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Drinking male tears: language, the manosphere, and networked harassment

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ABSTRACT

While popular discourse often frames online harassment as an issue of individuals engaged in abhorrent behavior, harassing behavior is often *networked* in that it is coordinated and organized. When feminists and female public figures experience harassment, it often originates from members of a loose online network known as the *manosphere,* a set of blogs, podcasts, and forums comprised of pickup artists, men's rights activists, anti-feminists, and fringe groups. While the particular beliefs of these groups may differ, many participants have adopted a common language. This paper explores the discourse of the manosphere and its links to online misogyny and harassment. Using critical discourse analysis, we examine the term *misandry*, which originates in the manosphere; trace its infiltration into more mainstream circles; and analyze its ideological and community-building functions. We pay particular attention to how this vocabulary reinforces a misogynistic ontology which paints feminism as a man-hating movement which victimizes men and boys.

Introduction

In June 2017, feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian appeared on a panel called "Women Online" at VidCon, a popular convention for video bloggers. The first three rows of the panel's audience were packed with anti-feminist YouTubers. Since beginning her "Tropes vs. Video Games" series, which deconstructs sexist stereotypes in video games, Sarkeesian has been a persistent victim of harassing behavior, including death threats, slurs, and sexually violent language, originating from various far-right and men's rights groups. In this case, Carl Benjamin, a YouTube celebrity who goes by the pseudonym Sargon of Akkad, was sitting in the front row filming her.

The panel moderator asked why the panelists thought it was still necessary to discuss the harassment of women, given the enormous amount of attention to the topic. Sarkeesian responded, "Because I think one of my biggest harassers is sitting in the front row." With anger in her voice, she continued: "If you Google my name on YouTube you get shitheads like this dude who are making these dumbass videos that just say the same shit over and

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over again." She looked straight at Benjamin and said, "I hate to give you attention because you're a garbage human."

Following the incident, Benjamin took offense to her term "garbage human," calling it abuse and accusing Sarkeesian of cyberbullying. The "anti-social-justice-warrior" (ASJW)[1] YouTube community erupted in indignation, posting dozens of videos portraying Sarkeesian as an "abuser," a "martyr," "a serial harasser," and even a misogynist.

In a statement on her blog, Sarkeesian wrote:

> Carl is a man who literally profits from harassing me and other women: he makes over $5,000 a month on Patreon for creating YouTube videos that mock, insult and discredit myself and other women online, and he's not alone. He is one of several YouTubers who profit from the cottage industry of online harassment and antifeminism; together, these people have millions of followers who are regularly encouraged by the videos and tweets of these individuals to harass me and other women who make videos daring to assert the basic humanity of women, people of color, trans folks, and members of other marginalized groups (Anita Sarkeesian 2017).

While popular discourse often frames online harassment as an issue of individual people engaged in abhorrent behavior, groups like the ASJW YouTubers—and many others—regularly encourage, promote, or instigate systemic networked harassment against their targets (Michael James Heron, Pauline Belford, and Ayse Goker 2014; Emma A. Jane 2016). While harassing behavior is certainly not confined to anti-feminists, many of the techniques used in networked harassment, such as doxing (publishing personal information online), revenge porn (spreading intimate photos beyond their origins), social shaming, and intimidation were refined by men's rights activists and anti-feminist gamers during a protracted online controversy known as Gamergate (Jean Burgess and Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández 2016; Shira Chess and Adrienne Shaw 2015; Adrienne Massanari 2015). In many ways, members of the so-called "manosphere" pioneered harassment techniques that are now leveraged not only by individuals and online communities, but by governments and other state actors (S. Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard 2017). This paper focuses on the term *misandry* as a core part of the vocabulary of manosphere spaces. We argue that this term encapsulates a theory of feminism as intrinsically prejudicial and threatening toward men, which provides justification for networked harassment of those espousing feminist ideas. By analyzing *misandry*, we investigate how misogynist ideas spread outward through discourse.

Literature review

Networked harassment

"Online harassment" is an umbrella term encompassing a variety of behaviors and is thus conceptualized differently by scholars. The term is widely used in the cyberbullying literature, sometimes as a synonym for "bullying" (R. S. Tokunaga 2010), but elsewhere to mean spreading rumors or cruel comments (Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell 2008), or posting threatening or offensive remarks online (D. Finkelhor, K. J. Mitchell, and J. Wolak 2000). Such studies primarily investigate peer relationships (e.g., the harasser and harassed know each other and are geographically proximate and the same age), behavior taking place in front of a local audience (e.g., one's peer group), and individuals under 18.

More recent studies define *online harassment* as a wider array of behavior. For instance, in their survey of more than 3000 Americans, Lenhart et al. defined 10 behaviors that constitute harassment:

> Being called offensive names, being embarrassed online, being physically threatened online, being sexually harassed online, being harassed over a long time, being hurt online by a romantic partner, being impersonated, spreading damaging rumors online, encouraging others to harass you online, and attempting to hurt the victim in person after online harassment (Amanda Lenhart, Michele L. Ybarra, Kathryn Zickuhr, and Myeshia Price-Feeney 2016).

By this definition, anything from a single instance of name-calling to serious abuse can constitute harassment. However, defining harassment is difficult, since it is a constellation of ever-evolving behaviors. The highest-profile victims of harassment, such as Sarkeesian, comedian Leslie Jones, game designer Zoe Quinn and usability expert Kathy Sierra, were subject to pejorative language; doxing; death threats; revenge porn; cyberstalking; and other threatening behavior. Regardless of how harassment is defined, women, especially women of color and queer women, are more susceptible to online harassment and more likely to consider negative behavior to be harassment, to the point where young women may see it as a normal part of online experience (Lenhart et al. 2016; Jessica Vitak, Kalyani Chadha, Linda Steiner, and Zahra Ashktorab 2017). Online harassment is also common for women in public occupations, such as journalists and politicians (Alana Barton and Hannah Storm 2014; Mona Lena Krook 2017). Thus, harassment is often used to police women's online behavior, and may have a chilling effect on women's participation in the public sphere both on and offline.

Feminist scholarship has used terms like "online hate," "e-bile," "gender trolling," and "online misogyny" to connect online behavior to structural sexism and violence against women (Sarah Banet-Weiser and Kate M. Miltner 2016; Danielle Citron 2014; Jordan Fairbairn 2015; Mary Anne Franks 2012; Emma A. Jane 2014; Karla Mantilla 2013). When women are harassed, regardless of who they are or what they do, much harassing behavior focuses on their gender, such as sexist speech, pornographic imagery, and rape threats. Banet-Weiser and Miltner use the term *networked misogyny* to reflect that such behavior is often a concerted, organized effort. Sarkeesian herself, in a passionate talk at TedWomen, explained how the "cyber mob" targeting her worked in a gamified context:

> We don't usually think of online harassment as a social activity, but we do know from the strategies and tactics that they used that they were not working alone, that they were actually loosely coordinating with one another. The social component is a powerful motivating factor that works to provide incentives for perpetrators to participate and to actually escalate the attacks by earning the praise and approval of their peers (TEDx Talks 2012).

Such networked misogyny is often organized in subcultural online spaces such as Reddit, 4Chan, and chat rooms, where participants collectively frame feminists like Sarkeesian as "villains." This provides justification for the harassing behavior and gives those engaging in it a moral high ground (Shagun Jhaver, Larry Chan, and Amy Bruckman 2018). Where does this point of view come from, and how is it perpetrated online?

The manosphere, men's rights activists, and Gamergate

The Men's Rights Movement (MRM) has its roots in the early 1970s, as college-age men engaged with the emerging Women's Liberation movement (John Fox 2004; Michael A. Messner 1998). Far from seeing feminism as problematic, men's rights scholars like Warren Farrell, Marc Fasteau, and Jack Nichols acknowledged that sexism harmed women, but emphasized that strict gender roles and patriarchal society were equally harmful to men

(Bethany M. Coston and Michael Kimmel 2012; Messner 1998). Early "Men's Liberation" literature discussed, for instance, emotional stoicism, unequal child support obligations, male-only draft requirements, and the social pressures of traditional male masculinity (Coston and Kimmel 2012; Emily Shire 2013). Messner notes that the early MRM's central goal was to "attract men to feminism by constructing a discourse that stressed how the male role was impoverished, unhealthy, and even lethal for men" (1998, 256).

In the 1980s, the Men's Liberation movement underwent a schism. While some men continued fighting sexism, others embraced traditional masculinity, arguing that modern society emasculated and feminized men (Michael S. Kimmel 1995). Poet and author Robert Bly led the so-called mythopoetic movement which suggested that men should return to their (imagined) ingrained nature by embracing homosocial solidarity (Fox 2004). At the time, the mythopoetic movement was heavily criticized for its limited representation of manhood and reinforcement of patriarchal norms related to white heterosexual male identity (Kimmel 1995). Despite this, Bly's books went on to top bestseller lists and spurred a movement that still appeals to a wide following.

The other subgroup of Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) believed that white men in America were in crisis and that feminism—and more broadly liberalism—was to blame for the failings of American culture (Kellie Bean 2007). This movement represents widespread geo-political structural changes and resulting discourses of decline, crisis, and public paranoia that emerged in the 1980s, a turning point not only for the MRM, but in popular sentiment toward feminism (S. Faludi 1991; Liam Kennedy 1996). The late 1970s–1980s saw significant economic, political, and social change, as Reaganomics in the US and Thatcherism in the UK dismantled long-established labor markets and unions, leading to widespread social unrest (Bean 2007). This political climate was coupled with major shifts in the make-up of the workforce that began in the 1960s, as more women and ethnic minorities joined the labor force (Mignon Duffy 2007). The contemporary men's rights movement is thus a reaction to diminishing social status of cisgender white men, and the emergence of feminist and multicultural activism as a mainstream political force. It is thus defined as much *against* feminism as it is *for* men's rights (Jonathan A. Allan 2016).

The internet has been key to the popularization of men's rights activism and discourse (Mary Lilly 2016; Rachel M. Schmitz and Emily Kazyak 2016). While the *manosphere* includes a variety of groups, including MRAs, pickup artists, MGOW (men going their own way), incels (involuntary celibates), father's rights activists, and so forth, they share a central belief that feminine values dominate society, that this fact is suppressed by feminists and "political correctness," and that men must fight back against an overreaching, *misandrist* culture to protect their very existence (Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis 2017). For instance, sexual violence is discussed throughout the manosphere as a gender-neutral problem, in which feminists ignore widespread sexual violence against men and encourage false rape accusations (Lise Gotell and Emily Dutton 2016). Blais and Dupuis-Deri refer to this belief system as masculinism: "Since men are in crisis and suffering because of women in general and feminists in particular, the solution to their problems involves curbing the influence of feminism and revalorizing masculinity" (2012, 22). In 2014, Elliott Rodger, who was deeply immersed in the manosphere, killed six people and injured 14 others in Isla Vista, California in an apparent attempt to punish young women for their disinterest in him and young men for their sexual success (Ralph Ellis and Sara Sidner 2014; Katie McDonough 2014).[2] While

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Rodger is an extreme exemplar, Lilly points out that "the extremist and the mundane versions of various ideologies are in fact the same ideology—the same assumptions underpin both the mainstream and the fringe" (2016, 5). Setting up feminism—and feminists—as villains, and men as victims, justifies the networked harassment that often emerges from the manosphere.

This is best demonstrated by Gamergate (GG), a contentious online campaign in which male gamers and MRAs used social media to systematically attack feminists, female video game critics, and developers (Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández 2016; Chess and Shaw 2015; Massanari 2015; Torill Elvira Mortensen 2016). From one perspective, GG was about "ethics in video game journalism" and combating those who wanted to censor video games and harm free speech. From another, GG was a backlash against the diversification of gaming from a mostly-male base (Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett 2012). Despite these competing frames, an empirical study of the #gamergate hashtag found that it was primarily used to further anti-feminist sentiment, harass women, and spread misogynistic ideas across platforms (Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández 2016).

Gamergate participants adhered to a normatively white masculine subject position that viewed itself as being under attack from SJWs and feminists, and thus justified harassing behavior through a mantle of victimhood and appropriation of the language of identity politics (Chess and Shaw 2015; Jhaver, Chan, and Bruckman 2018; Mortensen 2016). This "geek masculinity" is characterized both by a sense of subordination and persecution (since geeks are often outsiders and nerds) and an aggressive adoption of masculine stereotypes and overt sexism (Salter and Blodgett 2012). This allowed Gamergaters to adopt a position of ethical superiority, in which, as Mortensen writes, "aggressive, sexualized attacks against women are seen as reasonable, even moral modes of argumentation" (2016, 7).

Given the centrality of victimhood, and the importance of internet community, to the MRM and geek masculinity, we investigate the dissemination of the term *misandry* to understand how perceived persecution is used to justify networked harassment throughout the manosphere.

Method

This work explores the origins of the widely-used MRA term *misandry* (hatred of men), traces its infiltration from men's rights groups into mainstream feminist circles and popular press, and analyzes its ideological and community-building functions. We chose *misandry* since its existence is a central tenet of MRA discourse.

We used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to study uses of the term *misandry* across internet spaces and ideologically diverse communities (N. Fairclough 2003; N. Fairclough, R. Wodak, and J. Mulderrig 2011). Specifically, we looked at its use across three periods in time: 1990s Usenet newsgroups, early blog culture in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and social media and online press in the 2010s. To trace the emergence of *misandry* in online discourses of men's rights activism, we examined its use on the early internet forum Usenet (1989–1998). Usenet is not representative of larger American discourse, as its user base was primarily white, educated, tech-savvy men. However, given that MRAs primarily organize online, that Usenet's demographic resembles that of the contemporary MRM in terms of race and gender, and that our interest is how terminology disseminates through social media, studying Usenet made it possible to identify internet discourses as they emerged and solidified.[3] We used

Google Groups, which contains the most complete online archive of Usenet postings (Pandia 2001), to search for *misandry* by year and within particular newsgroups, such as alt.dads. rights, alt.feminazis, soc.men, soc.singles, and soc.women.[4] Please note that we have chosen not to link to or cite individual Usenet posts as many include the real names of the posters. Given the difference in audience size between Usenet in 1991 and Google today, we view this as an ethical, privacy-protective practice.

To track how *misandry* was used in blogs, discussion forums, and social media from 1996 to the present, we used Google Trends, the Internet Archives' WayBack Machine, and MediaCloud, attending to time periods when use of the term increased significantly. Once we had identified these "peaks," we targeted queries by year to find sites and uses of the term with the most reach, and then examined granular search results to identify relevant instances.

Our goal was to understand how the men's rights activists used language to construct their identity as fundamentally oppositional to feminism and reinforce binary gender systems. We were particularly interested in the project of feminist discourse analysis, understanding how language functions in "sustaining hierarchically gendered social orders" (Michelle M. Lazar 2007) and to delve further into the gendered assumptions of specific terminology (Deborah Cameron 1998). To guide the collection of our corpus and make connections throughout data collection, we employed a grounded theory approach (B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss 1967). Grounded theory approaches require a significant amount of flexibility, conducting data collection and analysis simultaneously, pursuing emergent themes, constructing abstract categories to guide and synthesize data collection, and subsequently refining those categories of analysis (Kathy Charmaz 2006, 4). In line with critical discourse analysis, we used a constructivist approach within grounded theory. Although delving into archival materials, the authors have both spent considerable time observing contemporary men's rights communities in order to contextualize data analysis and gain an insider perspective as much as possible.

Uses of misandry

Misandry mediates social practices and values within the men's rights community, and between the men's rights community and the feminist community. The rhetorical force of terms like *misandry* are thus in their capacity to serve as boundary objects; Star defines boundary objects as "a sort of arrangement that allow different groups to work together without consensus" (2010, 602). The word is more widely used following periods of dynamic interaction between ideologically competing groups, during which both MRAs and feminists negotiate the meaning of *misandry*. In such instances, each community defines and makes meaning of the word according to their own ideologies and beliefs. *Misandry* thus spreads through interaction between communities, but is also recontextualized through a "dialectical-relational" process (N. Fairclough 2009).

Misandry is defined as the "dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against men (i.e., the male sex)." The term originated in the late 19th century, and comes from the Greek; *miso* means "hating," and *andri* means "man" (Oxford University Press 2017). However, from its very inception, misandry was used as a synonym for feminism and as a false equivalence to misogyny. In the 1890s, there are a few instances of newspapers in the United States and United Kingdom referring to the "new women" as "man haters."[5] In a 1928 article entitled

"Logic and the Ladies," John Macy wrote in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* that Mary Wollstonecraft's "general accusation against society is free from the perversion of misandry, which distorts the more querulous of modem feminist arguments." In the 1980s, *misandry* reemerges in men's rights literature such as *The Male Ordeal: Role Crisis in a Changing World*, by Eric Skjei and Richard Rabkin (1981), which discusses male victimization, and academic literature commenting on structural sexism (such as the Fall 1987 special issue of *Representations* titled "Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy"). We tracked the emergence of *misandry* in more contemporary discussions by searching Usenet.

Usenet

According to Google's archives, the earliest instance of *misandry* was a 1989 post to soc. women, which used it quite generally. In 1990, a more robust conversation occurred in several newsgroups, including soc.men and soc.singles. Throughout six different threads, posters debated using the term as a "gender reversed" form of "misogyny," and to describe feminist beliefs they considered to be "anti-male," such as the notion that men "objectify women" or that male sexual desires "promote rape." In these discussions, posters used *misandry* synonymously with what one individual referred to as the "lunatic fringe of feminism." Posters also used it to structure an equivalency between misogyny (the dislike of or contempt for women), and the dislike of men. In one thread on soc.men, for instance, a poster tied *misandry* to a discussion about *Presumed Innocent* (1990) and *Fatal Attraction* (1987), two movies that feature murderous women. In another thread, a poster expressed shock at discovering that "misandry" was not listed in the Oxford Dictionary, but thought it was useful to describe the type of discourse on soc.feminism (which he alternatively referred to as soc. we.hate.men). Note that soc.feminism is not a feminist group; while it was devoted to the discussion of feminism, it attracted many anti-feminist posters.

As the number of people on Usenet increased in the early 1990s, *misandry* became more common. In 1991, there were 15 threads on the topic of misandry, compared to three in 1989 and six in 1990. In general, posters used the term to describe an extreme version of "feminist values" that invalidated "men values," or to critique generalizations about men (ex; "that sometimes men lie about rape"). One post on soc.men tied misandry directly to the need for a stronger "men's rights movement" to oppose the feminist movement, even acknowledging that feminists like Gloria Steinem had been advocating for a "men's liberation" movement since 1972. That same user, however, used "misandry" to undercut the feminist argument that society structurally oppresses women:

> Strip away the cant, the rant, the misandry, the bogus scholarship that would get a male 10th grader thrown out of school from the feminist literature of the past two decades, and the minimum that you are left with is a deep conviction that every disadvantage for women means a corresponding advantage for men ... I think this is absolute cowshit. Quite the opposite is true. Every disadvantage for women is tied, through social mechanisms, through a short, mutually reinforcing positive feedback loop with a corresponding DISadvantage [*sic*] for men, a tight little dance of pain.

This notion that feminist discourse *creates* a binary that requires the existence of the word "misandry" was a continued theme in Usenet discussions. Feminism was often portrayed synonymously with misandry—i.e., "feminism is really about trashing men," or that feminism over the previous two decades "cultivated misandry."

In 1992, the term appeared in a broader range of newsgroups, such as talk.politics.guns, talk.rape, and alt.folklore.urban. However, it was most frequently used in newsgroups devoted to gender discussion: soc.feminism (6) soc.men (15 threads), and talk.abortion (8). Many of these posts used *misandry* to mischaracterize feminism based on the work of radical feminists like Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon (such as the straw man argument that "all heterosexual sex is rape," a deliberate misreading of MacKinnon's writing (Cindy Richards 1999)). Certain feminist ideas were discarded as anti-male and thus misandrist. In soc.feminism, for instance (which, again, we do not consider a feminist community), generalizations about sexism and men's social behavior were labeled misandrist and therefore discounted ("The assumption that men cannot be trusted when you meet them on the street is misandry"). Examples of misandry mentioned in talk.abortion included believing that men do not have the right to determine whether a woman has an abortion, and being both pro-choice and pro-child support ("Similarily [*sic*], if someone is pro-choice and pro-mandatory-child-support because she doesn't care about hurting men, that's misandry"). Discussions on soc.men were more varied. A few men debated adopting "misandry" instead of terms like "androphobia," while others used it to discuss internalized sexism. One poster said, "I think one of the real problems facing men today is that we have bought into the androphobia (a term I prefer to misandry) so completely, that it has become difficult to see."

Though the term "misandry" pre-dates the internet, examining Usenet demonstrates how terminology serves a discursive role, creating a relationship between social groups. Consistent with Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional framework for conceiving and analyzing discourse, the word "misandry" serves several functions both within and between linguistic and social communities: as (1) text; (2) discursive practice; and (3) social practice.

For "misandry," separating text from discursive function is difficult. Early Usenet posters proposed it be used as a "gender reversed" variant of "misogyny," but the term had not yet crystallized in communities concerned with men's rights. This is demonstrated by one user in alt.evil asking "Is there an antonym for 'Misogyny' that applies to men in particular?" In another discussion, posters debated which term would best "serve the function of 'misogyny' for men," suggesting "misandry" along with "misanthropy," "androphobia," and "misandrony." One soc.men poster explained that they didn't like "'androphobia' because it isn't fear and it isn't necessarily irrational … I favor 'misandry' because it encompasses the whole phenomenon of prejudice against men." While *misandry* was an established phrase in offline men's rights circles, online communities were still unsure of how it should be applied in practice, and sought affirmations from each other in constructing a social practice around its use and this binary approach to "misogyny." In this sense, misandry served a textual and metaphorical purpose in establishing an equivalence between misogyny and misandry.

Even in discussions about the term's appropriateness, *misandry* often served discursive and ideological functions, as posters used it to discredit forms of feminism (one user suggested "misandry" instead of "pop-feminism" in critiquing a thread), make generalizations about feminists, and label-specific viewpoints as anti-male and therefore erroneous. For the most part, posters looking for a suitable word to describe "man-hating" women wanted to create an equivalence between discrimination against men and discrimination against women, establishing both as equally valid. While the stereotype that feminists hate men is as old as feminism itself, adopting *misandry* as a synonym for "man-hating" allows MRAs to appropriate the language of leftist identity politics and claim a victimized stance. This made it possible to further denounce feminists for ignoring gender-based discrimination against

men. For example, one user said, "if you don't think that misandry within the popular women's movement is an issue for the men's movement, then I guess that the sexism in Left really isn't an issue for feminism either."

Misandry also operated as a call-to-action action for men who agreed with the characterization of feminism as "man-hating." For instance, one poster in alt.comp.acad-freedom asked like-minded men to protest newly-instituted sexual harassment policies in the workplace, writing, "Fight misandry effectively. Fight it in the halls of government. Only when men have their own lobbying groups will this turn around." This allowed entire controversies to be entirely dismissed as misandrist and therefore invalid.

The term was used spuriously in Usenet discussion groups between 1993 and 1998, appearing mostly in groups devoted to gender issues. At its peak, there were 159 uses of the term in 1997, which dropped to 18 in 1998. Much of this increase is due to a thread titled "FAQ: Feminist myths and tricks frequently used to disrupt discussion," a list of common MRM talking points, which was reposted 34 times in different newsgroups, provoking a great deal of responses. At the same time, as the World Wide Web grew in popularity, websites dedicated to men's rights issues emerged.

Early websites and blogs

The emergence of websites dedicated to men's rights issues in the late 1990s and early 2000s had significant effects on the use of *misandry*. Usenet discussion about men's rights took place in groups like soc.women or talk.abortion, which had an array of participants with various political viewpoints. Websites specifically devoted to MRM concerns, however, were relatively free of outsiders; this is especially true for early websites with no interactive features, which functioned more like online magazines than discussion spaces. This removed the presence of dissenters and debate, which helped to solidify what *misandry* meant and how it was used. Rather than debating whether misandry was real or legitimate, online MRAs adopted the term and began to create a body of shared understanding surrounding it.

Overall, the existence of discrimination against men became a central tenet of the men's rights movement, and introducing potentially like-minded men to this concept was key to its political project (Hodapp 2017). Thus, early websites frequently used "misandry" as a way to orient readers to their beliefs. For instance, the Tripod site "Misandry Today" introduced readers to the concept of misandry on the front page, contrasting it with misogyny and urging readers to examine the ways "society ignores the oppression of men and generally focuses on men as the source … as opposed to victims of it." (Misandry Today 1996b). In a lengthy screed published in the online journal *Men's Voices*, Bert Hoff used the term "implicit misandry" to describe a less "blatant" form of misandry that he believed reflected the "victim" stance of feminism (Bert H. Hoff 1998). The website Dadi.org (Dads Against the Divorce Industry) also used the term to introduce readers to their core principles, urging readers to examine the ways in which "Misandry! (Hatred of Men)" had become embedded into institutionalized "legal & social sanctions against men" in the areas of domestic violence, divorce, child support or abuse, rape/sexual harassment, and equal opportunity employment (Dadi. org 2001).

On both Usenet and early men's rights sites, *misandry* was used to characterize and dismiss feminists and issues that MRAs deemed too radical. "Misandry Today," for instance, included a list of "Radical Feminist Quotes" which the author believed indicated "the manner in which

radical feminists espouse their hatred for men" (Misandry Today 1996a). The quotes were from activists like Valerie Solanas (author of the *SCUM Manifesto*), Robin Morgan, Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, presented as representative of feminism (Misandry Today 1996a). While many of these quotes are taken out of context or outright fabricated, in other cases, they do represent radical feminist viewpoints (such as lesbian separatism), albeit ones that were deeply controversial even within feminist circles.[6] Regardless, such "proof" of misandry was used by MRAs to equate unpopular or at-the-fringe belief systems with the overall project of feminism itself and dissuade others from adopting feminist viewpoints, lest they be aligned with such extreme views. Labeling some feminists as "misandrous" constructed alliances between men's rights advocates and members of the general public who did not want to be seen as "anti-male." In this sense, *misandry* served as a "boundary object" between multiple social groups—a way to translate value and critique about the political project of feminism (Susan Leigh Star 2010).

During this time period, the term appeared infrequently in traditional media outlets like *The New York Times*, *the Atlantic*, the *Washington Post*, and the *LA Times.* In virtually all these instances, *misandry* was used to describe feminist beliefs and further masculinist ideology—in other words, just as it was used by the MRM. For instance, in an *Atlantic* article titled, "The War Against Boys," post-feminist author Christina Hoff Summers questioned whether a prominent education theorist was "free of the misandry that infects so many gender theorists who never stop blaming the 'male culture' for all social and psychological ills" (Christina Hoff Sommers 2000).[7] In the *LA Times*, reviewer Kenneth Turan critiqued the film *American Psycho* as too feminist, characterizing it as "man-hating misandry" (Kenneth Turan 2000). The use of *misandry* in such contexts exemplifies how language spread can contribute to the mainstreaming of fringe belief systems.

Social media

As social media and blogging took shape in the mid-2000s, use of *misandry* online greatly increased. The r/mensrights subreddit was founded in 2007, and immediately began to use *misandry* in posts like "Israeli fathers protesting misandry in the courts" and "Minor victory: misandrous domestic violence display removed from courthouse." A year later, the first MRA videos discussing misandry appeared on YouTube. The video "Why is it a crime to be a man?" (2008) claimed that discrimination and misandry in Sweden's courts resulted in a criminal justice system that overly targeted men. Misandry became a staple of discussions on blogs and websites dedicated to men's rights and libertarian ideas, such as *MenAreGood.com*, *TrueEquality.com*, *A Voice for Men*, *Singularity2050.com*, *LibertarianPrepper.com*, and *Return of Kings*. While diverse in their subject matter, these blogs collectively held that the misandry of the women's movement had transformed men into an oppressed minority in the United States, caused by systemic discrimination against men within labor, families, and court systems (Jessica Horowitz 2013). In other words, sites that used the term misandry furthered a fairly straightforward masculinist ideology drawn from MRM discourse.

At the same time, a growing community of feminist blogs like *Jezebel*, *Feministing*, and *Pandagon* noticed the term's increased popularity and criticized the use of *misandry* on MRA sites like (now-defunct) *AntiMisandry.com* (Anna North 2009). In 2013, *Jezebel* posted a piece by Lindy West, "If I Admit That Hating Men is a Thing Will You Stop Turning It Into a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," which became the top Google result for "misandry" that year. The article

humorously deconstructed MRM arguments about the reality of misandry, explaining the difference between structural sexism and the actions of individual women, and noting that many issues of concern to the MRM were also feminist concerns. This satirical approach to misandry rapidly spread on social media and feminist blogs. The joke was not that these women were finally admitting the truth of their hatred of men, but to call attention to how MRAs and anti-feminists were using *misandry* to discredit a political project spanning multiple decades and theoretical outlooks. In this sense, feminists adopting *misandry* brought both feminist and anti-feminist outlooks into conversation with one another, a way to both co-locate groups and individuals under a common frame, but also to make the power dynamics inherent in the straw-manning of feminism as misandry visible.

In 2014, the trend received enough attention that "ironic misandry" became a subject for articles published by *The Guardian*, *Slate*, and *TIME Magazine*. In each piece, the authors examined the humorous appropriation of male-bashing and misandry by prominent feminists like Jessica Valenti, memes with sentiments like "I Drink Male Tears," and entrepreneurs on Etsy who sold embroidered hats and macramé "misandry" crafts, slyly combining the appropriation of the term with traditional expressions of femininity (Horowitz 2013; Alanna Okun 2014). Some of these articles criticized such satire, arguing that it might alienate male allies (Sarah Begley 2014), while others celebrated the strategic re-framing of *misandry* as a way to further feminist beliefs (Amanda Hess 2014). Men's rights activists like Paul Elam, founder of *A Voice for Men*, commented on feminist appropriation of misandry, stating it was "yet another public display of how fucked in the head [feminists] really are" (Hess 2014). Such pieces placed multiple conceptions of misandry in concert with one another and linked to men's rights and feminist blogs alike. Such interaction and recontextualization is reminiscent of how anti-feminist Usenet posters entered soc.feminism to critique feminist beliefs, but this process was being done by media intermediaries. However, journalistic practices like including quotes from "both sides" further reinforced the validity of misandry and reinforced the equivalence between structural misogyny and purported discrimination against men. While the goal of feminist bloggers was to move *misandry* beyond the manosphere and illuminate its false equivalence, this was not supported by media coverage.

Conclusion: vocabulary and harassment

The manosphere is an aggregate of diverse communities brought together by a common language that orients them in opposition to the discourse and rhetoric of feminism. While the concerns of, say, young men interested in seducing women, libertarian Bitcoin farmers, and fathers caught up in contentious custody hearings are quite different, vocabulary contributes to a sense of common identity. *Misandry*, which until recently was used almost exclusively within the manosphere, functions as part of a common linguistic practice. This creates a sense of community across divergent subgroups, builds ties between individuals, and helps to solidify the ideological commitment of MRAs to oppose feminism. It also exists as a tool to counter feminist language and ideas.

Our research also shows that *misandry* serves as a boundary object, serving to coordinate and convey meaning amongst ingroup and outgroup participants, depending on the source of its use. Men's rights communities use the term to signify a form of undesirable feminism that they argue privileges women's rights over men's, while feminist communities use it as a symbol of the false equivalence they believe the MRM employs in their rhetoric. While

misandry has a shared meaning, it is leveraged toward very different ends. Thus, the use of the term *misandry* is action- or -practice-oriented, serving to orient one community toward another: MRAs against feminists, or feminists against MRAs.

However, as *misandry* spreads and is covered by mainstream journalists, it brings with it intrinsically misogynistic frames. From its inception, people used *misandry* not just to establish equivalency between discrimination against men and discrimination against women, but to denigrate those seeking to overcome structural sexism by denying its existence. MRAs do not simply dislike feminist tactics or beliefs. They believe that the very premise of feminism—that women and girls face structural inequality, expressed through patriarchy and sexism—is not only incorrect, but a bald-faced lie spread by feminists. Feminists are not so much dupes as they are malevolent man-haters, attempting to denigrate and oppress men and then deny that they are doing it.

Such denial and conspiratorial thinking is common throughout the manosphere. By saying "You're not the victim, *I'm* the victim!" the MRA, whether he be Sargon of Akkad or a poster on soc.men, is able to adopt a defensible position as the suffering victim, turning feminist (or queer, or anti-racist) activism on its head and re-framing it as oppressive. This then justifies harassment as a defense mechanism to protect men against loathsome feminists out to oppress them. It is unsurprising that the MRM pioneered and engages in weaponized harassment, given the centrality of the victim narrative to their ideology. *Misandry* encapsulates the perceived persecution of men by feminists, which is used throughout the manosphere to justify networked harassment.

Since the November 2016 US Presidential election, the United States has witnessed the rise of an activist movement called "the alt-right" which espouses white nationalism and anti-Semitism in addition to explicit patriarchy (Matthew N. Lyons 2017). There are clear linkages between the alt-right and the manosphere. Alt-right figureheads like Milo Yiannopolous and Mike Cernovich gained prominence during Gamergate and continue to target feminists and social justice warriors in their online activities (Mortensen 2016). Portions of the manosphere, such as the popular pickup artist blog *Return of Kings*, began to espouse anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic ideas during Gamergate (Jason Wilson 2015). Moreover, for young men immersed in internet culture, the Men's Rights Movement is often a stepping stone to white supremacist beliefs (David Futrelle 2017; George Michael 2017). Notably, both movements rely on a white male identity seen as under attack by feminists, SJWs, and people of color. The links between the MRM and the resurgence of white nationalism online are worth investigating in more detail. Words like "cuck"—a male figure drawn from pornography who allows his wife to have sex with other men, usually Black men—function similarly to *misandry*, spreading white nationalist ideology (and patriarchal subjectivity) while justifying attacks on divergent points of view. Likewise, terms like "alt-right" or "alt-left" function primarily to link different social and political ideologies together, or locate non-equivalent positionalities in opposition, more than they convey any sort of stable meaning. Attending to the way that community-specific terms move across and between ideological spaces can help to illuminate how virulent belief systems fester and spread on the internet.

Notes

1. As Andre Brock writes, SJW is "ostensibly a term defining activist resistance to coercive regimes, [but] is instead more commonly understood as a pejorative definition of a particular type of

internet inhabitant. Per Urban Dictionary, an SJW is typically a member of LiveJournal or Tumblr, narcissistic, emotional, a slacktivist, overly concerned with online reputation, and obsessed with being politically correct" (2015).

2. Rodger posted a series of YouTube videos and a 141-page manifesto online. In his manifesto, he writes, "The most beautiful of women choose to mate with the most brutal of men, instead of magnificent gentlemen like myself. Women should not have the right to choose who to mate and breed with. That decision should be made for them by rational men of intelligence." This discourse is virtually identical to that found in the incels, or involuntary celibate, communities online (which were banned by Reddit in 2017).

3. While the contemporary MRM is overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and male (Christa Hodapp 2017), the pseudonymous and anonymous nature of many MRM-affiliated communities makes it difficult to tell whether participants share the same level of education as early Usenet posters. In a 2013 survey of the Men's Rights subreddit ($n = 600$), however, 11% of participants had some high school, 12% a high school diploma, 27% a Bachelor's degree, 29% some college, 9% MA or equivalent, and 6% PhD or MD, suggesting that they are slightly more educated than the population at large (MRASurvey 2013).

4. While Google owns the largest archive of Usenet on the internet (it is far larger than the archives posted by the Internet Archives), they do not provide sophisticated search functionality, nor does their archive include every Usenet post. This is a limitation to this method.

5. For example, see "a little misandry from some constitutional man-hater ("W. C. T. U. Notes. - By The Local W. C. T Um" *Christian Standard* (Cincinnati, Oh.), May 16, 1888, p. 8)"; "Such a being – the antipodes of the other, the sexless, the misandric kind of 'new woman' – has not yet succeeded in harmonizing her essential femininity with her claims to freedom." ("Novels and Novelists; 'The Clearer Vision,'" *The Echo* (London, England), Nov. 16, 1898, p. 1). Ironically, these examples are drawn from an anti-feminist webpage called "the Unknown History of Misandry," which presents "FACTS which contradict what is taught in the universities and which even run counter to the assumptions made by critics of misandry" (St Estephe 2013).

6. For example, Dworkin and MacKinnon's anti-porn position was strongly contested by pro-sex feminists and queer activists such as Gayle Rubin and Patrick Califa during the "sex wars" of the 1980s and 1990s (Elisa Glick 2000).

7. Note that Sommers is popular in MRA circles, which frequently cite her work as proof of discrimination against men and boys.

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