

# "I'm slowly getting better": A thematic analysis of online communities working towards healing ex-misogynists

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# Background

The "manosphere" is a "loose confederacy" of groups that have a shared brand of internet misogyny. These groups include men's rights activists, anti-feminists, alt-right, pick-up artists, MGTOW, and incels (Ging, 2017).

- Many of the members that are involved in the groups that make up the manosphere subscribe to a type of world thinking called the "Red Pill philosophy." The term the Red Pill, as used in the manosphere is a type of ideology that revolves around the idea that women have power and dominance over society as a result of feminism, and men are the oppressed group (Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019; Ging, 2017; Van Valkenburgh, 2018).

According to Dignam & Rohlinger (2019), feminists need to be able "to study online communities that they find abhorrent" and "counter them (Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019, p. 591)." One aspect of the Red Pill that has been studied in the academic literature is a sexual strategy that is employed to turn men from "beta" men to "alpha" men (Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019; Ging, 2017; Van Valkenburgh, 2018).

- This dichotomy between alpha versus beta male can be explained by sociologist, Raewyn Connell's perspectives on masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the idealized, dominant form of masculinity that is practiced that reinforces men's dominance over women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Repressing emotion, physical strength, and engaging in sexism are some examples of traits that can be associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Since hegemonic masculinities are idealized within a culture, certain other types of masculinity can be marginalized such as certain queer expressions of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Heasley, 2005).

# Purpose

Traits associated with a particular gender identity such as masculinity are socially-constructed meaning that it is not a stable identity and it can change overtime as certain norms and values become outdated and replaced (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

- Masculine identity can change as an individual develops the ability to criticize hegemonic masculinity such as in the case of “educational interventions and change programs (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 853).”

The purpose of this research will examine the life narratives that users share on the subreddit, r/exredpill that describes the life changing, sequence of events on how they discovered the Red Pill, learned it, practiced it, and what led them to eventually reject it.

# Methods

In order to collect a sample of posts from the subreddit r/exredpill, I used a feature built onto Reddit in order to filter and look at posts from a 1-year time period. I read through each post to make sure that it can be included in the analysis.

- Only original posts (no comments) were included. They must be written as a narrative where the user describes the chronological sequence of events on how they discovered, internalized, and eventually rejected the Red Pill.

In total, 14 posts ( $n = 14$ ) fit the criteria and were downloaded onto a word document which produced 47 pages of textual data. The document was uploaded to the online data analysis software known as “Dedoose” where the qualitative data was coded line-by-line. These codes were then sorted and categorized to create much larger themes.

“It all started back about a year ago when I came across one of "Rollo's" videos on youtube about hypergamy. Being only 23 at the time, I was still (and to an extent still am) quite impressionable. I ate it up. I truly felt as though I was acquiring knowledge that only a few select men were privy too. Within a few short months, this new knowledge went from only festering in my head to festering on the outside as well in the way I talked and behaved.”

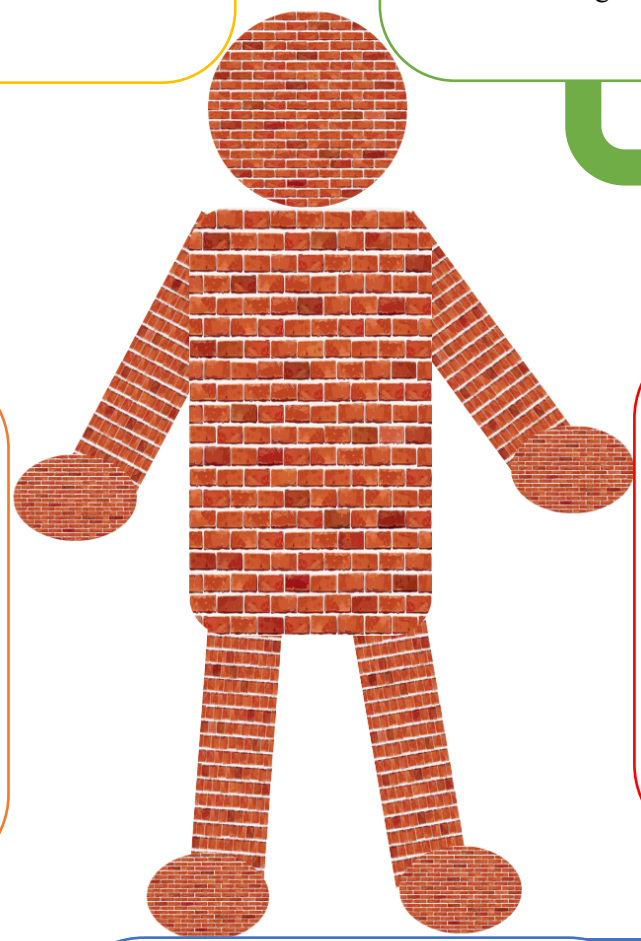
**Theme 2**  
**The role of the internet**

- Internet is used as a tool to seek answers.
- Exposure to manosphere-related content on websites such as YouTube. Red Pill/anti-feminist/alt-right content.
- Communities or videos of men giving advice on sexual strategy, appearing more alpha, and improving social status.

**Theme 1**  
**Self-Help and Truth**

- Struggles with dating as a result of shyness or lack of confidence.
- Desire to improve themselves in order to be more successful with relationships.
- Exposure to subtle, misogynistic views that can be traced back to the “manosphere.”
- Seeking role models or guidance in order to improve themselves.
- Receiving advice that feminism is the culprit; taught that women use men for resources and care only for looks, money, and status.
- Serious, long-term relationships are discouraged; learn that women are used only for fulfilling sexual desires.

“The problem was that I was socially awkward and nervous around girls. I would befriend them, hang out with them for months, and then finally ask them out only to get rejected or ‘friend zoned.’ I had no idea what I was doing. After a series of rejections I grew angry and bitter. Why wouldn’t any girl date me? Why did I keep getting rejected? I needed answers.”



**Theme 4**  
**Doubting and questioning: The legitimacy of the Red Pill**

- Sexual strategy failed or unable to manage emotions associated with performing an “alpha male” identity.
- Videos reacting to the manosphere that challenges and debunks their worldview.
- Unable to side with or fully commit to adopting the beliefs associated with the Red Pill and manosphere such as conspiracy theories or far-right/alt-right views.
- Desire for intimate, romantic relationships.

“While I was going through my "Redpill self-improvement phase" last year I took it upon myself to read No More Mr. Nice Guy and do the breaking free activities. I found a safe person and confided to them about everything, I'd say this and the month I took during that summer of 2019 to travel alone did more to improve myself than all of the self-help content, including redpill content, combined. I also found that the machismo alpha male persona that the redpill professes did not work for me when it came to picking up girls. What helped get my dating game back on track was, get this, being myself, and being comfortable in my own skin. Who would have thought!?!”

**Theme 3**  
**Performing the alpha male**

- Alpha male versus beta male.
- One must appear and act like an alpha male in order to lure women; performative.
- Building muscle to appear alpha.
- Repression of emotions and desires for long-term romantic relationships.
- Underlying fear and insecurities of not appearing masculine (or alpha) enough to other women.

“For the next 3 or 4 years, I was full TRP. I worked out a lot. Through the whole thing I still had an underlying feeling of insecurity in myself, but I masked it with muscles. I got really good at hiding my emotions and acting as if I didn't have any feelings. I was just 'stone cold' you could say - or at least I acted the part. On the inside I felt soft, but I saw softness as weakness. I saw softness as the reason why my heart was broken. So I tried to coat it with a rough alpha exterior.”

**Theme 5**  
**The aftermath of the Red Pill**

- Strained and damaged relationships with friends, family, and previous partners.
- Self-doubt and questioning whether they are desirable by women.
- Developing a consciousness/awareness of the constraints of performing hegemonic masculinity; reconstructing idea of what it means to be a man.

“So I'm out of it, now what? And that's the thought I'm wrestling with now. This was a large part of my identity for 5 ish years. I've separated from people I considered friends. I navigated life based on wisdom that I no longer accept. I appreciate certain aspects of redpill. I think we all ought to accept that the facts of life might be a little uncomfortable. We ought to employ self-reflection and try to change in ways that make us happier. There probably is value in learning about social strategy. Surely some of that is available outside of the manosphere. I like the idea of guys trying to help one another turn their lives around but I want to do it in a less brutal, hateful, delusional way. Is that a thing that exists? I sure hope so.”

# Conclusion and Future Direction

- In this presentation, I have shared my preliminary results from my ongoing research project that I have been conducting for my honors thesis.
- In the future, I plan on gathering more data in order to produce more generalizable results as well as research other potential interventions that can be explored in order to help guide change among men associated with the different ideologies associated with the manosphere such as the Red Pill.

# References

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