Dear Readers,

This is the final draft of my third essay, titled, “Feminism, Antifeminism, and Ideological Tunnel Vision.” In this paper, I focus on the online pickup artist community known as the manosphere, their antifeminist ideology, and the way they engage in conversation with the feminist side. I explore the way that the manosphere suppresses contradictory narratives using the works of psychologists Moore and Gillette and then try to explain (with reference to political scientist Amy Gutmann) how the combative nature of the rhetoric involved reveals the most concerning issue at hand – namely, that both sides have lost sight of the larger goal (establishing circumstances conducive to the greater happiness of men and women) in favor of smashing the ideology of the other side to bits.

I had quite a few ideas floating around in my head for this draft, so I’m glad I was able to finally settle on one important aspect of the conversation. I had to eliminate the original psychological lens (which discussed how men reacted to threats to their masculinity) because I agreed that it was too obvious and not particularly insightful.

I hope I did a good job painting a portrait of the manosphere community, which I think is a fascinating subculture within the greater blogosphere. No matter whether or not you agree with their ideology, their dedication to the cause is certainly impressive. Thank you for reading!

Sincerely,

Hannah Hirsh

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04.15.13

WRI 173

Professor Kristin Dombek

**Feminism, Antifeminism, Ideological Tunnel Vision, and Combative Rhetoric: Putting Principles into Practice**

In the sprawling annals of the rowdy, unruly Internet, there exists a particularly clamorous circle of blogs known collectively as the “manosphere.” Arguably the two most prominent bloggers are Heartiste (the writer formerly known as Roissy) and Daryush Valizadeh, known as Roosh V; others include Krauser (KrauserPUA), YouSoWould, and Frost (thumotic.com). These blogs purport to teach men PUA, or pickup artistry: how to “game” women, with the end goal of getting them into bed (or the bathroom stall, or the back of a limo).

Some posts are reasonably innocent, such as Roosh’s “How To Meet Girls In Grocery Stores” and Krauser’s “Chick Crack: How to make a girl laugh on a date.” Others, like “How To Get A Girl To Send Nudes of Herself” (Heartiste) and “How To Cheat On Your Girlfriend Without Getting Caught” (Roosh) are more sinister. In a particularly chilling post titled “Evil Men Get Laid More Than You,” Frost declares, “Women like evil men. They will gravitate towards you, the worse you treat them. They will fall deeply in love with you, the more you torment them. […] Lie to them and they will love you for it.”

Heartiste gives similarly disturbing advice in his article “Dread,” in which he urges men to cultivate a perpetual sense of unease in their partners by ignoring their calls, flirting openly with other women, and having not-so-secret affairs. He tells his readers:

“When she confronts you, don’t get defensive. Don’t speak at all. […] Let her punch you in the chest and scream obscenities. When she takes a breather, tell her she’s never looked more beautiful and you will never stop loving her. Then without waiting for her response calmly walk out the door and break off all contact for two weeks. When she comes back to you… and she will… you will have a love slave for life.”

Even for readers unfamiliar with the manosphere, the deeply psychologically manipulative nature of these last few lines should be a tip-off that the teachings of these blogs are not limited merely to the shallow gratification of carnal needs; in tandem with pickup pedagogy there is, in fact, a coherent ideological narrative which describes the West (and America in particular) as a crumbling society poisoned by the feminist agenda. But if the antifeminist antidote is “game,” the results have been strangely lackluster; as evidence will show, even those antifeminists who have succeeded in gaming girls are not necessarily happier. Similarly, many feminists who are supposed to be enjoying their sexual liberation are experiencing odd sensations of confusion and regret. What can we learn from the way these two parties react to conflict within their ranks, and how can we begin to move towards mutual understanding?

The primary antifeminist complaint is that feminism masculinizes women, turning them into snarky, entitled, and aggressive man-haters without the typical feminine qualities of sweetness and warmth. Though many of the manosphere’s accusations have to do with physicality—Roosh criticizes the “unwashed hair, loose-fitting drab clothes, and ugly sandals”[[1]](#footnote-1) of Westernized women—the most virulent attacks are made on their mannish personalities, “nonexistent homemaking skills” and “tough guy attitudes.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Heartiste perhaps put it the most bluntly: “FEMINISM MAKES WOMEN MANLIER. This bizarre epoch will come to be seen as a time when women were led so far astray that they became, socially and biologically, men. And men, for their part, became manboobs.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

In fact, the manboob-ification of America’s men is a problem that the manosphere takes just as seriously as the masculinization of women. Game blogs are full of advice on how to be a real man, or “alpha male”—someone who exudes overpowering, testosterone-fueled, hairy-knuckled masculinity through every pore. Beta males, who spend their lives desperately jumping through hoops for women in the hopes of “elicit[ing] a pity fuck through the LJBF [Let’s Just Be Friends] back door” are treated with contempt—case studies in how not to interact with the female sex. These men are doomed to a world of “interactive porn and video games,” embittered by their repeated failure with women—because, as prevailing manospheric thought tells us, “the better a man becomes with women, the happier he will be.”[[4]](#footnote-4) In the school of manosphere wisdom, one of feminism’s most egregious crimes is the way it has brainwashed men into rejecting their own masculinity, thus precluding any chance they may have had at happiness.

In a post entitled “The War Against Men,” Roosh rails against the declining appreciation for manly vigor, writing, “[We] have been left floundering on a confusing search for masculinity in a society that attacks us and makes us feel ashamed for being men.” In another, he declares that we live in an age “where classic forms of masculinity are being shamed into obsolescence,” and suggests that a man’s sexuality should be questioned if he “leans over to the feminine side.” Heartiste, as usual, expresses similar sentiments in more politicized and offensive terms, writing that “masculinizing a woman or feminizing a man turns each into a monstrous aberration” and that “90% of radical femcunts are lesbians or manjawed atrocities, and 90% of manboobs are closet cases or soft, pillowy micropeens.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

The narrative that claims men are being systemically denied the right to exercise their masculinity is at the forefront of most blogs in the manosphere. The curious thing, though, is that there have been instances in which a contradictory narrative has seeped into the conversation—and then been widely ignored.

For beneath all the antifeminist vitriol and simian chest-thumping is a note of discontent with the model of the alpha male—a sense of frustration, almost, that men are expected to be so relentlessly cold, aloof, and hypermasculine. In one post, Heartiste reflected on “women’s natural inborn revulsion for beta males”[[6]](#footnote-6) in the context of the game Marry Shag Kill, in which one person selects three people around the bar and the other must choose whom to murder, whom to marry, and whom to shag. “After an initial hesitancy,” Heartiste writes, “[women] get comfortable playing and suddenly the claws and fangs are out, revealing in high definition surround-sound glory their barely submerged joyous hate for the hapless beta male.” He continues, “Marry Fuck Kill is an excellent litmus test. I now use the game to screen for women with good character.” Interestingly, it is the women who are reluctant to kill the “beta males” that Heartiste deems most worthy of becoming a “long term prospect” rather than a “short fling.” But if tolerance of beta male behavior is a sign of good character, why the excessive vitriol against the dangers of man-boobery?

Similar contradictions can be observed in Roosh’s writing, as well. For example, when Roosh writes that “[the] broken American system has given rise to sexual jackals like myself who take advantage of the current environment,”[[7]](#footnote-7) he seems almost half-apologetic. Oblique criticism of the alpha model can also be seen in Roosh’s remarks that feminism has made American women “overvalue alpha males” and that “[in] America you are severely punished for complimenting a girl. She thinks you’re a weak man who is falling in love with her.”[[8]](#footnote-8) On occasion, he has expressed these sentiments explicitly: “All we can do today—in fact, what we are *forced* to do today—is to go against our nature and be aloof players and approach robots in order to get sexual intercourse.”[[9]](#footnote-9) This is unequivocal criticism of the cold alpha archetype—but why has this contradictory narrative gone so widely unacknowledged in the manosphere? In a community of men who pride themselves on telling the “ugly truths” about the world, why has there been so much resistance to making this small concession in ideology?

In a moment of rare candor, blogger Western Cancer pointed out the manosphere’s tendency towards one-sided, extremist thinking, advising men to “take a break” from “all this negativity and anger.”[[10]](#footnote-10) “[You’ll become] bitter and angry at everything that doesn’t fit your worldview,” he cautioned readers. “You’ll start seeing examples of what is ‘wrong’ everywhere you go, just to validate the problem. I say at least try to find the good in every girl you meet.” Western Cancer also criticized the way discussions are conducted between the feminist and antifeminist camps, writing, “Feminists regurgitate jargon instead of debating a topic logically. We say internet feminists are fat and unhappy [clones](http://www.rooshvforum.com/thread-22624-post-416323.html#pid416323) which causes their irrationality and anger. All ad hominems. All worthless when it comes to communicating with one another.”

But Western Cancer’s post—which was trying to say something true and important and honest about the conversation going on in the manosphere, and about the culture it was breeding—was greeted with protest from readers. Commenter John Rambo scoffed, “This whole ‘Just be positive, don’t be negative’ crap sounds like something right out of a new age website. It’s GOOD to see REALITY as it is, so that you can operate according to reality, and not according to mainstream fantasy and dogma.” Another reader sneered, “So, now that feminism is on the run, and their high priestesses are wailing in disarray, should we turn away? Give quarter? If our positions were flipped, would they? What is best in life? To crush your enemies, see them driven before you, and to hear the lamentations of their manginas!” [[11]](#footnote-11) But perhaps most telling are the remarks of Mark Minter, a regular within the manosphere: “I try, am trying, to get away, to take a break [… but] everything else is stupid, fucking boring drivel. This is only true and interesting thing on the internet. And manosphere men are the only interesting people in the world right now. Even though their viewpoint is colored by anger, it is, at least, not slanted with horseshit cultural slants.” The views Minter expresses so vehemently represent a kind of ideological tunnel vision that is pervasive among bloggers in the manosphere—a refusal to admit that any other set of beliefs besides those expressed in the manosphere could be anything other than “stupid, fucking boring drivel.”

# To begin to understand this tunnel vision, we can turn to the field of archetypal psychology, which describes the collective unconscious as consisting of powerful inner identities that provide a framework for one’s psyche. In their 1990 book King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine, Robert L. Moore and Douglas Gillette discuss the four archetypes that comprise the masculine subconscious, arguing that an understanding of “mature masculinity” is essential for the men of today’s “dangerous and unstable world” (xix). Though they celebrate “authentic masculine power and potency,” they make a critical distinction between the “immature” and “mature” masculine—and it is the former, interestingly enough, which is associated with patriarchy. “Patriarchy,” they write, “is the expression of Boy psychology […] It expresses the stunted masculine, fixated at immature levels. […] Patriarchy is based on fear—the boy’s fear, the immature masculine’s fear—of women, to be sure, but also fear of men” (xvii). What men who subscribe to patriarchy are lacking, Moore and Gillette contend, is “an adequate connection to the deep and instinctual *masculine* energies, the potentials of mature masculinity” (xvii).

# If we understand the manosphere’s underlying aversion to alpha masculinity as a general aversion to patriarchy, which preaches condescension to women, the source of their confusion seems clear—but why is it so difficult for the manosphere to make that distinction in the first place?

# At this point, it may be helpful to examine the feminist side of the conversation.

Like antifeminism, much of the feminist ideology communicated over the internet is aggressively absolute, and when self-professed feminists express dissatisfaction with the movement, they seem to always feel a need to qualify their statements or express their criticism in an apologetic way. In an article on *The Frisky* titled “Ways In Which We Fail At Being Feminists,” women submitted “confessions” about times in which they felt they had betrayed the spirit of feminism: “I legitimately believe that you shouldn’t sleep with a dude until you seal the relationship deal,” one woman wrote. “That’s so unfeminist, but I’ve found it to be sound advice.” Another confessed, “There are days that I would be perfectly happy being ‘just’ a stay-at-home mom and let[ting] my husband be the only one pulling in an income.” Although these women are clearly put off by some of the beliefs of the feminist movement, they seem to feel an obligation to follow them unswervingly—even if doing so will make them unhappy.

In an article on *Jezebel* titled “Sex on the First Date is a Fictional Fuck,” another woman shared her experience doing exactly that. On a date with a man she found highly attractive, she was aware of “a quiet but persistent internal voice” in her head that warned against going home with a guy on the first night, but chose to dismiss it as an internalization of “cultural judgments about ‘easy’ women.” She did go home with him—had “intense, unexpected, rough and satisfying” sex—and promptly felt like shit. Even then, though, she “couldn’t identify why.” The answer was pretty clear—she felt worthless, used, and cheap—but she couldn’t bear to admit that, as a modern, “sex-positive,” independent woman, she wasn’t enjoying the fruits of feminism.

In another *Frisky* article, titled “Girl Talk: My Newfound Respect For Chivalry,” writer Jessica Wakeman wrote that she had “a hard time reconciling [her] feminist beliefs with [her] enjoyment of chivalry.” She was proud of the strong, independent woman she had made herself into, but she couldn’t help envying women whose boyfriends and husbands opened doors for them and hailed cabs for them and carried their groceries home. But why did Wakeman even feel uncomfortable about her desire for a chivalrous man? Whence came this idea that not subscribing fully and completely to the feminist cause—that not participating in the same kind of ideological tunnel vision we saw from the manosphere—would be a betrayal of her sex?

To answer this question more fully, we can turn to an examination of the rhetoric used by the feminist and antifeminist factions, particularly in relation to one another. Much like the rhetoric used in political discourse, the language of the feminist debates has become combative, antagonistic, and violent to the extreme—and, in polarizing the two sides of the conflict, has made compromise nearly impossible.

Heartiste’s blog, for example, has a category specifically devoted to “Feminist Idiocy.” Feminists are variously described as “fat,” “ugly,” “dumpling-faced,” “droopy-eyed,” “vapid,” “gross,” “bitter,” “delusional,” and “quasi-dyke.” In a similar vein, Roosh V’s post “The 9 Ugliest Feminists in America” linked to unflattering pictures of various feminists around the web, commenting on each with insults such as “[S]he’s so ugly that when she goes to the therapist, he asks her to lie on the couch face down.” Others use violent rhetoric—such as Roosh V’s article “The War Against Men” and Heartiste’s “The Fallacious War on Women,” in which he quotes a commenter as saying, “There is no ‘war on women.’ There’s a war on MEN. The so-called ‘war on women’ exists because it is the nature of woman to portray herself as the victim at the very moment when she is in fact the aggressor.”

Feminists, too, use violent terminology to drive home their beliefs; by now, the “war on women” is a widespread political catchphrase used to criticize restrictions of women’s rights. Articles on *The Frisky* talk about the “threat” that men pose to women, while simultaneously declaring a “crusade against the patriarchy.” This rhetoric has defined this conversation as a power struggle in which both sides feel the need to confine themselves to combative, uncompromising rhetoric, each one afraid to let slip any sign of weakness.

Profess of political science Amy Gutmann, in her article “The Lure and Dangers of Extremist Rhetoric,” examined this phenomenon from a political perspective. She defined extremist rhetoric as that which “tends towards single-mindedness on any given issue” and “passionately expresses certainty about the supremacy of its perspective on the issue.” Though the latter is perhaps true only of the antifeminist camp, the widespread reluctance of feminists to blame feminist beliefs for their problems is perhaps indicative of a similar issue. Gutmann identifies several problems with extremist rhetoric, the most pernicious of which being that “it condemns without further consideration those who dare to disagree. No single value, not even liberty, can safely claim to be a ‘total solution’ to the problems afflicting humankind.”

In this case, the dangers of extremist rhetoric lie in the black-and-white nature of the solutions they present to the given problem. In truth, there is dissatisfaction on both sides, as well as evidence that what they *supposedly* want—if ideology is any indicator—is not necessarily what will lead them to greater happiness. The triumph of feminist views isn’t making feminists happy, and the triumph of anti-feminist views isn’t making men happy, either. But now both sides are afraid to back down, for the struggle has become more ideological than practical. Feminists and antifeminists alike have adopted a Manichean worldview that leaves no room for compromise. In doing so, the focus of the conversation has shifted from finding actual happiness to obliterating the ideology of the other side. A more forgiving, understanding environment would be to the benefit of both parties involved, if only they could each put aside their pride and learn to listen to one another in an honest effort to emerge towards a greater truth. They both have the principles down – but putting them into practice is another matter entirely.

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This paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

/s/ Hannah Hirsh

1. “Travel Is No Excuse To Look Like Shit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Perception of American Women As Masculine Is Going Mainstream.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Manjaw-ification of American Women: Science!” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Reader Mailbag: Happiness Maximization Edition.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “The Psychology of Feminists and Manboobs.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Marry Shag Kill.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “Not All Women of the World Want an Alpha Male.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “World Game.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “The Decline of American Women.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Take A Break From The Manosphere.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Man + vagina = mangina [↑](#footnote-ref-11)