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**From Incels to MGTOW: Addressing the Men's Rights Movement Using Intersectional
Feminism**

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GQS 494: Gender & Queer Studies Research Seminar

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Letter to the Editor

The most consistent issue throughout the first draft of my thesis was a lack of clear structure. Without the content of my paper being clearly organized and a lack of subject headings I left the reader confused and unclear on what my argument was. A lack of clear structure also kept my theory and analysis from being a predominant, and clear part of my paper.

When addressing the issue of structure, I worked on many clarifying issues that came with unclear organization. By re-organizing my paper I addressed the need for more concise and consistent analysis and incorporation of the theories of bell hooks and Kimberle Crenshaw throughout the paper. Following this re-structuring also allowed me to recognize where to cut down in order to bolster the importance of my topic. I removed discussions and theories of Kate Manne and her definitions of misogyny, which did not apply to the argument I'm currently making.

In addition to changing the organization and flow of my paper and adding clear subject headings I also worked on basic grammatical issues. I worked to address topic sentences, and overuse of commas. I shared my paper with a peer for help with this issue and to catch grammatical mistakes I may have overlooked. Finally I incorporated a clear definition of the arguments of my theorists in the methodology section and added that my argument is unique and has never been made. I also added more implications to the end of my paper addressing how my argument can be used to work on real world issues.

From Incels to MGTOW: Addressing the Men's Rights Movement Using Intersectional Feminism

“Every-single-time I encounter feminists they can't help but explode in a rage when I point out how feminism is in no way about 'equality'. Even the dictionary definition says it's “the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes.” Meaning it does nothing about men's issues.” -BreakingTheCut¹

The definition of feminism has become increasingly bastardized since its inception and members of the men's rights movement make this painstakingly clear. They question the motives of feminism and declare it to be the product of rage filled women. Ironically when questioning its definition their arguments often hold the resolution to their own queries, “feminism is in no way about 'equality'” user “BreakingTheCut” states above. Only to argue that the dictionary definition of feminism is “women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes” just a line later. So where is the disconnect? Though they don't recognize its origins in the patriarchy members of the men's far right experience oppression similar to that of the very women they condemn as feminist “man haters”. They fail to recognize that the perpetrator of their suffering originates in patriarchal control.

¹ ““Greek Statues Are Modified to Remove the Nipples and Gentiles' and Other Insights on Feminism from the Men's Rights Subreddit,” *We Hunted The Mammoth* (blog), December 28, 2019, <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2019/12/28/greek-statues-are-modified-to-remove-the-nipples-and-gentiles-and-other-insights-on-feminism-from-the-mens-rights-subreddit/>.

In the many years since first wave feminism false definitions have been developed that culturally misrepresent what feminism is. The movement, filtered through patriarchal mass media has misconstrued feminism as a means to elevate women to the status of men. Rather than a movement for men and women alike to create a system free of sexism and patriarchal control. Many men believe that because the patriarchy favors masculinity it serves them. However, they fail to recognize that it is the same system that dictates how they should perform their masculinity.

The patriarchy is a system in which women are excluded based on their dictated social roles², but there is a societal misunderstanding that because the patriarchy favors men they don't experience its toxic effects. I will be using the theories of bell hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw to analyze the perception men's rights groups hold of feminism and to explain how the patriarchy is the root cause of this movement. My argument is that current definitions of feminism are filtered through the patriarchy in such a way as to cause a cultural misunderstanding of what the movement's fundamental goals are. I propose that by re-defining feminism through an intersectional lens proposed by marginalized groups of women, in order to develop a cultural understanding that feminism is for everyone. Using this framework I will address how the patriarchy does not exclusively benefit men, and how it is the origin of the anger and discrimination many men's far right groups blame on feminism. I will also argue that in doing so we may find a solution to eradicate the growing disconnect between men and feminism that has led to dangerous men's rights groups such as Incels and "Men Going Their Own Way".

² "Definition of Patriarchy | Dictionary.Com," www.dictionary.com, accessed December 17, 2020, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/patriarchy>.

Methodology

The argument that we can explain the origins of the men's rights movement by examining cultural misunderstandings of feminism and recognizing that men too suffer under patriarchal control is unique. In this paper I will be focusing on primary sources pulled directly from two men's rights groups; Incels and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW). I will expand on the principles and ideologies of these two groups in the background section. My primary sources will include a popular blog analyzing the current discussions within these men's rights groups of women, feminism, and masculine standards. The blog, titled "wehuntedthemammoth.com", is written by David Futrelle with the tagline "Misogyny, tracked and mocked". For primary sources on Men Going Their Own Way I will include "mgtow.com", a site written by members of MGTOW which outlines their theories and ideas firsthand. I will use "incels.co", a popular message board for Incels to find primary sources on opinions shared within the Incel community. I will also look at threads on Reddit and 4chan to cite and analyze the men's rights beliefs and definitions of feminism in their own words.

To analyze and support the argument that misogynistic radicalized men are victims of the patriarchy I will rely on two theorists: bell hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw. I will draw directly from bell hooks and her discussion of the origins of feminism, its exclusivity, and its applications, pulling from her piece "Feminism is for Everybody". I will be using the theories of intersectionality coined and explained by Kimberlé Crenshaw analyzing how systems of oppression diminish the experiences of individuals and how this can help explain why men too can still suffer in a patriarchal society.

Although the phrase "feminism" is regularly used in our cultural vernacular most people don't understand an accurate definition about what the movement is. In her piece *Feminism is for*

Everybody bell hooks defines feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression”³. She argues that most individuals do not comprehend what sexism is, or they simply don’t recognize that it is a pervasive issue across modern society and includes the actions of both men and women. hooks comments that one reason for this is that most people gain their understanding of feminism through problematic patriarchal mass media. Since its first wave the media has emphasized that feminism is an anti-masculine movement full of “man haters”.⁴

Many feminists did not fit this stereotype, and actually encouraged the inclusion of men in the fight for a society built on equality. However, some feminist groups came to the forefront of the moment as women who didn’t acknowledge the need for diversity in the movement. Reformist feminists found that the “man hating” single minded stereotype of feminism served them and allowed them to propel themselves to independence within a sexist and patriarchal system.⁵ Since these reformist feminists didn’t combat the stereotype of “man-haters” they stepped upon their poor and working-class sisters, allowing them to remain subject to a violently anti-feminist society. By setting out with the goal to become equal to men reformist feminists failed to acknowledge the complex suffering of their sisters, including the intersections of sexism, capitalism, and racism.

Today the problematic definition of equality proposed by reformist feminists prevails, a definition of wanting to exist in a sexist world as equals too men. More accurately what most feminists want is a patriarchy-free world in which men and women have worked together towards a new equality. As bell hooks states “Feminist politics is losing momentum because the

³ bell hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. [Second edition]. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

⁴ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*

⁵ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 6

feminist movement has lost clear definitions⁶". Our culture needs to redefine feminism as a tool for men and women alike to create a new system in which sexism and the patriarchy aren't used as tools for policing bodies and delegating men and women to separate, but equally toxic, roles within our broken society.

To address the men's rights movement it is important to acknowledge the realities behind their complaints. Though the blame on feminism and women is misplaced their experiences of body shaming, loneliness, and ostracization are real. This makes the inclusion of an intersectional lens vitally important in understanding how to address the movement . Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality argues that systems of oppression interlock with one another to produce increasingly dangerous systems of privilege and suffering.⁷ While her theory was originally applied specifically to how individuals experience both racism and sexism it is also highly applicable to how men and women experience the oppression of the patriarchy in different, but highly toxic ways. Men are held to standards of masculinity that require sexual prowess, wealth, and impossible body standards. In order for men to maintain these impossible pre-requisites to manhood they must continuously condemn women who don't fulfill the complement to toxic masculinity; that is women who seek independence, financial freedom, and reproductive choice.

⁶ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 6.

⁷ Crenshaw <https://time.com/5786710/Kimberlé-crenshaw-intersectionality/>

Background

“It is a kind of cooking
the male child undergoes:
to toughen him, he is dipped repeatedly
in insult--peckerwood, shitbag, faggot,
pussy, dicksucker--until spear points
will break against his epidermis,
until his is impossible to disappoint.”
-The Replacement by Tony Hoagland⁸

With the rise of violence against women both politically and socially the question about what to do with the men’s rights movement is a critical issue that pertains to matters of life and death. Men are fed or, to draw from *The Replacement*⁹, cooked in a climate of toxic masculinity developed by the patriarchy that dictates the roles of men and women. Patriarchy and misogyny control and abuse men as they do women, albeit in very different ways. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that we criticize and dissect the men’s rights movement through the lens of intersectional feminism.

The term “manosphere” is used to describe the extensive grouping of men who partake in the men’s rights movement. It is important to understand that not all members of the manosphere are violent men’s rights groups. Some groups within the manosphere are fighting for genuine issues that men face under the control of the patriarchy. This includes groups such as “Men

⁸ Tony Hoagland. “The Replacement.” *New England Review* (1990) 17, no. 1 (1995): 104–105.

⁹ Tony Hoagland. “The Replacement.” *New England Review* (1990) 17, no. 1 (1995): 104–105.

Against Sexism” and “The New Men’s Movement”, both of which are based in the UK and are working to bring awareness to the rising mental health crisis men are facing. These groups work for positive social change and subscribe to drastically different philosophies than Incels and Men Going Their Own Way¹⁰.

During the first wave of feminism men took part in a growing collective of people who sought equal roles in society for both men and women. As second-wave feminism emerged we saw feminists becoming increasingly antagonistic and hateful towards men. Angela Nagle, in her book *Kill All Normies: The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the Alt-Right and Trump*, states that “many feminists have often been intolerant and dogmatic on these issues¹¹,” when describing the exclusion of men’s issues. Men experience very real issues of mental health, body image, and oppression but are ignored and patronized by self-proclaimed “feminists”. This kind of mentality ostracizes suffering men and they are forced to seek solace from other men. This kinship is often found in radicalizing groups such as Incels and Men Going Their Own Way who discuss the ways they experience suffering, but blame feminism and feminists for their experiences, rather than acknowledging the role of the patriarchy.

It can be hard to grasp how men become radicalized in a society that inarguably favors masculinity. However, psychological evidence has shown that men are forced to maintain their societal standing by maintaining toxic standards of masculinity at the cost of women. A study by Scapturea and Boyle administered a measure to examine Incel traits in 18 to 30 year old heterosexual men in the United States. The study hypothesized that, “stress in one’s inability to

¹⁰ Angela Nagle. *Kill All Normies: The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the Alt-Right and Trump*. (Winchester, UK ; Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2017), 78-79.

¹¹ Nagle, *Kill All Normies: The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chanto the Alt-Right and Trump*, 78.

live up to norms of masculinity and endorsement of “Incel” traits are associated with violent fantasies about rape and using powerful weapons against enemies¹².” In the case of Incels these “enemies” are the women who fail to reinforce manhood by refusing sex. Incels don’t recognize that it is the patriarchy that portrays virgin men as being less masculine, and not the fault of the women who refuse intercourse.

Previous research suggests that men who experience gender invalidation are more likely to subscribe to traditional gender roles. With this in mind Scaptura and Boyle read vignettes to participants about date rape and assault, prior to reading the vignette the participants’ gender was either confirmed or invalidated. Results confirmed the hypothesis, finding that men whose gender was invalidated prior to the vignette were more likely to blame female victims than the male perpetrators for the assault¹³.

This study provides clear and enlightening information on how the nature of oppression is cyclical. Toxic masculinity promotes a notion that to be a man one must fit into a certain standard of manhood, men who have these traits confirmed have no reason to express violence because they are filling the mold of masculinity set forth for them. However, men who are unable to attain these standards must reinforce their masculinity in other ways. This leads to men using systems of control such as violence and emotional abuse to reconfirm their status as being masculine.

¹² Maria N. Scaptura and Kaitlin M. Boyle. “Masculinity Threat, ‘Incel’ Traits, and Violent Fantasies Among Heterosexual Men in the United States.” *Feminist Criminology* 15, no. 3 (2019): 155708511989641–298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085119896415>.

¹³ Scaptura, and Boyle. “Masculinity Threat, ‘Incel’ Traits, and Violent Fantasies Among Heterosexual Men in the United States.”

Incels and MGTOW

“Men Going Their Own Way”, abbreviated as MGTOW, is a group defined as being a place “...where the modern man preserves and protects his own sovereignty above all else.”¹⁴ Their website is monochromatic and uses sleek animations reminiscent of a men’s deodorant ad. If you click on the tab labeled “posters” you are taken to a spread of images and cartoons ranging from the creative; posters of “feminist” Kool-Aid with words such as “strong and independent”, “rape-culture”, and “patriarchy”, to the simplistic; a picture of a human brain labeled “The “I’m not a feminist” Starter Pack”. It’s easy to peruse the site and snicker at the graphics. But when you read the description of what MGTOW believes life has outlined for them it makes sense that they think feminism is working against them.

Men Going Their Own Way have seemingly rejected the need to “get” women to prove their masculinity. Instead, they blame feminism and make jokes about consent (or lack thereof). However, considering the internet is rife with rape jokes and movements against feminism, MGTOW is a relatively tame movement. Involuntary celibates on the other hand, commonly known as “Incels”, are a comparatively sinister group. Self-proclaimed Incels have taken credit for horrifying killing sprees including the Isla Vista murders by Elliot Rogers and the Toronto van killings.

Incels have founded themselves predominantly on the notion that women are seeking genetically superior men. They believe this tendency among women is thus the explanation for why they are virgins. As put by reddit user “Lookismisreal”, “Bitches are nothing but natural

¹⁴ “MGTOW,” *MGTOW* (blog), accessed October 3, 2020, <https://www.mgtow.com>.

born psycho(paths).”¹⁵ Documents plaster sites such as Reddit with bullet pointed lists outlining “Reasons why women are the embodiment of evil”, using terms such as “femoids” to describe the “psychopaths” denying them sexual gratification. It could almost be construed as funny if it weren’t the very real ideologies of a growing group of young men who continue to condone the murder and rape of women.

Red Pill and Black Pill Ideology

“If you’re prepared – and willing- to learn the harsh truths of human behavior, then dive in and take the red pill. What you will learn can change your life, so long as you are prepared to face the truth.”¹⁶

To understand the men’s rights movements, specifically Men Going Their Own Way and Incels, you have to consider two popular ideologies within the community: red pill theory and black pill theory. Red pill theory argues that men are the victims of feminism whereas black pill theory takes a more biologically deterministic approach to understanding the sexual failures and frustrations of men. To “take the black pill” means that you have accepted that women are seeking genetically superior men (alphas) at the cost of inferior men (betas)¹⁷.

In the many twists and turns of the internet the spread of the “red pill” theory is perhaps one of the most ironic. The original idea of the “red pill” comes from the movie *The Matrix*

¹⁵ Justin Ling, “‘Not as Ironic as I Imagined’: The Incels Spokesman on Why He Is Renouncing Them,” *The Guardian*, June 19, 2018, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/19/incels-why-jack-peterson-left-elliott-rodger>.

¹⁶ “What Is Red Pill Theory? -,” accessed October 13, 2020, <https://redpilltheory.com/red-pill-theory/>.

¹⁷ Mandy Stadtmiller. “Sympathy for the ‘Incel’: A Young Man like Jack Peterson, a Self-Described ‘Incel,’ Seems Not so Much a Product of Toxic Masculinity as a Failure of Masculinity Itself.” *The Daily Beast*. 2018.

written by the Wachowski sisters, both trans women, about the trans experience¹⁹. Ironically the theory has been perverted and adopted by the alt right, who are notoriously anti-trans. Lilly Wachowski, in an interview confirming the allegory of the movies stated, “The Matrix stuff was all about the desire for transformation but it was all coming from a closeted point of view²⁰.” To put it simply, if you believe in red pill theory you have accepted that society is living under a “mask”.

Red pillers are counter to mainstream ideologies and believe they have an accurate understanding of “the real world”.²¹ Men who accept red pill ideas of feminism believe that it is men who are being victimized and it is women that have all the advantageous. This leads to groups such as Men Going Their Own Way who believe that they have seen the truth and are recognizing that women, and by extension feminism are only after men to sustain them without reciprocation.

Taking the black pill means you have accepted that your sexual fate was determined at birth. It relegates men into the distinct categories of “chads”, “chadlites”, “normies”, and “Incels”. Chads are characterized as being sexually successful and highly desirable to women. If you consider chads to be at one end of the spectrum, Incels are at the other, with chadlites and normies being in between. If this sounds like a foreign language it practically is, and it's crucial to understand it if you want to see how deep the black pill theory goes. Incels have created their own culture, toxic and crude yes, but nevertheless it is a community of like-minded men that

¹⁹ “The Matrix Is a ‘Trans Metaphor’, Lilly Wachowski Says - BBC News,” accessed December 18, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53692435>.

²⁰ “The Matrix Is a ‘Trans Metaphor’, Lilly Wachowski Says - BBC News,” accessed December 18, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53692435>.

²¹ CBS News March 16, 2020, and 7:00 Am, “A Parent’s Guide to the Secret Language of Internet Extremists,” accessed October 12, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/incels-radicalization-glossary-parents-cbsn-originals-extremists-next-door/>.

have found themselves the only explanation they can for understanding their sexual undesirability.

4Chan and Reddit

With news reports of misogynistic violence, academic studies on Incels, and documentaries such as “TFW no GF” and “The Red Pill” it’s hard to recall a time when men’s groups didn’t have a widespread grip on the internet. In order to understand how they went from underground communities of like-minded lonely men to internet fame and acts of terrorism we must examine their origin story. Specifically, the role that two websites play in allowing for these toxic communities to develop and thrive: 4chan and Reddit.

4chan is an anonymous imageboard platform that began in 2003 from its predecessor “2chan”. Notably it is an anonymous site with limited moderation that has on average 1 million posts per day²². It’s a breeding ground for extremist ideas filed into tags like “video games (v)” and “random (b)” amongst others.. Like-minded people are able to quickly find one another and espouse ideas of misogyny, white supremacy, sexism, and taking violent action.

The other site most commonly associated with the origins of Incels and other members of the manosphere is Reddit. Much like its cousin 4chan, Reddit is a space with little to no moderation and endless forums for every kind of theory and opinion. Though not anonymous in the same way as 4chan, Reddit allows for participants to go by usernames that easily conceal their identities and it has become a noxious breeding ground for white supremacy under the guise of “free speech”. User “Dubteedub” states that “Reddit has been a recruitment ground for white

²² CBS News March 16, 2020, and 7:00 Am, “A Parent’s Guide to the Secret Language of Internet Extremists,” accessed October 12, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/incels-radicalization-glossary-parents-cbsn-origins-extremists-next-door/>.

nationalism for many years”²⁴. Many Reddit editors and participants have recognized for years that it is a place filled with hate and recruitment for domestic terrorists, like white supremacists. But beyond just user recognition larger social rights groups have recognized its toxicity, back in 2015 the Southern Poverty Law Center called Reddit a home to “the most violently racist²⁵.” Unlike previous groups spouting claims of white superiority, male superiority, and the like which required in person meetings (such as the Ku Klux Klan), Reddit is accessible to anyone with internet access.

Discussion

At its conception feminism paved the way for voting rights, equality of marriage and the fight for reproductive rights. Feminism was sensational as it moved into its second wave, a public perception of “burning bras”, punk bands like Pussy Riot, and the ability to work the same jobs as men. Nowadays feminism feels more like a sales tactic, type “feminist shopping” into Google search and you will be met with over 41 million hits of websites with titles like “intersectional feminism gifts”, “the feminist shop”, and “feminist goods co.” In the eyes of popular culture, it feels like feminism has become another tactic of capitalism to sell products and make you feel good about buying them.

Unlike what capitalism has led us to believe feminism is hard work, it is not a buying choice but a lifestyle choice, feminism is about advocacy and having hard conversations such as a woman’s right to choose whether to keep or abort a fetus. It is about law making, policy change, raising awareness about violence towards women in the home and when we walk to our

²⁴ Kaitlyn Tiffany, “Reddit Is Finally Facing Its Legacy of Racism,” The Atlantic, June 12, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/06/reddit-racism-open-letter/612958/>.

²⁵ Kaitlyn Tiffany, “Reddit Is Finally Facing Its Legacy of Racism,” The Atlantic, June 12, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/06/reddit-racism-open-letter/612958/>.

cars from the grocery store. Yet Incels and Men Going Their Own Way believe otherwise, they believe feminism is about dressing provocatively just to turn men away. It is a tough job to educate men's rights groups that feminism is beneficial to them, just as it is to women. Feminism isn't a sales pitch, and yet we must learn how to sell it to the men's right if we have any hope of not only diminishing but eradicating the rising trend of a culture steeped in toxic masculinity.

One of the most important challenges to address when determining how to "sell feminism to men", is to understand that there is a deep cultural misunderstanding about what feminism is. When asked to define feminism most people are likely to respond by saying it is the "equality of the sexes". Even radicalized men will spout this definition, yet as a culture there is evidence that this definition represents only women trying to achieve the same role as men within society. Rather, the feminism we so desperately need is about the simultaneous growth of the sexes as equals working together to develop a society in which gender doesn't hinder the choices one is entitled to make, and ideally to reach a society in which gender is irrelevant. Feminism isn't about women reaching the status men currently hold but allowing men and women to collectively surpass the roles imposed on them by patriarchal society.

Intersectional feminism may be the most successful approach to controlling the men's rights movement. Not only does it introduce a lens through which we can begin to understand why men suffer in a male dominated society, but we can also use it as a means to educate men of how their privilege impacts women. Jon Greenberg reported on his experience as a recovering misogynist and how intersectional feminism helped him to understand the problems with his past actions. He credited visiting a domestic violence center as helping him to grasp that violence against women is more than just illegal like assault. Describing his past self Greenberg said, "My emotions would spill out as rage because I, as a cis man, was trained to suppress them until they

consumed me²⁶.” This kind of system, in which men are forced to suppress emotion until they seek to regain control through acts of violence illustrates how both men and women experience oppression²⁷. Men are oppressed in toxic masculinity and this system results in exerting control over women through violence and misogyny.

Intersectionality also provides a way to understanding how exclusion and inclusion play roles in being a member of patriarchal society.²⁸ Greenberg discusses how intersectionality allowed him to understand the complexity of sexism in relationships of domestic violence where the violence is more than superficial. Men like Jon Greenberg can be educated via intersectionality on how masculine violence against women to maintain control is a false means to maintaining masculinity. Intersectionality informs us that being excluded from experiences women face within the patriarchy doesn't mean that men aren't included in the suffering, they just experience the system in a vastly different way.

To summarize the disconnect between men's rights and feminism we must turn to bell hooks. Men are taught a false understanding of what feminism is and essentially trained to believe that female liberation is synonymous with a hatred and disgust for men and masculinity. Rather, “Their misunderstanding of feminist politics reflects the reality that most folks learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media²⁹.” Patriarchy promotes a cyclical nature of control, teaching men to be angry at feminists rather than recognizing they could benefit from the

²⁶ Jon Greenberg. “How Intersectional Feminism Transformed Me from an Asshole to an Activist.” *OpenDemocracy (London)*, 2017.

²⁷ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” n.d., 31.

²⁸ “She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ Over 30 Years Ago. Here’s What It Means to Her Today,” *Time*, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://time.com/5786710/Kimberlé-crenshaw-intersectionality/>.

²⁹ bell hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. [Second edition]. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

movement. Men focus their anger at women rather than channeling this energy into dismantling a system that continues to manipulate them.

hooks makes the argument that in order to combat violence we must directly name the perpetrator, the patriarchy. In her book *Feminism is for Everybody* hooks addresses why we must name the sexism within male violence against women, “The term “patriarchal violence” is useful because unlike the more accepted phrase “domestic violence” it continually reminds the listener that violence in the home is connected to sexism and sexist thinking, to male domination (hooks, 61-62).”³⁰ While the context for which this quotation was written was intended to address the violence in home it provides relevant insight into the way we phrase problems of male on female violence. It is important that when seeking a solution for the men’s rights movement we reiterate the origins of the problem, the patriarchal emphasis on masculine behavior.

Men who are vocally against feminism often see feminists as “man haters”, using this idea to discredit the goals of the movement. This cultural misunderstanding originated in women seeking to escape abuse and ultimately starting the women’s liberation movement.³¹ However, many women came to understand that oftentimes men were also seeking to catalyze a world in which there was equality and greater social justice. hooks argues that in order to combat the oppression of women we need more than just feminist men, we also need women that recognize their role in the system of the patriarchy, saying; “Facing that reality required more complex theorizing; it required acknowledging the role women play in maintaining and perpetuating sexism.”³² Reformist feminists are an example of feminists whose work actively hinders the

³⁰ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 61-62

³¹ bell hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. [Second edition]. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 7

³² hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 67.

ability for feminism to be inclusive.³³ These feminists, often wealthy white women, found equality by stepping on poor and working class women, seeking to be equated with men, rather than striving for a world in which men and women successfully coexist outside the roles of gender.

bell hooks makes it clear that combatting oppression means clarifying that feminism needs men to succeed. She discusses that the mass media failed in acknowledging feminists who viewed men as comrades during the first wave. The media ignored the women who critiqued the demonization of men³⁴, it reinforced reformist and white feminist ideals that women only wanted to achieve the same standing as men, rather than fight for a world without patriarchy. It is in this failure to publicize feminists defending men that the history of the men's rights movements originated,

“These men identified themselves as victims of sexism, working to liberate men. They identified rigid sex roles as the primary source of their victimization, and, though they wanted to change the notion of masculinity, they were not particularly concerned with their sexist exploitation and oppression of women.”³⁵

In analyzing her own words hooks stated, “In many ways the men's movement mirrored the most negative aspects of the women's movement³⁶.”

The mansphere emphasizes that men have been required to live in a world without support. Men Going Their Own Way attempt to find this feminist existence outside of the patriarchy stating that a man going his own way “... doesn't fear resistance, turbulence, or

³³ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 3

³⁴ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 69

³⁵ bell hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. [Second edition]. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 69.

³⁶ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 69

commitment, because his masculine frame turns resistance into rise, finds sustenance in turbulent waters, and relies on the steadfast roots of commitment to provide stability for himself and safety for those he vowed to protect.”³⁸ It is no surprise that these men are angry and feel betrayed. They acknowledge that our society has set forth impossible standards for the modern man and left no room for self-growth, identity, or any means to break out of the mold imposed by toxic masculinity. However, what MGTOW gets wrong is who the enemy is. MGTOW see feminists as those demanding men to fit in the mold of toxic masculinity rather than realizing it is their shared enemy, the patriarchy.

It’s been established that sites such as 4chan and Reddit are vacuums of hatred and violence, but how is it that previously naive boys and young men find themselves on these sites that are so quick to radicalize them? The answer is simple, and the documentary “TFW no GF”, makes this clear. When you’re lonely or ostracized you want acceptance and companionship. You look for community. Since its inception in the early 2000’s 4chan, and similarly Reddit, have been easy access for lonely boys to connect with other lonely boys. Another strong draw of the site for young men is sheer boredom, one interviewee in “TFW no GF” states that he had “...nowhere to go, nothing to do.”³⁹ The danger of this is that once these men have entered a world of like-minded loneliness and boredom it is easy to channel their mutual anger into radicalization.

The true danger of the black pill philosophy is not it’s classification of men on a scale of Incels to chads but it’s concept of feminism. The philosophy of the black pill inverts the reality of women being the subject of societal discrimination and claims that men are the true victims,

³⁸ “The Manosphere | MGTOW,” accessed October 3, 2020, [/manosphere/](#).

³⁹ “Watch TFW No GF | Prime Video” n.d.

similar to red pill ideology. However, with black pill ideology the basis of this understanding often lies within the concept of false phrenological ideas of head and body shape, implying that women choose men exclusively on the basis of appearance. Incels and other men's rights groups that subscribe to the black pill ideology believe feminism is perpetuating the cycle of biological determinism. Furthermore, this implies that women are too inept to understand their own feelings and emotions and unable to choose partners based on anything beyond physical characteristics.

While Incels argue that sexual fate is determined at birth and women are purposely withholding sex is false, their experience of discrimination based on appearance is real. The United States is an extremely ableist society which perpetuates very strict ideas of what beauty is. While many Incels don't face true discrimination like those of disabled persons within the United States they do face the psychological repercussions of looking different. Furthermore "feminized men" are looked down upon, as being feminine is seen as a weakness. Men that embrace their feminine side are met with an onslaught of insults and threats. But even men who aren't feminine but don't meet patriarchal standards of masculinity face issues of self-esteem and hate, "What is and was needed is a vision of masculinity where self-esteem and self-love of one's unique being forms the basis of identity... Patriarchal masculinity teaches men that their sense of self and identity, their reason for being, resides in their capacity to dominate others⁴⁰." Men within the United States face interlocking systems that require them to base their masculinity and self-esteem in dominance. They are forced to put down anyone that doesn't confirm their toxic self-image, resulting in men who experience emotional turmoil that also perpetuate the suffering of women.⁴¹

⁴⁰ bell hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. [Second edition]. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 70.

⁴¹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," n.d., 31.

In many cases this belief in the black pill has led Incels to compare feminists and other women to perpetrators of genocide. Reddit threads and Incel boards discuss that women refusing sex and choosing “chads” instead are purposefully committing eugenics against the male sex. A post on “incels.co” rants about why women should be sent to the Hague for crimes against humanity, the user goes on to state;

“They’ve set uniform height requirements for all sperm donors, so manlets can’t reproduce. Short women don’t like short guys, because they don’t want their kids to be short. Taller women hate short men and call for their death on twitter.”⁴²

The blog site “wehuntedthemammoth.com” dedicated to analyzing the opinions of the men’s rights movement eloquently sums up the implications of this world view, “Apparently the right to say no to sex is hardly a basic human right at all. Who cares about the bodily autonomy of women when set against the sacred right of Incel manlets to get sex from the woman of their choice?”⁴³ Once more, this analysis assess how men must exert violence and hate over women in order to confirm their masculine identity under the patriarchy.

Body shaming is one facet of how the patriarchy controls its citizens and as a society we acknowledge the effects this has on women. But we often fail to recognize that the same is true of men. Men are also taught that they should fit into a standard of muscularity and height in order to be perceived as desirable. Men are taught that if they aren't masculine they look feminine in a society where we are conditioned that it is shameful to be a woman. Yet we still think it is acceptable to undermine the self-image of men. It is largely agreed upon that commenting on a woman’s body is not only rude but downright predatory. But, as noted by an

⁴² “Incel: Western Women Should Be Tried in the Hague for Genocide against ‘Manlets’” 2020

⁴³ “Incel: Western Women Should Be Tried in the Hague for Genocide against ‘Manlets’” 2020

anonymous 4chan user, penis-shaming is a real thing. Throughout history the phallic symbol is used to represent power and superiority, and it is still a method of control used by the patriarchy to put down “lesser men”.

It is not surprising that Incels have turned to dark corners of the internet, men raised to believe that success is having a woman by your side. They view success as a man being based in elitism, riches, and a chiseled jawline. Just as bell hooks points to women being “socialized either consciously or unconsciously to have anxiety about their body, to see flesh as problematic,⁴⁴” men are also fed insecurities about their bodies.

“...if a man’s penis is too small, that means he deserves to be a laughing stock. Penis-shaming is an actual thing: and it’s an indictment of our wrongheaded norms that it’s still considered fair game. The male body, despite being vilified by radical feminism, is still openly subject to the abuses it claims are injustices. (this applies also to muscularity, height, etc.)”⁴⁵

It’s easy to hate Incels, but it’s hard to blame them for being frustrated for not attaining the impossible standards set forth.

Body shaming is one tactic the patriarchy implements to control the social roles of men and women another is allowing for men to pass social roles onto their children. There is a cyclical nature the patriarchy uses to continue to undermine women and brainwash men into misplacing the blame. The men who joined internet message boards in the early 2000’s now have children. Now that these men are older their ideologies and conditioning are being transferred to

⁴⁴ bell hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. [Second edition]. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 35.

⁴⁵ “/Search/ - Search - 4chan,” accessed October 12, 2020, <https://find.4chan.org/?q=feminism%20and%20incels&o=10>.

their sons. Self-proclaimed man going his own way “Fphilippe45” posited the following question on Reddit,

“I know I’ve already gave him [my son] a few red pills like: “woman does not love a man like a man loves a woman”, or “the most important thing in life is your freedom, your health and relatives”...

I don’t want to tell him to GYOW [go your own way] abruptly, but I definitively want him to understand his self-worth and to not worship pussies.

Any idea of the few red pills I can already give him at 14?”⁴⁶

If boys are already being taught by their fathers that women are untrustworthy at the age of 14 the patriarchy has succeeded. bell hooks points out that “...children will not turn away from violence if it is the only way they know how to handle difficult situations⁴⁷.” The patriarchy has infiltrated family systems and taught sons that their mothers and sisters are a part of an evil system. Sons learn that feminist ideology is about the repression of men for the benefit of women and that violence and hate are the justified means of masculine control.

Toxic masculinity emphasizes domination and control where men are viewed as weak when they respect women. bell hooks discusses how many men feel uncomfortable with being forced into these roles of violence, but will passively support male domination,

“Males as a group have and do benefit the most from patriarchy, from the assumption that they are superior to females and should rule over us. But those benefits have come with a price. In return for all the goodies men receive from patriarchy, they are required to

⁴⁶ “MGTOWs Debate the Best Way to ‘Red Pill’ 14-Year-Old Boys,” *We Hunted The Mammoth* (blog), October 21, 2020, <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2020/10/20/mgtows-debate-the-best-way-to-red-pill-14-year-old-boys/>.

⁴⁷ bell hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. [Second edition]. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 66.

dominate women, to exploit and oppress us, using violence if they must to keep patriarchy intact. Most men find it difficult to be patriarchs. Most men are disturbed by hatred and fear of women, by male violence against women, even the men who perpetuate this violence. But they fear letting go of the benefits. They are not certain what will happen to the world they know most intimately if patriarchy changes. So they find it easier to passively support male domination even when they know in their minds and hearts that it is wrong.⁴⁸”

One of the best ways to illustrate this point is a recent insult used by members of MGTOW and Incel groups, “simp”. Essentially simp means “any guy who’s seen as being too nice or accommodating to the girls and women in his life”⁴⁹. This word illustrates the ability to passively uphold patriarchal dominance. MGTOW and Incels have found agreement in defining simp as a way to call out “lesser” men who have been “brainwashed” into believing that basic human decency is not only undesirable but undermines your masculinity. Self-proclaimed man going his own way and reddit user “BlizzStrx” posted his theory that “The simp meme is destroying feminism and [saving] the beta boys/men in the making”,

“Before the meme, men and boys didn’t get called out on their bullshit when they bowed down to their crushes, female friends, or female school mates. So, these men and boys became betas in the mating game and more often than not they had no father figure capable of fixing them into alpha males. The school girls became wannabe queens and feminists...Youtubers talk about simping, etc. Now at school the meme changed the boys behavior, even. Boys that even help girls get called out as simps. Every action towards

⁴⁸ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, ix

⁴⁹ “PewDiePie Is Destroying Feminism with the Word ‘Simp,’ MGTOW Redditor Contends,” *We Hunted The Mammoth* (blog), April 8, 2020,

them is considered simping amongst dozens of boys. Men finally have a word to call out their bros with. This is nature balancing things out, maybe.”⁵⁰

Words hold power and even if used passively they can successfully reinforce institutionalized sexism. Many feminist men use the word, referring to their girlfriends, or in reference to their friends behaviors towards their partners. While superficially it may seem innocent it just supports a system of men passively supporting dominance by putting down fellow men who have adopted what they deem to be feminine, and therefore anti-masculine behaviors.

What makes the argument of “simping” over women even more treacherous is the Incel belief that simps are the enablers of female rights. This phenomenon further complicates the man vs. woman binary by creating a faction of men who blame other men for enabling feminism. Further still this notion takes even more autonomy away from women, reddit user “Alpha_Fucks_Beta_Bux” compares women to being akin to horses, stating that “hating holes⁵¹ for being whores is as silly as hating a horse for running wild”⁵². Not only does this user see women as non-human, he believes they aren’t even the ones responsible for fighting for their own rights. “Alpha_Fucks_Beta_Bux” goes on to state that, “...instead of hating women I hate the simps who for whatever fucking reason decided to give in to holes’ demands and give them

⁵⁰ “PewDiePie Is Destroying Feminism with the Word ‘Simp,’ MGTOW Redditor Contends,” *We Hunted The Mammoth* (blog), April 8, 2020, <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2020/04/07/pewdiepie-is-destroying-feminism-with-the-word-simp-mgtow-redditor-contends/>.

⁵¹ “holes” is a commonly used phrase by Incels and other men’s rights groups signifying women. The term hole refers to the opening of the vagina.

⁵² “Just like Horses, Women Are Underdeveloped Beasts Who Need to Be Tamed,’ Creepy Incel Redditor Explains,” *We Hunted The Mammoth* (blog), July 7, 2019, <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2019/07/07/just-like-horses-women-are-underdeveloped-beasts-who-need-to-be-tamed-creepy-incel-redditor-explains/>.

equal rights.”⁵³ Furthermore this illustrates how any instance of masculinity built outside the bounds of sexism (men freely and openly caring for women) threatens the identities many misogynists have built.⁵⁴ Acknowledging love and care for a woman may be forcing them to reconcile with the knowledge that they can exist outside of their patriarchally determined roles.

Women are almost always portrayed as products by patriarchal mass media and this contributes to perceptions of their autonomy in men’s rights groups. The same poster as referenced above discusses women using the phrases “holes”, “whores”, “horses”, “beasts”, and “savages”. Not one of these phrases acknowledges women as being human, the closest being the word savage which is commonly used as a slur for people of color.

Though they make it difficult it’s important to analyze these groups of men with the empathy and compassion that they clearly lack. These men have experienced lifelong emotional abuse and suppression and have been taught that it was feminism’s fault. They have been told that women want someone who is masculine, not a man that expresses vulnerable emotions. Men have been taught what a woman is through advertisements that constantly juxtapose women with beer cans or lustfully pose them with men wearing cologne and use them as products to advertise “correct” masculinity. Women are frequently used as sales tactics for men where they are dehumanized and mass produced, they are an accessory to well performed masculinity. When this is the constant message about what a woman is its easier to understand why a disconnect view women as more animal or product than as a human being.

⁵³ “‘Just like Horses, Women Are Underdeveloped Beasts Who Need to Be Tamed,’ Creepy Incel Redditor Explains,” *We Hunted The Mammoth* (blog), July 7, 2019, <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2019/07/07/just-like-horses-women-are-underdeveloped-beasts-who-need-to-be-tamed-creepy-incel-redditor-explains/>.

⁵⁴ bell hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. [Second edition]. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 70.

It's clear that the patriarchy has established itself within the lives of both men and women alike, promoting outdated roles of masculinity and femininity. The patriarchy uses these roles to invalidate any person that fails to live up to its impossible standards. Men that aren't muscular and sexually active aren't "real men". Incels and MGTOW live in a world in which they experience the constant invalidation of being a man that doesn't fit the image of manhood and masculinity. This leads to the misplaced belief that women are succeeding at the cost of men rather than recognizing that women experience the same body shame and control. This is where intersectionality becomes the key to undoing decades of white feminism that failed to include men in the conversation of oppression under patriarchy.

Kimberlé Crenshaw proposed intersectionality as a tool for examining the interlocking systems of oppression that affect the individual.⁵⁵ She illustrated that the black woman faces more hardship than the white woman because she faces the institutions of both racism and sexism. Women of color have been advocating since the beginning of feminism for examining the ways in which exclusively white feminism fails to solve many of the problems associated with patriarchal life.⁵⁶

Intersectional feminism must be used as a lens to understand why the men's rights movement is unable to grasp how women and men face the same issues. While many men who subscribe to these groups are white they often experience hardships and identity crises. For example, many often live at home with parents, lack substantial income, and don't have the appearance associated with successful men. They are mentally ill, suicidal, and filled with the rage and shame that accompanies lifelong invalidation. Intersectionality recognizes that while

⁵⁵ "Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later" n.d.

⁵⁶ bell hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. [Second edition]. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3.

these men may have the characteristics of privilege; white and male, they face the oppression of stigma, loneliness, and shame.

To move forward from these identities and find a solution to these problems men must be accepted as suffering members of a society that has failed them. By proposing that their anger is valid and they have been consistently put down throughout life we may start to see a change. In accepting that these men have been wronged we may see an opportunity to educate them that the enemy who has wronged them isn't women, it's the patriarchy. In acknowledging the systems of abuse and suffering that men experience and presenting feminism as the solution in which progress can be made for both genders, we may finally see a reprieve of violent toxic masculinity. Paving the way for a new cultural understanding of feminism and a united front against the patriarchy.

The current understanding of feminism has been culturally misconstrued. It has been defined as angry, man hating women who want to achieve the same status as men. I have argued that we are witnessing a rising crisis of dangerous men's rights groups and that to combat this we must first redefine feminism as a battle for social equality against the patriarchy using the works of Kimberlé Crenshaw and bell hooks. It is my belief that in doing this we will learn how to "sell feminism to men" in such a way that accepts the suffering of men's rights groups and incorporates men into the feminist movement through identification of the common enemy, the patriarchy. Ultimately, by applying this revised feminist framework we will be able to work towards diminishing and eradicating the violence perpetuated by men's rights groups.

Moving forward feminists should consider the failures of the movement and how the ostracization of men has forced them into radicalization. Feminists need to accept their failures and re-frame perceptions of what working towards equality means. We need to recognize that

men need support, comradery, and education. While simultaneously caring for men's needs the opportunity for education about how patriarchy has manipulated them will arise. Emphasizing intersectionality as an explanation for how men and women have suffered separately, but alongside each other is the key to dismantling and reforming the people, and violence, behind the men's far right.

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