laws' of under-age women, and outright bans of an abortion unless the woman's life was in danger. Simultaneously, under the Reagan administration, women's studies programs came under attack by conservatives in a backlash against "multiculturalism"

9 | The statute contained a preamble interpreting life to begin at conception. Thus, the foetus had protected rights. Doctors were required to perform tests to see if a foetus was "viable" at five months old, before conducting an abortion. The use of public facilities for abortion, as well as using public funds or employees to counsel on abortion, was prohibited unless the mother's life was in danger. https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/492/490

and "political correctness;" academic institutions sought to reestablish focus on the "great thinkers" of Western European history (Pelak et al, 1999: 158-159).

According to Messner (1998) in, "The Limits of the 'Male Sex Role': An Analysis of the Men's Liberation and Men's Rights Movements' Discourse," men's liberation groups employed sex role theory, a functionalist analysis of family structures developed after World War II. Sex role theory posits that the socialization process puts men into instrumental roles and women into expressive roles in society. Ruth E. Hartley was a pioneer of sex role theory and examined the "costs" of the male sex role to boys and men.[10] Messner writes,

> The ideas that socially created symmetrical (but unequal) sex roles trapped men into alienating, unhealthy and unfulfilling lives, and that the devaluation of 'the feminine' was the main way through which boys and men learned to discipline themselves to stay within the confines of this narrow sex role, became a foundation in men's liberation discourse and practice. (Messner 1998 in Farrell 1974; Fasteau 1974; Nichols 1975)

According to psychologist Joseph Pleck (1974, 1976, 1982), the paradoxical male reality was that despite institutionalized male privilege, most men do not feel powerful. Fulfilling the scripted male sex role to succeed in public life left them "emotionally and psychologically impoverished, leading men to feel that women had 'expressive power' and 'masculinity-validating power' over them" (Messner 1998). Sex role theory was radical in the pre-feminist context of the 1950s and 1960s, because it broke partially from biological essentialism, and suggested a correlation between identity formation and social structure.

Men's liberation, seeking to align itself with the women's movement and eager to resolve any contradictions, packaged sex role theory as an argument of the symmetrical oppression of men and women in a sexist society. According to Warren Farrell, a public men's liberation figure and—for a while—a feminist, men are trapped in a "masculine mystique," compounded by women's economic dependency on them. "The unliberated woman [...] living vicariously has become a two-sex problem" (Messner 1998, in Farrell 1974, 73). Thus, men's liberation, coalescing with the women's movement, sought to undo sexist forms of oppression to the equal benefit of both genders.

A pointed feminist critique was that the men's liberation platform decontextualized institutionalized relations of power and the inaccessibility of women to male, institutionalized privilege. Sex role theory problematically posited a false symmetry between women's and men's liberation, and assumed white, male, middle-class and heterosexual identity to be normative. Furthermore, gender analysis often fell back on essentialist dichotomizations of men and women. Pro-feminist men and feminist scholars abandoned sex role

10 | cf. Hartley, R. E. ([1959] 1974).

theory in favor of a discourse exploring gender relations and power, in which constructions of gender are studied alongside historical dynamics of race and class. However, Messner believes, "the language of sex role symmetry is still flourishing in men's rights organizations and is very common currency in the general public and the media. It tends, for instance, to be used to discuss and inform debates about affirmative action and can be employed to fuel backlash against 'special treatment' for women" (Messner 1998). Messner encouraged the use of sex role theory for the study of men's rights ideology.

In "Men's Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century," Michael S. Kimmel (1987) delineates three responses to the feminist movement:

> The *antifeminist* reaction relies on natural law and religious theories to demand woman's return to the private sphere. Kimmel defines *antifeminism* as the direct opposition to the women's rights movement and women's participation in the public sphere. Antifeminists' arguments often rest on the distinction between natural right and civil right, claiming that feminism is a war against nature. Antifeminists use the argument of natural law to oppose women's education, arguing that education pushes women beyond their physical limits. Medical texts treated women's equality and newly found sexual autonomy as threatening, and deride the feminist rejection of femininity (ibid: 268).

The *masculinist* response opposed the feminization of culture—less than the advancement of women as a group—which masculinists believed had devalued male identity. Masculinists sought to create *homosocial spaces*, or islands of untainted masculinity (ibid: 261), to socialize young men to the hardiness appropriate to their gender. They did not oppose women's participation in the public sphere, so much as they sought to counteract women's monopoly of the private sphere and the feminizing influences of childrearing. Masculinism espoused anti-modernist and anti-urbanist sensibilities to reassert traditional values.[11] In the 1980s, masculinist men's rights groups and father support groups, perceived male supremacy to be an illusion and denounced female institutionalized privileges—such as exemptions from the draft, advantages in alimony and child custody and child support (ibid: 269-272). Kimmel quotes Messner:

> Men they [masculinists] say, are emotionally and sexually manipulated by women, forced into provider roles where they work themselves to death for their gold-digger wives, kept from equal participation and power in the family and finally dumped by

11 | Thompson Seton, founder of "Boy Scouts of America," believed that in the cities "robust manly, self-reliant boyhood [turns into] cigarette smokers with shaky nerves and doubtful vitality" (Kimmel 1987: 271).

wives only to have courts and lawyers give all the property, money and child custody to the woman. (Kimmel 1987: 270, cited from Messner 1986: 32)

Finally, the *pro-feminists* embraced feminist views and supported feminist methods of social reconstruction as correctives for oppressive, patriarchal structures. In Kimmel's survey, pro-feminist texts constituted a minority of reactions to feminism. Contrary to masculinists, pro-feminists believed in the liberating potential of modernity. Men's support to feminism consistently came from the argument of scientific advancement and societal progress. Pro-feminists acknowledged the oppressive qualities of the marital institution and championed women's suffrage, education, equality in the workplace together with sexual freedom, divorce and birth control (ibid: 272-276). According to Messner, pro-feminists began to diverge from the men's liberation movement due to feminist critiques: "These men tended to be less impressed by the liberal, middle-class feminism of [men's liberation than] the student anti-war movement, the Black power movement, and especially by radical feminism and the fledgling gay and lesbian liberation movement" (Messner 1998). Pro-feminist rhetoric changed from that of sex role symmetry and equal oppression, to one in which they de-emphasized the costs of masculinity and emphasized men's derived benefits of patriarchy (Messner 1998, cited from Snodgrass 1977: 137). However, some pro-feminists outside the campus settings were also reverends and rabbis and others linked to patriarchal institutional power that held onto misogynistic beliefs and divisions of sex, while still furthering women's issues—such as suffrage, divorce and birth control—in the name of egalitarianism (Kimmel 1987: 272).

Methodology

Initially, the antifeminist presence online caught my attention as a reactionary meme against the "Slutwalks" protests in Toronto, Canada. According to the Slutwalk Toronto website[12], Slutwalks began in 2011 "as a direct response to a Toronto Police Services officer perpetuating rape myths by stating 'women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized'." Since then, Slutwalks have developed into an international movement. Antifeminist women wanted to distance themselves from Slutwalk protesters ostentatiously parading their sexualities, while still staking a claim in notions of (female)

12 | http://www.slutwalktoronto.com Accessed: March 15, 2016.

empowerment[13]. I grew aware that the internet hosts a large network community of antifeminists, both female and male.

From the beginning of my study, I knew my access—as a female researcher—would at least partly be hindered to male, antifeminist circles. I began with a remote approach—as set out by US anthropologists: Margaret Mead, Bateson and Benedict—designed to study Japanese, German and other "cultures at a distance" in the 1940s. As John Postill (in press) writes, "with the explosive growth of networked technologies in recent years, the remote study of social practices is once again on the agenda." Postill posits one of the advantageous facets of remote ethnography to be an extra element of safety (Postill in press). His concept of "safe distance" refers enmity and hostility on the "ground" or a single locale, but in context of *#gamergate* and the general phenomena of cyberbullying, the initial invisibility of my own "remoteness" cushioned antagonistic sentiments that may have been directed towards me as I sifted through a plethora of online material.

I identified different platforms that antifeminists frequent and use to communicate with each other. *Google* searches gleaned a variety of search results including *Tumblr* pages by young antifeminist women aged 15 to 25, a digital manifesto by a Men's Rights Activist, and a website for "Pick-Up Artists." I moved on to *Facebook* groups such as "Meninism" and other antifeminist groups for both males and females, inclusively and exclusively. This initial survey gave me a general idea of the rhetorical framework of online antifeminism.

I learned of MGTOW on *Facebook* and began to follow the MGTOW *YouTube* content creator, Sandman. I searched the MGTOW website and read MGTOW posts on *Reddit*. I became interested in what MGTOW was to various men, cross-platform. For example, how did Sandman's high visibility on *YouTube* as a MGTOW "star" reflect in the expression of his ideas of MGTOW, versus the "regular" MGTOWs on *Reddit*? One of the main challenges was to discern the ways in which the online and offline worlds informed each other. In "Social Media Ethnography: The Digital Researcher in a Messy Web," John Postill and Sarah Pink's study of Barcelona Free Culture social media and activism departs from models of "network and community to focus on routines, mobilities and socialities" (Postill/Pink 2012: 2). As MGTOWs conservatively numbered between 20,000-30,000 at the time of the study, my intention was not to map out this immense network and community or to define MGTOW by "bounded" (Postill/Pink 2012: 2) terms, but rather to understand different types of MGTOW socialities and how online and offline worlds create "intensities" (Postill/Pink 2012: 2) through participation and routines.

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13 | cf. https://twitter.com/WomAgainstFem and http://womenagainstfeminism.tumblr.com/

Researching MGTOW across platforms entailed,

> flexibly adapting and developing new methods [...] yet retaining reflexive awareness of the nature of the knowledge produced and of its limits and strengths [...] This approach neither replaces long-term immersion in a society or culture, nor aims to produce "classic" ethnographic knowledge but, rather creates deep contextual and contingent understandings produced through intensive and collaborative sensory, embodied engagements often involving digital technologies in co-producing knowledge. (Postill/Pink 2012: 4)

I was aware that when I finally did reach out to MGTOWs to ask questions, it would likely be viewed as an encroachment. This prediction was confirmed on April 29, 2015 when "thick_knees" chastised his fellow MGTOWs for responding to my questions on *Reddit*, "Congrats all. You've essentially written this chicks paper for her." As of April 29, 2015, "thick_knees" received one point for his comment, as did "Orbital Thrownaway" who chimed in: "Seems like old habits die hard." My response on April 30, 2015 also received one point: "I understand your concern thick_knees. Interviews and questions are only part of the research process. Those who respond help me represent MGTOW more correctly in writing." In submitting questions and comments via *Reddit* and *Facebook*, I was leaving "digital traces" of the ethnographic process, "thus weaving a digital ethnographic place that is inextricable from both the materiality of being online and the offline encounters that are intertwined in its narratives" (Postill/Pink 2012: 14). My very presence may have compromised MGTOWs conceptions of "exclusiveness" and the status of their "safe space." However, I was pleasantly surprised to receive multiple answers from MGTOWs on *Reddit* immediately. Sandman did not respond to the questions I submitted to him via *Facebook*, although he had agreed to it when I initially made contact. Restricted access also informed me of possible disparities of MGTOW identity formations across platforms.

Findings

Meanodeano, on the MGTOW *subreddit*[14], informs me on April 28, 2015:

> The MRM is the 'change' wing [...] they are seeking legal and social avenues to redress [men's] issues [...] MGTOW is the 'abandon' wing: seeing that men are disenfranchised in numerous very real and potentially lethal ways, MGTOWs are opting out of those aspects

14 | http://www.reddit.com/r/MGTOW/comments/34fc80/some_questions_about_mgtow/

> of life which are statistically most likely to result in extremely negative consequences for men: sex [false rape accusations], marriage [divorce/family court bias], traditional male jobs [high mortality rate due to assumed male disposability], etc. (Brackets in original)

Some men went through a bad divorce and scoured the internet for answers amidst bouts of depression. Others realized their financial assets were the target of "gold-digging women." Many came by way of other antifeminist groups such as MRM and *Red Pill*. Like many other MGTOW, Nigelh—a diver, caver and glider—lived his life according to MGTOW values for 14 years before even hearing of the term. He first heard of it after the Isla Vista massacre last year, when the mainstream media blamed online groups like MGTOW. Though many MGTOWs have had bad dating or divorces experiences, MGTOWs are careful to not cast themselves neither as unattractive, impotent, emasculated nor too nerdy. In the comments section of his "Double Standards" video Sandman elaborates that, in high school, he was more like "a physically-fit outsider." "Self-glorification" can be used to sum up MGTOWs neo-liberal and neo-individualistic values.

The internet is the only route of access to the community for MGTOWs. They feel unable to express their opinions openly in offline interactions, fearing that they will be shunned or judged in a gynocentric society and workplace. Some express their views to select family members, without mentioning the label MGTOW. Although one of the guiding rules of the MGTOW *subreddit* precludes it from being "safe space," the anonymity of the internet allows MGTOWs to create an all-male "safe space" on their own terms. Members may exchange ideas and personal experiences without fear of backlash. However, insularity and anonymity have its consequences. Meanodeano writes, "When we already have to hide our identities in order not to be seen as vicious misogynist neckbeards by wide society, we end up being defined by our more vocal and most shameless members."

MGTOWs post and exchange videos and articles exposing the "true" nature of society, feminists, "gold-diggers" and female (sex) criminals; there are discussions around the usefulness of pornography and prostitution to circumvent commitment and marriage. Fellow MGTOW members are commonly alerted to various salient cases and potential dangers—for example, one thread on the MGTOW *subreddit* is devoted to the *façade* of subservient Asian women. MGTOW share personal testimonials of instances where they have been "burned." Across platforms, MGTOWs consistently display pent up emotion, cynicism and resentment towards women. They deliberate over just how a man should go his own way, and whether men and women are *meant* to work together or not.

MGTOWs agree to disagree, and disagreements do not necessarily disrupt the greater sense of camaraderie. Responding to one of my questions, Ancap-biochemist writes, "MGTOW has probably been one of the most enriching parts of my life and I value the thoughts and insights of my fellow men [as well as my own insights]." Ancap-biochemist, like many of my informants, chose to write additional comments under their answers, which spoke of their willingness to come forth and discuss the group; MGTOW is a mantra, the means and the end, the individual and the collective. The popular films *The Matrix* (1999) and *Fight Club* (1999) are also sometimes referenced. Nigelh writes, "It may sound contradictory, but like the Buddhist enlightenment once a person has embraced MGTOW they no longer need MGTOW."

The origins of MGTOW are unclear, though it seems to have emerged from the RP (*Red Pill*) phenomenon. "Red Pill" is a term appropriated from the 1999 film *The Matrix* that provides antifeminists with the metaphor for waking up to society's (gynocentric) evils. Its antithesis, the "Blue Pill," is blissful or willful ignorance. The MGTOW neologism: "Purple Pill," is between Blue Pill and Red Pill. Purple Pill is a Level 1 MGTOW: a man who is aware of that there may be conspiring gynocentric forces, but goes through the motions of a being Blue Piller[15] anyway. The media has spoon fed the Blue Piller false conceptions of love and romance from birth.

However, some MGTOWs also distance themselves from RP because, on *Reddit*, RP has become equated with PUA (*Pick Up Artists*). PUA are men who tailor their maneuvers to maximize on sexual encounters with different women ("game"), having become aware of what they perceive as women's dominance in the dating sphere—especially given the current popularity of social media and dating apps. ShitfacedBatman came to MGTOW via the RP *subreddit*. On April 28, 2015, he wrote:

> I was already into *Seddit*[16] and RP and was trying to figure out what possible use I would have for MGTOW once I learned about it. I landed in MGTOW once I burned out on RP and all other pill metaphors. There was really nowhere else I was going to run with it. If you go to the Red Pill sub, a lot of it is really impatient men trying to burn through women in short order. They're not very relaxed or chill. One thing that happened to me [I don't know if it happens to other guys] is I was 'ex-RP' for a while, or thought maybe I was "Purple Pill." It's that your wheels are still spinning and they feel like they need to spin. But for me, after the wheels normalized I was still Red Pill, just not keyed up or losing sleep over it. If RP and MGTOW were a form of "game," RP is fast and MGTOW is slow. (Brackets in original).

15 | Neologism.

16 | A *subreddit* for "seduction, self-improvement, and pick-up." (https://www.reddit.com/r/seduction)

Such is the ambiguity of MGTOW's origins that some of my *Reddit* informants deny outright any correlation between MGTOW and RP. Still, another of my informants, oldredder, maintained this:

> [U]ntrue. The true red pill which is the core of going your own way has been so since 1999. Truth is the bizarre version of "red pill" on *Reddit* isn't the real actual red pill at all. *Reddit* has a bad way of pretending it's the authority on something when in fact the subreddit "theredpill" is literally the least accurate source on what the red pill is on the face of this earth.

This led me to hypothesize that MGTOW, though diffuse across sites and platforms on the internet, also has specific identity formations on specific sites. According to the MGTOW website[17]:

> *Men Going Their Own Way* is a statement of self-ownership, where the modern man preserves and protects his own sovereignty above all else. It is the manifestation of one word: *No*. Ejecting silly preconceptions and cultural definitions of what a "man" is. Looking to no one else for social cues. Refusing to bow, serve and kneel for the opportunity to be treated like a disposable utility. And, living according to his own best interests in a world which would rather he didn't.

The manifesto also provides a definition for *sovereignty*: "Supreme power or authority. Autonomy, independence, self-government, self-rule, self-determination, freedom. Self-governing." Exactly how the MGTOW philosophy should be applied to one's daily life varies from man to man, pointing again to the core tenet that men should live their lives however they want. Modern man must "unlearn himself" and return to a more primal, "actualized" state of manhood.

A common MGTOW claim mentioned in other "antifeminist" online circles, is that men are powerless and invisible in the society that they themselves have built up through industrialization and technology. While men have served society and their female partners dutifully, reality has painfully backfired on them. Many MGTOWs feel betrayed. According to MGTOW, women use the rhetoric of objectification to their own benefit—playing the victim card—while at the same time posting fetishized and sexualized selfies in order to solicit as many male admirers on social media as possible. MGTOW members believe that women's higher visibility on the internet, especially within the online dating sphere, promotes a mentality of narcissism within women. According to Sandman, women get "male attention on tap," and engage in *hypergamy*—a lifestyle of heightened sexual activity with multiple partners. Men, seeking to

17 | www.mgtow.com Accessed: April 15, 2016.

meet or simply chat with women online, must compete with a few thousand other "liking" admirers.

MGTOW believe modern women have been "brainwashed" by feminism to believe "they are right no matter what." She will "ride the cock carousel" with as many men as possible, most of whom will mistreat her and valorize her feminist claims of victimhood. When women do decide to settle for a man, he will be a passive "beta-type," whom she will boss around and target for his "utility value"—financial assets and stability. The "beta" may be a Purple Piller[18] who is aware of the risks of marriage, but tries to hold out for a "Disney-ending." However, divorce proceedings will inevitably sway in a woman's favor, due to institutionalized female privilege.

According to Sandman in his video: *College Girl Debt Bubble—MGTOW*, women who use their looks to get free favors from men, demonstrate the notion of female privilege. Sandman grew up in Florida and later in Canada. He went to a school for art, photography and design, and lives in Toronto. Growing up, he was the intellectual-type but instead of being the nerdy guy who helps girls with homework, he worked out and slept with them instead. He says, he felt like his body and his mind were in direct competition, because girls didn't seem to care about his thoughts. Nowadays, Sandman is working freelance about 40 hours a week. Often, he works with women to create start-up packages. He believes female-led start-ups often fail because women resort to paying others for their skills instead of learning those skills for themselves. In any case, he insists, most women are miserable having careers, because female instinct revolves around "manipulating men to build a home." Men, on the other hand, are "hard-wired" to be productive. Sandman muses that he himself earns more than he "could *possibly* know what to do with" but he keeps on pushing himself to work hard and to be productive anyway. His innuendo contains some irony: tragically it is the same productivity that has landed men in their current, dire situation.

Further, according to Sandman, men invent, while women "manage and redistribute the wealth." Men do the "dirty work" and are responsible for "maintaining roads," while women are "city planners, working comfortably from behind the computer." Women are more likely to invest in higher education, but their degrees are "dumb" and "useless," as they "find themselves working at Starbucks, and leaning on their fathers and husbands for support to get out of debt." Although discrimination in the workplace may occur, Sandman states: "Perhaps companies are paying their workers based on productivity versus position" (Paraphrased from *Double Standards—MGTOW*, *College Girl Debt Bubble—MGTOW* and *The Ideal Woman*).

18 | Neologism.

Sandman often rehashes that women might *seem* beautiful, innocent and harmless on the outside. He dated a "hippy girl" for a year and a half in his early twenties, with whom he was deeply connected. Since then, he hasn't been able to find that same kind of connection. Reflecting on the ephemeral nature of things, he concludes, "the notion of an *ideal* mate is childish." His ex-girlfriend only *appeared* like the ideal:

> a soft-spoken, quiet hippy woman, but she was covertly feminist and manipulative, as her mother had taught her to be. MGTOW is the idea that men will use their faculties of reason and rationality to discern female mind games that enshroud day-to-day reality. (Paraphrased from *The Ideal Woman*)

With regards to actress Emma Watson's "HeforShe" speech at the United Nations,[19] Sandman remarks it is clearly a "feminist, utility campaign masked as gender equality." Feminists are trying to re-brand themselves as egalitarians, when feminist ideology is clearly aimed at female superiority. Men have never had the supposed benefits "male superiority," let alone equality. Men have only had "the burden and responsibility" of building up infrastructure. "Patriarchy" is just a term to take power away from men, but MGTOW is about "rebuilding the self-esteem of a ghost nation of men." Sandman attended and filmed the Toronto Slutwalk last year (for the video "Slutwalk Toronto 2014"). He, himself, was there to protest against the outlawing of prostitution by the government. Women and transgenders paraded the streets in bras and denim-cutoffs. Maybe, like feminists, Sandman muses, MGTOW needs "a smart, gay guy" to broaden its appeal.

A MGTOW has four levels to his journey; as paraphrased from Sandman's "Introduction to MGTOW," they are:

- Level 1: A man is aware that women use "the government, courts and men's desire to reproduce" as devices to manipulate him psychologically, but believes marriage is worth the risk. This man is referred to as the Purple Pill.
- Level 2: A man only believes in short-term relationships, but abstains from marriage, long-term relationships and cohabitation.
- Level 3: A man abstains from dating and limits his interactions with women.
- Level 4: A man limits his interactions with the state and society. It also means working as little as possible—"going ghost."

19 | "HeforShe" is a gender equality and solidarity campaign initiated by UN Women to engage men and boys to fight for gender equality and women's rights. cf. http://www.heforshe.org/en

However, not all MGTOW delineate the community by Sandman's terms. According to one thread entitled: "Are MGTOW's completely against the idea of being in a relationship with a woman?"[20] vtsobnf writes,

> Tradcons [Traditional Conservatives] claim its about self-actualization and being your own man. These "MGTOW" claim that even married men can be MGTOW. The original phrase "Men Going Their Own Way" came from a letter that went viral a decade or so ago that was basically a tradcon screed, so tradcons do have a claim on what defines MGTOW.
> Another "MGTOW" faction, let's call them Anti-Gynocentrists, would say that any man can be MGTOW so long as they avoid marriage.
> Finally, the "MGTOW Monk" faction [according to Sandy] would say that MGTOW should avoid all relationships with women. They probably shouldn't fap[21] either. Also, they should live off the grid. Also, real MGTOW are child-free. Also, real MGTOW should get vasectomies, Also, the government is responsible for 9/11, and Grey Aliens, and the Illuminati, etc.
> [...] MGTOW is a poorly defined philosophy with a few different factions trying to push their agenda.

In Vtsobnf's view, the MGTOW community is clustered into horizontally distributed subgroups, rather than divided by hierarchy based on fame and visibility.

In reviewing Sandman's *YouTube* content, I found that he makes concessions to "Level 1" MGTOW who date women, while staking most of his arguments in radicalized claims. Like radical feminist collectives, MGTOW disavows hierarchies, and similarly, hierarchies inadvertently crop up. Most of my informants on *Reddit* adamantly deny MGTOW as a movement, and fashion it more as a like-minded internet collective. Sergeant Dickhead writes:

> Keep in mind MGTOW isn't a movement or something that can be penetrated or stopped. It's a personal choice that is shared in the Commons of like-minded. In fact, there is no winning or losing MGTOW is straight up just opting out completely [...] many undercover people come around here asking the same questions like you did trying to unearth and get under our skin and see the inner workings of what we believe in trying to debunk it as well as manipulate It. This can not happen because we are not a group we are individuals who believe in our own personal choices and "get together" to offer help and advice to others who share our common thought. In fact, a logical perception such as MGTOW can

20 | http://www.reddit.com/r/MGTOW/comments/33fdwk/are_mgtows_completely_against_the_idea_of_being/ Accessed: April 15, 2016.

21 | An onomatopoeic slang term for male masturbation. http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=fap Accessed: March 28, 2016.

only work when there is no hierarchy. When everyone is their own belief system. Now tell me, how does one change the choices of others when those others have all different choices? You cannot.

In the more radicalized directives of Sandman, and other *YouTube* content creators such as Barbarossaaa and Stardusk, MGTOW resembles an anarcho-masculinist movement, using the internet as an expansionist tool for MGTOW agenda and for plotting against "gynocentric forces." Unlike Men's Rights Activists (MRA), who advocate for changes in legislature concerning Men's Rights issues, *YouTube* content creators present the withdrawal from society as a subversive tactic, and the rejection of traditional standards, or gynocentric indicators of male success—such as being married or having a family—as the only recourse against society that has already failed.

In the last year, these MGTOW *YouTube* personalities have begun taking donations for their videos, a move that has been met by some MGTOWs with suspicion. Hard_Cold_Truth posted under Sandman's *Double Standards* video:

I didn't whole heartedly agree with your slandering video but what I and others like to know is if you're homeless or jobless cuz [s.i.c.] why should you be capitalizing on our pain, misery and fear while this is supposed to be brothers helping others out.

ProLifeVegan Aryan also commented:

Barb[22] is full of shit. Ever since he stated that he couldn't continue making video content since it cost him too much time, and thus money, he asked for people to donate. Funnily enough, since that time, the amount of content he has produced has dropped to the point of where he is supposedly retired. but is capable of both simultaneously moaning about other men "stealing" the spotlight, and that upsets his overinflated ego [...].

Sandman responded in a post to ProlifeVegan Aryan:

Between this and my full time gig I'm working 60+ hours a week [...] All I wanted to do was make enough "mobile" income so I could afford to travel around the USA and Canada and make these videos and do nothing but that! Make it my lifestyle.

22 | Barbarossaaa

Conclusion

MGTOW is primarily a masculinist reaction to feminism that finds its conclusions in antifeminism, radicalism and anarchism. The internet provides MGTOW an anonymous, homosocial-type space, where men can resurrect lost notions of masculinity. MGTOW adheres to men's liberation's appropriation of sex role theory symmetry and parallels its "slippage [...] to angry antifeminist men's rights language of nude victimization" (Messner, 1998). Messner writes, "First is the claim of having been an early and ardent supporter of [liberal] feminism in hopes that it would free women and men from the shackles of sexism." At the beginning, a MGTOW is either Blue Pill or Purple Pill. Beginner MGTOWs buy into the gynocentric system. "Second is the use of the language of sex role theory that equates sexist thoughts and attitudes without discussing gendered institutional arrangements and intergroup relations." (ibid.). A MGTOW had alienating experiences, which consequently made them realize double standards exist that do not work in their favor. They realize they have been taught to buy into this unequal system by seeking validation in women. "[...] and last is a sense of hurt and outrage when women do not agree that men's issues are symmetrical with those faced by women, coupled with an enthusiastic embrace of an angry and aggressive antifeminist men's rights discourse and practice." (ibid.). MGTOW, unlike MRM, believe in breaking communication with women, divisively re-inserting male sovereignty into discourse and the re-inscription of essentialist divisions of sex.

Inverting Kant's notion of marriage as the only moral *commercium sexuale*, marriage is instead, an oppressive institution to be avoided, just as for many second-wave feminists. In keeping with sex role theory symmetry, men are not objectified by their sexuality like women, but by their success. Again echoing the men's liberation platform of the 1970s, the husbands' success is the woman's source of power in marriage. MGTOW mirrors the "gendered spaces" of radical feminist collectives in its devised non-hierarchal structure, with the same rationale being that their beliefs directly influence the organizational structure of the community. Like radical feminists who furthered a social movement culture in the 1980s and 1990s, MGTOW attempts to create a "men's culture" through MGTOW approved books and songs. Hierarchy emerges in the distinctions of MGTOW media and platforms. *Reddit* MGTOW, who write long posts on message boards, do not seek donations in the way *YouTube* content creators do. Ironically, Sandman has, contrary to "going ghost," enjoyed the elevated status of internet star. He cemented his position by an economy of donations for creating videos on request. Another sign of hierarchization is the control and censorship of ideas, since technically the MGTOW community is about whatever men individually want to discuss. This again, occurs along the division of *YouTube* content versus written posts. On the MRM site,

rockingphilosophy.com, a message by Tilted in the comments section to the 2013 article: "Face it, MGTOW is a Cult," indicates that Barbarrossaaa repeatedly censored the posts of Tilted that contended Barbarrossaaa's ideas. While *Reddit* message boards provide MGTOW non-hierarchal modes to negotiate male identity formation and is thus truer to the cause of MGTOW, radicalized versions of MGTOW on *YouTube* also stick closer to men's liberationists' packaging of sex role theory symmetry.

While the popular press is quick to find answers in generalized notions of "misogyny" with regard to tragedies and controversies, such as Isla Vista and *#gamergate*, male identity formations on the internet warrant a closer inspection. With MGTOW, MRM and PUA, the numbers are indeed evident of latent and unresolved male identity issues, which the internet has enabled into a "ghost" consciousness of anonymous men in the digital milieu. But which points are salient for "antifeminists" to expand on contemporary gender discourse, if any? The answer may be different with every type of antifeminist. Given the strong undercurrent of antifeminist presence online, the notion of "men as victims" and other types of sex role theory language may begin to play an increased role in gender debates. This is illustrated in the 2013 Columbia University sexual assault controversy between Emma Sulkowicz and Paul Nungesser. Sulkowicz alleged that Nungesser raped her, although they had—previous to the incident—been consensual sex partners. Columbia University reviewed the case and found Nungesser not guilty. Sulkowicz, an art student, responded with an act of protest by creating "Mattress Performance: Carry That Weight," as part of her thesis project. Maintaining that Nungesser had raped her, Sulkowicz carried a mattress with her wherever she went. This garnered so much attention in the popular press and in the art world, that she effectively ruined Nungesser's reputation. At their graduation ceremony, Sulkowicz and her friends also carried the mattress onto the stage. Nungesser sued Columbia University for allowing a "gender based anti-male discriminatory harassment campaign" to take place on the campus,[23] a case which the judge ultimately dismissed. The case put into question the role of educational institutions in presiding over campus violence and rape cases. By accusing Sulkowicz of an "anti-male campaign," the council for Nungesser was using an antifeminist line of argument. A particular antifeminist language, emerging from an earlier men's liberation rhetoric, has entered into the courtrooms. Although sex role theory is not new, its language may still be recurrent in gender politics and discourse.

23 | cf. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/29/magazine/have-we-learned-anything-from-the-columbia-rape-case.html?_r=0 cf. http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womeninthe world/2015/06/26/emma-sulkowicz-accused-of-anti-male-campaign/

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