

# **Digital Dystopia: The manosphere's influence to Modern Politics and Feminists resistance Online**

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## **Abstract**

We live in an era occupied by technological devices in which people spread and consume discourses. These discourses are also sources of ideologies and social movements. One social group that is extremely present nowadays and is the reason for several aggressions in the offline world is the manosphere. The characteristics of this social group still influence male-dominated industries such as the domain of cinematography and the music industry.

Since 2017 another movement has gained popularity, which is #MeToo. The #MeToo movement derives from feminist women aiming to punish their sexual aggressors and denounce them. Those aggressions are also often present in male-dominated environments. On one end we have a far-right ideology that is more than ever trying to strike against new leftist social movements. On the other end, we have a new feminist movement trying to fight those far-right ideologies. This thesis will focus on both sides of the discourse by first trying to understand the roots of the manosphere and to what extent its characteristics hinder other social movements and politics. This thesis will analyze those issues through qualitative research and online discourse analysis of the manosphere and feminism.

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## Introduction

“*Not all men, but always men*”, is a statement that has often appeared in social media, such as Instagram, in response to a sexist and misogynistic published discourse. This statement implies that feminists or women, in general, are not necessarily against men, but are not surprised that most hate speech, aggression, and sexual assaults towards women come from men. This seems to be an issue that is relevant and even more enhanced because of social media.

The manosphere has become present online and enhanced by spreading discourse. It is a social group of men that spread hate speech towards women, LGBTQQ, and individuals from different races, or that do not adhere to patriarchy’s norm. Moreover, the manosphere consists of loosely defined groups that share common characteristics that will be discussed in the first chapter. Those men from this social group share some fascist features that will also be introduced in the first chapter. This social group is presenting a danger to society nowadays as they not only spread hate speech online but also pose a physical threat to individuals, especially women who do not adhere to their ideology (Johanssen, 2022, p.2).

Furthermore, according to Jacob Johanssen in his book “Fantasy, Online Misogyny, and the Manosphere,” there is a rise of the far-right political parties that are linked to the discourse and characteristics of the manosphere. For instance, Javier Milei won the presidential elections of Argentina, Geert Wilders’s political party of the PVV won the election in the Netherlands, and currently, Portugal’s far-right political parties are gaining popularity and so is the United States with Trump. How come several right-wing political parties are gaining popularity even though society has several left-wing popular movements such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, environment movement, #FreePalestine, and so forth? Does social media affect those ideologies and to what extent? Should we see social media as a threat to individuals when it is being used by individuals deemed as deviant and poses a potential threat to alter?

These questions will be discussed further in the thesis. In this thesis, I will discuss the fascist ideologies behind the manosphere as it is important to define them. Fascism, as Jason Stanley (2018) states, has the following characteristics that he describes as “*a referral to a mythic past, anti-intellectualism, a strong emphasis on hierarchy and law and order, a distortion of reality, a feeling of and claiming of victimhood and sexual anxiety.*” (Johanssen, 2022, p.5).

It is crucial to discuss this topic as it is extremely present nowadays in our hybrid society. This thesis will use the study case of Gerard Depardieu, a famous French actor, that has recently, been accused of sexual assault on certain women, as empirical data to contribute to further insights into the workings of the manosphere. This topic is relevant as a case has been raised against his deliberate crimes towards those women. In response to those allegations, French President Emmanuel Macron has sided with Gerard Depardieu’s arguments. This goes against the principles of the #MeToo movement and poses a problem to society and feminism as it undermines the progress made through these movements. This progress aimed to hold sexual predators accountable for actions regardless of their status or power. As a result, it hinders those movements as powerful men such as the French president decide to side with the aggressor because of what he represents to the idealized and romanticized French cinematography culture. This case has opened discussions and debates between feminists and far-right misogynistic individuals on social media.

This leads to the thesis' research question; How does this ideology enforcement of the manosphere affect other social groups, such as feminists and LGBTIQ? Despite echo chambers, do they pose a potential threat to those groups? In order to answer this research, question this thesis will be divided into four chapters. First, this thesis will define what the manosphere is and its ideologies through Jason Johansson's psychoanalysis literature on "Fantasy, online misogyny, and the manosphere" (2022). Secondly, this thesis will analyze the concept of victimhood in the manosphere's discourse based on the arguments of Marwick and Caplan (2018) and interpret the case of Gerard Depardieu through the lenses of qualitative research.

Furthermore, this thesis will define the social movement of #MeToo and the feminist response to the case of Gerard Depardieu through the framework of *The Right Sex* by Amia Srinivasan (2021). Finally, this research will examine the social and political consequences of those discourses in a hybrid environment.

# Chapter I Who is the manosphere?

In this chapter, I would like to make a brief introduction of what triggered the existence of the manosphere. To gain a better understanding of the subject itself and to facilitate the understanding of the aim of this thesis, it is crucial to first elaborate on the characteristics of the manosphere, and on the reasons why it exists. Jacob Johansson, in his book “Fantasy, Online Misogyny, and the Manosphere” (2022), focuses on the contradictory desires, thoughts, and fantasies that men claim to have about women, referring to them as being in a state of “Dis/inhibition”. In addition, this first chapter will discuss the different ideologies that men from the manosphere are part of. I will focus on defining the different subgroups that make up the manosphere in order to differentiate and understand the different discourses and their impact online. Finally, I will make a brief psychoanalysis of the manosphere to understand whether they have toxic traits that may pose a threat to society and hinder certain social movements. Studying the psychoanalysis behind the manosphere permits one to acknowledge that individuals within it may have some disorders, and enables one to understand what triggers those disorders, such as showing signs of obsession and hysteria.

## 1.1 An introduction to political ideology behind the manosphere

It is interesting to see how and why misogyny discourse is increasing in the digital world. Moreover, individuals in the manosphere, such as incels (see below), are aware that they are deemed as deviant, which compels them to join certain forums or certain social groups online to find likewise minds (Johansson, 2021). This leads to questions such as; how do they get around that? What strategy do they use? Individuals from the manosphere are aware that feminists have a point (another human being from a different sex is in favor of equal rights within society), nonetheless, they do not want to give up on the privileges that the patriarchy provides them. Johanson cites Fuchs (2018), who argues that men from the manosphere share the same values as right-wing authoritarianists (Johansson 2021, p.5):

- The authoritarianism and leadership, i.e. the belief that a state is powerful because it has an authoritarian leader.
- The scheme of a friend's enemy, i.e. the belief that other individuals that don't adhere to the state's ideology are the enemy that needs to be eliminated.
- The idea of nationalism and ethnocentrism, i.e. the belief that one nation or community is superior to the other.
- Finally, militarism and the patriarchy, are sexist values.

Having said that, it is noticeable that those ideas are rather deemed extremely conservative and “old-fashioned” nowadays in Western society. The “men’s liberation” movement started after the second wave of feminism in the 1970s (Ging, 2017). From that period on, many men have felt a threat to their position in society. Johansson (2022) argues that this perspective aligns with fascism, as fascism pays particular attention to the body, promoting the idea of how strong, powerful, healthy, and so forth a man must look. In these ideologies men deem women fit to reproduce, while they produce. In other words, we encounter a dualism between those genders which reduces women to simply those who reproduce and take care of the housework whereas men are the ones who construct society. One interesting fact is that, despite the widespread acceptance of feminism, and the restriction of misogynist discourse online to mainstream social platforms such as Instagram, Google itself accommodates these prejudices that patriarchy

provides for those two opposite social roles. In fact, if one types “manly synonyms”, Google will provide words such as “heroic, brave, bold, daring” and so forth, which all are related to personal characteristics. If one types “womanly synonyms”, on the other hand, Google will provide adjectives such as “thick, voluptuous, curvy,” and so forth, all terms that define women through their bodies. This is interesting if we want to understand and explain to what extent the misogynistic rhetoric affects society.

## **1.2 Subgroups within the Manosphere and their characteristics**

Within the manosphere, there are several subgroups, such as PuAs (Pickup artists), Men Go Their Own Way (MGTOW), Men’s rights, alt-right, and incels. Individuals of these social groups aim to present a certain resistance to perceived threats to the male gender. Moreover, men from these sub-groups all share a common trait: insecurity about their relationship with their own masculinity (Laughren, 2023). This insecurity is often depicted as a reaction to the traditional masculine roles and identities in societies wherein gender roles are being put in doubt and rethought through several social movement such as feminism (Laughren, 2023). Another insecurity one may have from the manosphere is the relationship between men and women.

The manosphere is a presence in current political movements such as the alt-right and the Men’s rights movement (Johansson, 2022). Those two movements are not the same. The alt-right praises the white race and is anti-feminist. They believe that men and women have two distinct roles to play in society based on biological affordances. The Men’s rights movement, on the other hand, states that discrimination against men is greater than discrimination of women nowadays (Johansson, 2022). Those ideological battles raise polarisation between genders, and between feminist discourse and anti-feminist discourse. In feminist discourse, individuals advocate for gender equality and address issues such as repressed rights, and violence against women. They also aim to deconstruct patriarchy’s structure in society. In contrast, anti-feminism discourse opposes feminist principles, claiming that feminism undermines gender roles and the advantages that women have at the expense of men. Moreover, anti-feminist discourse criticizes feminist movements and the rhetoric they use.

According to Stefan Stijelja and Brian L. Mishara, incels are “involuntary celibates’ that are known to have an anti-women discourse (2023). These men haven’t engaged romantically and sexually with women for a certain time or even never (Johansson, 2022), and tend to be between 15 and 30 years old (2022, p.141). Incels idealize ‘Chad and Stacy’: mythical individuals of what should be the perfect man and the perfect woman (Meier and Sharp, 2024). Chads are very masculine, strong, and athletic, and Stacy is extremely feminine. Incels believe that as Chads they are able to bring a post-feminist world into being, in which they are in control of what they want, when they want, and so forth (Meier and Sharp, 2024).

Men who belong to the MGTOW movement come from a broader age group than incels (Johansson, 2022). They strongly believe that they are on their own now, as they have firmly decided to leave women behind and claim that they do not need women. This community emerged in the early 2000s and is considered to have consumed the “red pill”. The concept of the red pill will be elaborated elsewhere in this chapter. The main idea is that only those who have taken the red pill have the truth revealed to them. They have a strong viewpoint on separatism between men and women, and they overlap with the alt-right movement as they believe strongly in traditional gender roles.

Pick-up artists (PuAs), finally, also have a strong presence online. This sub-group saw the daylight on television for the first time. Although the original television program is not as relevant anymore, it did result in an online subculture of men who deem themselves qualified to teach other men how to seduce and be successful with women (Dayter and Rüdiger, 2016)

These subgroups are prominent components of the manosphere and play an important role in shaping its discourse.

To summarize, the manosphere is mainly an online assembly of misogynistic groups, with some troubling references to fascism and racism. Those men, especially incels, have also shown themselves a threat to society beyond the virtual world, with attacks on women, queer individuals, and non-Whites.

### **1.3 Manosphere Psychoanalysis red and black pill**

Men of the manosphere strongly believe that women are looking for strong and economically successful men (Johansson, 2022). One of the main figures of that ideology, very well known within the community and not extremely appreciated by feminists, is Andrew Tate. Because of his popularity, misogynistic discourse is normalized on social media platforms such as Tik Tok which has featured several videos (Kay and Aslan, 2023). Andrew Tate's discourse is extremely focused on the identity construction of how a real man should be. He elaborates on the topics of how to be economically successful, and how to be a "real man" who succeeded in life. That is when the red pill comes into play. According to Johansson, the idea or the root of the red pill saw the light when the Matrix movie came out: the red pill is the option that allows one to reveal the truth about the world (Preston, Halpin, and Maguire, 2021). Although the female lead characters of this movie were portrayed as strong women, this has utterly been dismissed by the manosphere. In other words, they see their ideology as the truth that has to be revealed to the world but is suppressed by feminists. Van Valkenburgh (2018) describes the red pill as men's "*attempt to improve their seduction skills by discussing evolutionary psychology and economic theories.*". In the example of Andrew Tate, some men may see him as one of their spokespersons as he unravels seduction skills and arguments on how to become a successful man, which aligns with the truth the manosphere seeks to exhibit. The characteristic common to all discussed subgroups of the manosphere is the insecurity of the relationship they have with their masculinity. In addition to the red pill the concept of the black pill has also been applied in the manosphere. The Black pill is when incels accept the fact that "it's over" and they do not stand a chance in attracting any women. They believe that women are exclusively attracted to physical features. Their community is defined by heterosexual sex and masculinity status. Their aim is not to become Chads, but rather to accept themselves as inferior and unattractive in comparison to men regarded as Chads (Preston, Halpin, and, Maguire, 2021). Moreover, involuntary celibate or incels are accepting their situation as hopeless. Moreover, their masculine identity is defined on their heterosexual relationships, although they view women as lesser. This results to frustration and anger, as those incels cannot seem to reconcile their need for validation from those they deem inferior to them. ((Preston, Halpin, and, Maguire, 2021).

Furthermore, the authors state that incels dehumanize women and deny that their discourse is misogynistic. In contrast to Van Valkenburgh (2018), incels claim to accept their appearance and do not have the aim to change their appearance by consuming the black pill (Preston, Halpin, and, Maguire, 2021). Within the manosphere, the different communities both consume the ideas and identity construction of the red pill or black pill. A further perspective on the discourse of MGTOW comes from Lomas (2018). Building on the framework of Kiesling,

which focuses on how masculine identity is performative, he argues that there are four main cultural discourses of masculinity. Those are:

- “Gender differences”, which is the idea that men and women act differently because of their biological differences. These differences are innate.
- “Dominance”, is the argument that men have authority and are dominant compared to women.
- “Heterosexism”, is the idea that men are and must be heterosexual.
- Finally, “male solidarity”, which is the natural bond between men, as in the famous citation “bros before hoes”. (Kiesling, 2007).

Lomas states that those discourses are prominent in the Western world in general and describe male solidarity in Men Goes Their Own Way (MGTOW) in particular.

The psychoanalysis of alt-right misogynists reveals a nostalgia in today’s Western society for “a mythic past”, when another gender hierarchy existed, i.e. before 1968 (Johansson 2022).

#### **1.4 Psychoanalysis of historical and obsessional behavior**

Johansson (2022) states that incels and MGTOW are both obsessed with women and have fantasies about them. Moreover, Johansson argues that MGTOW has characteristics of hysterical comportment when it revolves around women. In other words, they so strongly desire women that their frustrations lead them to express a form of hatred towards women. They are in a state of dis/inhibition, as they fantasize about women but also cannot stand them. Johansson refers to the framework of Elisabeth Young Bruehl, *The Anatomy of Prejudices* (1996) which isolates characteristics, typical of MGTOW, that are inclined to facilitate prejudices. These prejudices have a narcissistic foundation which consists of believing that they need to set strict boundaries toward women in order to avoid being emasculated or castrated. Moreover, MGTOW, incels, and alt-right men all share obsessive characteristics. Johansson (2022, p. 130) asks the question: “*What kind of people are incels or become incels?*”, and states that incels share similarities with proto fascists. He elaborates on Freud’s discussions of three-character types that the incels, MGTOW, and the misogynist alt-right all have in common. i.e., erotic, compulsive, and narcissistic, by relabeling the characteristics as; obsessional, hysterical, and narcissistic.

Johansson goes into some depth with the psychosocial analysis of the manosphere. He points out that Young Bruehl’s research focused on this aspect of the manosphere by drawing on philosophical and sociological texts. She focuses on theories that are related to prejudices commonly held in the misogynistic communities. Those theories are related to social character and societies’ impact on those character types (Johansson, 2022, p.131). All in all, Young Bruehl’s character research is represented through the aforementioned ideal types. Focusing on the obsessional character, their traits are that they are “rigid, well-organized individuals, neat, ‘aversive to dirt’” (Johansson, 2022, p.131). However, this does not mean that such individuals live in “chaos”, and they often have a “high mental capacity” (Johansson, 2022). Furthermore, they also act upon a fixation they may have, a certain “mental act” (Johansson, 2022), in which they also create scenarios in their heads or fantasies. Obsessions provide a certain aim that requires a challenge so that they can work, think, and act upon it. This requires effort on their end which is one crucial thing they want to spend. Furthermore, they practice self-punishment

and do not like to admit defeat (Johansson, 2022). In other words, they function well within a group if they have been delegated a task which they must complete (Johansson, 2022 referring to Young Bruehl 1996, 212). Having an obsession permits them to feel self-love and self-worth. Moreover, it gives them a sense of their belonging in society. The author relates those traits to incels and MGTOW, as they deem women as dirty (Johansson 2022, p. 133). They are fixated on women. In other words, women, for those two subgroups, are dirt and represent a threat to them, as they believe that women may “castrate and overwhelm” them (Johansson 2022, p.133).

Men from these two subcultures are claimed to encounter difficulties in admitting that they are wrong, although they present contradictory thoughts on the opposite gender. Their chosen social groups permit them to find meaning and a feeling of security and belonging within today’s society, and because of digitalization they are easy to find. This allows them to continue to spread and practice their ideologies with little insecurity about their position, even though fascist ideologies are deemed as deviant. These online niche communities permit them to have the sensation of normality. While society at large may see these ideologies as deviant, because of social media and social platforms in which several niche groups form easily, MGTOW and incels feel more secure and free to identify as such because they have a community. Johansson (2022, p.133) describes this dynamic as “self-caricature”. Men from the manosphere with the traits of obsessives, such as MGTOW and incels, enhancing their viewpoints and arguments so as not to have their egos hurt.

The next term Johansson (2022) discusses with reference to Young-Bruehl’s characteristic types is hysterical. The hysterical are more linked to the erotic than the obsessives, and they do practice gender separation roles, in which one is extremely masculine and the other extremely feminine (Johansson, 2022, p. 134-135). Those characteristics are not immediately linked to MGTOW or incels. Nonetheless, they do still share similarities and common traits. One of the common traits is their fixation on “strength, sex, and appearance” (Johansson 2022, p.134).

According to Young-Bruehl, people who can be described as hysterical do not deem life exciting and are not necessarily afraid to take risks and do something illegal. Hystericals are known to have aggressive impulses. Furthermore, the author states that once they are prejudiced, they will have strong desires for certain “objects of their prejudice” (Johansson, p.134), while the rest will be deemed as forbidden to their frustrated desires. They relate to individuals who project their obsessions. Incels are openly obsessed with women and express frustration when they are not successful with them, which may turn to hatred towards them. In other words, incels relate to hysterics as wanting to be a Chad and to have a Stacy. Johanson (2022) concludes that, with the traits of obsessions and hysterics, incels are narcissistic and spread sexist and misogynistic discourse, whereas MGTOW, although they share some similarities, they express it differently. Unlike incels, who express it with frustration, MGTOW expresses it through exhibiting “independent” behavior towards women (Johansson 2022, p. 136).

The obsessional characteristics are enhanced and built up online on several platforms by incels and MGTOW. It is interesting to see that those men do not necessarily deem themselves as fascists or even follow this ideology, but they do accommodate the same characteristics as fascism. Moreover, it is their “state of mind” that is fascist (2022, p.134). The fascist state of mind is present even though fascism does not dominate Western societies anymore. A final characteristic trait taken from Young-Bruehl’s analysis is erotic. The erotism in question is the strong desire for fascism that one may have. Fascism is still present in people’s mindsets, in

which authoritarian capitalism and some cultural and economic conditions are helping re-emerged fascism through right-wing populists (Johansson 2022, p.134). These issues arise through economic problems and difficult working conditions one may experience. Moreover, Fascism is seen as a shield for men's ego's, a justification for the importance they attribute to their bodies, and a guide for how they can be in control of women. Jacob Johanssons cites Susan Sontag, who has described the woman as the erotic to fascists (p.139). Women are perceived as the desired object. This shows once again that men from MGTOW and incel are in a state of dis/inhibition. They are spreading hate on women online, unable to show any signs of appreciation, even though they desire women. The culture of sexuality that is enhanced through hook-up apps triggers the fascist mindset. Moreover, because of these sexual frustrations, those men spread hate speech online and this can lead to physical aggression and murder in real life (Johansson 2022, p.142). This contradictory state of mind is dangerous for society as a whole.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has defined some sub-groups of the manosphere and their characteristics. Those characteristics are related to several traits of fascism, which is concerning for today's society. All in all, these characteristics are important to note as they will permit us to identify individuals from the manosphere online. It also provides a perspective on the subject matter of the following chapter, which will analyze the roots of the online misogynistic discourse, with special attention to the case of Gerard Depardieu.

## Chapter II: Misogynistic Discourse Online

The manosphere's internet engagement has decreased on certain social platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, as they received several warnings (Johansson, 2022). Nonetheless, it has been observed that Reddit has regrouped several individuals from the manosphere. Those individuals spread hate speech and discourse that are racist and anti-feminist. It is, however, interesting to see that feminist communities are present on this platform. This shows that social networks such as Reddit, contain several conflicting ideologies that are being produced, spread and consumed within the same platform which could potentially result in polarization of ideologies. This chapter will focus on the hate speech and online discourse of the manosphere from the sub-groups incels, MGTOW, alt-right misogynists, pick-up artists, and the men's rights movement. First, I will introduce Marwick's and Caplan's theoretical framework of the manosphere's discourse online. Thereafter, this chapter will offer a broader perspective in the way in which one may believe that the manosphere is important to protect men's gender and identity, through Ian Ironwood's book on the manosphere. Finally, this chapter will analyze the online discourse of the manosphere based on empirical data and ethnography on Instagram and Reddit, by focusing on the concept of misandry and the case study of Gerard Depardieu.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework on Misogynistic Discourse Online

Marwick and Caplan (2018) explore the online discourse of individuals from the manosphere. In their argumentative and empirical article "Drinking Men's tears" (2018), the authors use discourse analysis to understand and explain the hate speech of the manosphere, specifically, what triggers or enhances online harassment in the manosphere toward feminist discourse. They study the concept of "misandry" in their discourse analyses to understand why online users participate in hate speech against feminists. The term originates from the social subgroup "Men's Rights movement" (Marwick and Caplan, 2018) and describes hate rhetoric that women project onto men. In their study, the authors found that men in this social group identify themselves as victims of misandry. Marwick and Caplan use a satiric title "Drinking Men's Tears", which mocks the discourse of the manosphere. Moreover, it denounces the ideology of right-wing political perspectives. Marwick and Caplan explore the construction and the function of the manosphere. In other words, the term "misandry" enhances the idea of men's victimhood towards feminist rhetoric. Specifically, it shows how individuals in the manosphere use ideology and language to create and enhance the culture of harassment against feminist discourse.

Marwick and Caplan also emphasize the way in which the mainstream media contributes to the discourse surrounding the term misandry, often accepting the framing offered by the men's rights movement. Marwick and Caplan illustrated this through the case study Gamergate. This case study shows how Men's Right movement and male gamers used social media to condemn female video game critics, feminist, and developers. Marwick and Caplan state that an empirical study found that the hashtag *#gamergate* was mostly used to harass women, propagate misogynistic ideas and spread anti-feminist sentiment despite some portraying it as a campaign about 'ethics in video game journalism' (2018). Through the media, these actions were presented within the frame suggested by Gamergate participants, who perceived themselves as victims under attack from feminists and social justice warriors (SJWs) (Marwick and Caplan, 2018).

The coverage is regarded as the same feminist activity with discrimination against men which not only legitimized the term but also supported misogynistic beliefs (Marwick and Caplan,

2018). The term misandry has been utilized by several online communities within the manosphere, in response to feminism discourse. It highlights how language fosters community building and justifies harassment and ideological positions (Marwick and Caplan, 2018). The term misandry suggests that the core ideology of feminism is anti-male (Marwick and Caplan, 2018). This notion is a bridge to different ideological groups that accommodate this term to their beliefs, such as the men's rights movement, MGTOW, alt-right, and so forth. The authors claim that the concept of misandry influences gender discourses such as in the men's rights movement. These discourses imply that the main agenda of feminists rely on anti-men ideologies and rhetoric. Furthermore, the use of this concept by the alt-right, and in the mainstream media highlights the complexities and the impact they have in shaping social and political movements. This portrays feminists to be anti-men or man-haters which complicates dialogues regarding gender equality as it creates binary oppositions with misogyny. Misandry becomes a term of weaponization for men's right activists who claim to be victims of the feminist agenda, which reinforces the division within gender discourses.

Why is the manosphere an issue if men attempt to put up a fight against emerging social and political forces, like feminism? The answer is that they claim to be victims of misandry. Some authors, such as Ian Ironwood, claim that the manosphere is in fact a progressive social group for men's rights and masculinity.

## **2.2 Ian Ironwood analysis**

According to Ian Ironwood's well-researched book, the ideology of hate speech directed towards women is just men resisting those ideologies. Ian Ironwood is the author of "The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity" (2013), a popular book in which he explains that the manosphere is bringing some positive aspects for the male gender. It is a relevant text to study as it makes the remarkable claim that the manosphere is a positive thing happening nowadays. Ironwood claims that now more than ever it is important to keep men's traditional values, as defining what men are. In other words, he perceives the manosphere as something great for men as it helps them resist feminism and enhance masculinity. Feminists are deemed as threats to masculinity, according to Ian Ironwood.

He defines the manosphere as a place of hope for men who wish to enhance their masculinity and who wish to adhere to what one may think a man should be. In other words, the manosphere is described as a shield against feminist or LGBTQQ discourses. The idea put forward is that men are being oppressed by women's discourse and that men should be "allowed" to express their manly identity. Ironwood also argues that several of the prominent men in the manosphere are not alt-right individuals. This goes against the arguments brought by academics such as Marwick, Caplan, and Johansson. The manosphere, Ironwood claims in the summary of his book, is; "*a world where sweat, respect, honor, and fidelity are the coins of the realm*" (Ironwood, 2013). The new man is not "*sensitive new age talking about their feelings*" (Ironwood, 2013). He suggests that the "destructive" ideology of feminism shouldn't influence men who value their masculinity. Rather, men should preserve it now more than ever because of the feminist movement. Sweat, honor, and fidelity are the assumed crucial characteristics: men sweat because of hard work, they honor their past and beliefs and they are loyal to what they stand for.

Finally, Ironwood suggests that men are becoming more secure in their masculinity. He claims that since men are getting divorced more and are more often single, they are taking the red pill through which they enter the ideologies of the manosphere. Ironwood argues that is crucial for men's survival in a world in which feminism produces, as he calls it, "wimps".

On Amazon, several admiring reviews can be found. Those comments are mainly from individuals who claim to be men who have read the book. In one of the reviews an individual states that Ian Ironwood is the “Inner circle of the Manosphere Bloggers”, suggesting that Ironwood is the spokesperson for the manosphere because of his extensive knowledge. The book is claimed to be directed at men who have been deceived by women, and who are victims of women’s vicious discourse and actions. In the same review, the writer describes women nowadays as less feminine and as toxic towards men now that they make their own decisions to divorce them, and so forth. Another review states that it is justified that men take the red pill. This reviewer states that the red pill permits men to reveal the truth and confront it, rather than follow what is trending and is politically correct. This suggests that the red pill permits men from the manosphere to hinder feminists’ “indoctrination”.

Furthermore, author and novelist Ben Hourigan from Melbourne in Australia, a bestseller author on Amazon with his novels “Kiss Me Genius Boy” (2011) and *My Generations Lament*” (2013), wrote a review of Ian Ironwood's book on the manosphere. In his review he states that arguments said in Ironwood’s book on the manosphere’s perspective is a reasonable counterpoint to modern gender feminism (Hourigan, 2014). According to Hourigan, these counterpoints highlight the need for a balanced approach on gender politics that are deemed to be the well-being of men and women. This perspective is that men should embrace their own gender identity without being or feeling obligated to obey to feminist societal demands and expectations.

### **2.3 The Case of Gerard Depardieu**

Since 2020, the French actor Gerard Depardieu has been put into examination (Sud-Ouest journal, 2024) as in 2014 and 2021, three women accused him of sexual assault. Depardieu starred in some of the most highly regarded French films. However, several fans and individuals were shocked after having heard the claims of the victims and following the diffusion of documentary *La Chute de l’Ogre (2023)* as it showed his vulgar and sexual comments during his voyage to North of Korea in 2018, namely regarding the sexual comments he made in a video about a twelve-year-old girl riding a horse. Furthermore, in 2018 Charlotte Arnould, a 22-year-old French actress, accused Depardieu of rapping her twice (Le Figaro, 2023). Arnould states that her mother set up a meeting between her and Depardieu at the actor’s place, to help her in the cinema world. Unfortunately, this “help” resulted in a traumatic event for the young woman.

Considering that the accused is a well-known, affluent actor, this has led to much public debate. Some, including women, argued that Gerard Depardieu is innocent as he is an important actor in France. Others are revolted and want to see him arrested. Such discussions are mainly held online, such as on Instagram and Reddit. Regarding the topic of this thesis, it is difficult to define whether Gerard Depardieu shares common ideologies with the manosphere; however, his comments are often based on women’s bodies and on how horny he is because of them. Particularly, he is aware that he is a successful actor known internationally and well respected by many. This increases the power dynamics between the targeted underage girls and women and the famous, successful and wealthy male actor who is conscious of the privileges that he has, based on his status and the male-dominated society. Moreover, in the cinematic world, several other directors and actors have been accused of sexual assault as well recently, such as Benoît Jacquot and Jacques Doillon (Sud Ouest, 2024). This is posing an issue in the domain of cinematography as it is suggesting a violent male-dominated world. Why, in a

domain such as art, are there several men who are being accused of sexual violence towards women and minors? What is triggering this activity forbidden by law and deemed as a crime?

## 2.4 Discourse Analysis on Gerard Depardieu and social involvement

It was only in 2017 and 2019 that Reddit enhanced its policies against hate speech. Macron shocked many when he openly defended Gerard Depardieu on television. The important questions one may ask include; What discourse do people use to defend him? How do people justify his actions? Are there any sorts of signs of people engaging with the opposite side of view? Don't sexual predators need to be held accountable? In this part of the thesis, I will analyze some empirical data taken from Reddit, as this features the most accessible discourse of online misogyny. In order to study the empirical data of the manosphere, the research must apply some basic ethnography technics. One must go native to understand what the manosphere thinks. What do individuals of the manosphere do? What do the individuals of the manosphere think of what they do as they do? Moreover, to accomplish what?

This news didn't only travel within the borders of France, but became a story on an international scale, as some individuals from English news sources responded to it in English. One individual on Reddit under the news of Gerard Depardieu assaulting women, writes the following text: "*Feminists got crazy all over the world! Soon one won't be able to say anything without someone accusing of who knows what for an abuse!!!*". In this passage, the writer relates the news of Gerard Depardieu being accused of sexual assault to feminist discourse. Moreover, this individual describes women as hysterical and voices a global generalization about feminists around the globe. More importantly, this Reddit user is claiming that because of feminism one's right to free speech is limited to the extent that using it may cause them to be accused of sexual assault. The issue that the actor was accused of being a sexual predator in the headline of the news story, made this individual relate those accusations to the limitations on free speech allegedly caused by feminism. This seems to reflect a common sentiment within these subgroups of the online manosphere community, particularly those aligned with the Men's Rights movement in the sense of the perceived overreach by feminists and the portrayal of men as victims of unjustified accusations. It appears that the claim that feminists are getting "crazy" and too sensitive is an attempt to delegitimize feminist concerns and reject feminist critiques (Marwick 2018). The same Reddit user further states that they are in favor of equal rights, despite their statements. Shouldn't then any individuals be able to expose their abuser without being related to an ideology for doing so?

Anyone, including people who do not identify as feminists, can be a victim of sexual assault. Nevertheless, according to Marwick and Caplan, participants in the manosphere often focus on anti-feminist rhetoric and discourses. They find themselves in a polarized social group. The issue in this case is that is not about who Gerard Depardieu is, but about the concerns regarding sexual predators in general. Tellingly, another user, who identifies as a man, writes in the comment section of the same news article; "*LEAVE GERARD ALONE! If the guy was really that bad, there wouldn't be a controversy. Hence he's subject to an unjustified witch hunt.*". This comment seems to be protecting Gerard Depardieu's reputation. Moreover, this user is claiming that the actor is the victim of a witch hunt, which is once again relating it to women posing a threat to men. According to Marwick and Caplan, digital harassment or hate speech derives from ideological background. In this context, several ideologies are conveyed in the comment section, in ways similar to how discussions in the manosphere unfold. This is because this individual relates the accusations against Depardieu to feminism and a witch hunt. According to Marwick and Caplan, this type of discourse is what reinforces the manosphere's

ideology. In other words, the terminologies used by those individuals, such as calling feminism crazy and using the term ‘witch hunt’ enhance the misogynistic stance. Furthermore, the way people like Gerard Depardieu have defended themselves against misbehavior charges speaks to a larger narrative that is skeptical of misconduct claims, portraying them as emblematic of baseless "witch hunts" rather than as valid demands for accountability. These claims are consistent with the larger discourse examined by Marwick, which emphasizes how language is employed in online forums to support stories of male victimization and hostility to feminism (2018).

A broader argument has been made by individuals who have a certain public position. Around 50 public personalities signed a petition on the Figaro site in favor of Gerard Depardieu’s innocence. This petition’s main statement claimed: “*C’est l’art que l’on attaque*”, “*It is art that we attack*” (Le Temps, 2023). This central claim “It is art that we attack”, frames the accusations against Depardieu as an attack on a broader scale than just the individual, but an attack on art itself. Art is presenting as being threatened by individuals who accuse Gerard Depardieu of lewd behavior. It is observed that there is a division between people defending Gerard Depardieu and others supporting the victims. The claim presents itself as a collective defense in support of art and Depardieu. There is a dispute within the public sphere. In other words, this divide in public opinion is pitting advocates for the victims and Gerard Depardieu’s supporters against each other, which as a result enhances the tensions within society. According to the journal Le Temps, the celebrities that have signed this petition are mainly in Gerard Depardieu’s age group or generation. This suggests solidarity within the age group and thus some shared cultural perspective. This may help explain why those individuals are defending him, as they are most probably romanticizing and feeling nostalgic for the cinematography of their times. Some of the celebrities that have signed the petition include the film director Bertrand Blier, and the actors Pierre Richard, Jack Weber, Gérard Darmon, and Benoît Poelvoorde. Among actresses, Carole Bouquet, Nathalie Baye, and Charlotte Rampling signed the petition, as did singers Carla Bruni, Arielle Dombasle, Roberto Alagna, and Jacques Dutronc (Le Temps, 2023).

It is interesting to see so many public figures siding with Gerard Depardieu, despite risking their reputation. Notably, French President Emmanuel Macron defended Gerard Depardieu on television, claiming that he is an extremely admired actor. Macron’s stance added weight to the defense of Gerard Depardieu. He claimed that “*Je déteste les chasses à l’homme*”, which means “I hate the hunting of men”. This statement evokes the metaphor of witch-hunting. Does that mean Emmanuel Macron is part of the manosphere? No. However, the president’s rhetoric on this matter does mirror the discourse encountered within the manosphere. His choice of words underscores the pervasiveness of some manosphere discourse techniques in defending the actor despite the misalignment.

Considering the above-mentioned case, a complex interplay of power relations, discourses, and debates within the public sphere is present, especially with celebrities taking a stance. Those celebrities are uniting around Gerard Depardieu in the face of predator claims (Marwick, 2018). Furthermore, the rhetorical strategy of Emmanuel Macron illustrates how discourse influences the dynamics of power and representation, and the public narratives within society. On top of that, the fact that Emmanuel Macron is a man and representing France is well received by all in the public sphere, but it is well received within the manosphere.

## **2.5 Framework of the #MeToo movement in the manosphere**

As mentioned, there are counterarguments to the claim that Gerard Depardieu is innocent, especially from individuals in the #MeToo movement. Valerie Dickel and Guilia Evolvi, explore how the #MeToo movement is framed in the manosphere. Macron's stance reflected a classical patriarchal attitude toward a country that is constantly protesting for women's rights and against violence and sexual assault towards women. Misogyny emphasizes punishment towards women who do not conform to the social norms of the patriarchy (Dickel and Evolvi, 2022). Therefore, misogyny is deeply embedded in privileged institutions that tend to single out particular women. (Dickel and Evolvi, 2022). In relation to the Depardieu case, this suggests that male sexual predators are still protected by the patriarchal idea that feminism poses a threat to men. In a nuanced way, this general idea is still present nowadays in Western countries such as France.

These discourses represent a broader issue for other communities on the internet but also in real life. Individuals in the manosphere are defending the sexual assault allegations against Gerard Depardieu as there is always a possibility that he is innocent. Nonetheless, one cannot ignore the numerous vulgar comments he has made during video recordings toward underage girls who do not speak French. In other words, the actor sexualized and objectified these underage girls.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Considering the above, Marwick and Caplan argue that men in the manosphere use the concept of misandry to justify and legitimize their hate speech toward feminism, in order to preserve patriarchal values and ideologies. Influential individuals such as Ian Ironwood deem the manosphere as essential for the survival of men's gender identity and of men's rights. Many in the manosphere share arguments about how women are "wimping" men and thus pose a threat. This is reflected in the current case of Gerard Depardieu. Ideas extremely visible in the online manosphere are very much present in current society, albeit usually in a more nuanced way. It is not extremely visible until a celebrity such as Gerard Depardieu is accused of a crime and is nonetheless adored by fans and prominent figures such as the president, who is meant to represent his population as a whole. In this case, Emmanuel Macron fails to represent the social movement #MeToo, which is extremely present in France, and has made sexual harassment a big topic of discussion. This exhibits the fear that some public figures and other individuals may have towards feminist discourse. The use of the term misandry is present in larger contexts of internet movements such as the alt-right. The alt-right often voices dissatisfaction regarding feminism and social justice. (Marwick, 2018). This interdependence emphasizes how crucial it is to comprehend how language functions in digital environments, how instrumental it is for spreading extreme viewpoints and defending negative behavior (Marwick, 2018). Finally, the public figures are turning Gerard Depardieu as well as art itself, into a victim of "men hunting" and an "attack on art". Those discourses travel from the digital world to the real world, which helps shape and enhance certain anti-feminist ideologies.

## Chapter III: #MeToo's response to misogynistic discourse online

As argued in the previous chapter, there are ideological battles online that expand in the offline world. Individuals from the manosphere express several sexist and misogynistic discourses, targeting men as their audience. Dickel and Evolvi (2021) make a distinction between sexism and misogyny. Sexism is when comments are made by the opposite sex, based on stereotypes of gender roles. Marwick and Caplan analyzed misogynistic discourse in the manosphere, and how they use misandry as a tool of self-victimhood (2018). They also explored to what extent those ideologies and the associated discourse affect and reach individuals in real life and to what extent it affects one's perception of feminism. People defending Gerard Depardieu are using the discourse of misandry to frame his case as an attack on men and, in this case, on art. One may wonder how this affects the #MeToo movement? Is it hindering it? How do individuals in the feminist movement respond? This chapter will analyze *The Right Sex*, a book by Amia Srinivasan (2021) that elaborates on the #MeToo movement's response to sexual predators. Using this, I will then explore the feminist response to the above-mentioned Gerard Depardieu case based on discourse analysis and empirical data.

### 3.1 False rape accusations within society and domains such as cinematography

Srinivasan discussed her interactions with two men who have been falsely accused of rape. She states that she knows several women who have been raped but did not report it to the police (2021). Moreover, she states that statistically speaking, based on official figures for the UK, the police recorded 216 out of 2643 false claims (2021, p. 14). Furthermore, out of those 216 complaints, only thirty-nine suspects were named and six were arrested (Srinivasan, 2021). Against two of these six individuals' charges were pressed, which were eventually dropped. Furthermore, the author states that only 0,27 percent of men are falsely accused and 0.07 of men are falsely temporarily charged, as none resulted in a wrongful conviction.

Although those numbers are rather low, it is not an issue that should be taken lightly. Still, they cast doubt on the claim that there are conspiracies of women using their "feminine privileges" to the end of hurting someone, or that men are always falsely accused. Srinivasan further states that although the numbers were low, black men were more likely to be accused of rape than white men and more likely to be charged. Particularly, in the United States, Srinivasan states that 76 out of 147 of the falsely convicted men were black between 1989 and 2020. That is 52 percent of those convicted of a sexual assault based on false accusations or perjury (Srinivasan, 2021). According to the statistical analysis of RAINN in the publication "Perpetrators of Sexual Violence," fourteen percent of the male population in the United States are black men. Based on this percentage, twenty-seven black men are falsely convicted. These statistics show that it is 3.5 times more likely for a black individual to serve time in prison for a sexual assault compared to a white man with the same conviction. This has to do with the common prejudices raised against black men as they often come from unfavorable social classes (Srinivasan, 2021).

Srinivasan analyzes the contradictory concerns with regard to fabricated accusations pressed on wealthy white men. In today's discourse, affluent white men fear that if they are falsely accused of rape, they will receive the same treatment as minority men get (Srinivasan, 2021, p.16). This fear is disproportionate as they are more likely to be protected by the legal system. This concern points to deeper problems having to do with inequality across gender, class, and race boundaries rather than just injustice (Srinivasan, 2021). The claim of vulnerability persists, as it is being driven by ideological constructions rather than by the facts (Srinivasan, 2021). As

a result, the fear of false rape accusations actually results from a misunderstanding of who is truly vulnerable and is rooted in biases and particular societal narratives (Srinivasan, 2021).

### **3.2 #MeToo introduction**

The movement #MeToo was first introduced in 2007 by Tarana who was sexually abused as a child (Britannica, 2024). The movement aims to spread awareness of sexual harassment and assault around the world and thus create change. It became prevalent in 2017 when a woman started sharing her sexual assault experiences online with the hashtag #MeToo. It mainly revolved around denouncing famous actors or wealthy men accused of sexual assault. The movement started online and was quickly spread globally (Britannica, 2024). This movement is also used to promote vigilance against sexual predators so that those individuals face punishment (Srinivasan 2021).

### **3.3 #MeToo, a movement that intimidates patriarchal men**

The movement #MeToo presents complex dynamics regarding accusations of sexual assault. Srinivasan focuses on the evolution of the discourse around sexual harassment accusations. She states that some accused men, although they were deemed to be innocent, seek to reduce their culpability and demand sympathy rather than denying their actions when being falsely accused of sexual aggression (Srinivasan, 2021). Moreover, the victims, whether minors, men, or women, should have been aware of what those powerful men are capable of. The only thing that these wealthy white men deny is that they should be punished and suffer the consequences for their actions. As we saw in the context of Gerard Depardieu in chapter two, Emmanuel Macron expressed empathy toward Gerard Depardieu when he states that the actor was a victim of a “men hunt” instead of underlining his sympathy for the victims. Gerard Depardieu, on the other hand, is denying the accusations.

The men accused of sexual assault are part of a larger societal dynamic, where privilege and entitlement shield them from facing the consequences of their actions (Srinivasan, 2021). Moreover, according to the author, those societal dynamics are rooted in the patriarchy which is still anchored extremely well in today’s society. For instance, the main debate in the case of Gerard Depardieu is whether one should take back his Legion of Honneur, rather than, for example, acknowledging the pain the victims are going through. The discourse reflects the ideology behind the patriarchy, with difficulties distinguishing between flirting and harassment, refusal of sex, and rape resulting from coquettishness (Srinivasan 2021, p.30). Although part of the public, especially feminists from the #MeToo movement, hold them accountable to several degrees, these men prioritize their reputations and well-being over facing and acknowledging their crimes and the pain they cause others. In the given context, this could be due to the fact that these men have a powerful position and are taking advantage of it. Again, we see the patterns of the privileges the patriarchy enjoys in a male-dominated environment. The behavior of the accused reflects the positions of power exploiting gender norms and expectations with little regard toward the victims they have hurt and the impact of their behavior (Srinivasan, 2021). We can find another example with the Belgium rapper Romeo Elvis, who is the brother of Angele, who became known with the title “Balance ton quoi” (Throw your what) which became a feminist anthem song for the #MeToo movement. In French #MeToo is translated as “Balance ton porc”, which means “Throw your pig”. However, she quickly received backlash on the internet, mainly from men, when her brother was accused of sexually assaulting a woman. Romeo Elvis did not deny the facts and rather publicly apologized and tried to seek sympathy from the audience. He wasn’t sentenced.

### **3.4 Solutions to responses against sexual assault?**

Srinivasan (2021) discusses the limitations of institutional settings, such as universities, and of legal responses to sexual assault and misconduct. She also raises the point, as mentioned, that there is a failure in accountability and a normalization of misconduct. Those failures and normalizations pose challenges and obstacles to activists and victims who resist toxic masculinity and the privileges of the patriarchy. Such thwarted voices emphasize the importance of the discussion around justice reform regarding privileged men and sexual assault. With regard to gender expectations, men with certain prestige, such as famous actors, singers, and so forth, are aware that there are certain expectations in their environment with respect to gender stereotypes and exploit them to justify their actions. Unfortunately, those societal expectations drive ideologies that objectify women and encourage aggression and dominance. Those two traits are strongly embedded in the mansphere.

In this light, Srinivasan presents a nuanced critique of carceral feminism. Carceral feminism is an approach to the criminal justice system that addresses gender-based violence (Srinivasan, 2021). However, it is criticized for its failure to address the reasons that cause sexual assault and violence against marginalized communities and for how it affects the extent to which non-white individuals are punished. In other words, one must focus on the social, political, and economic factors that contribute to gender-based violence. Instead, Srinivasan draws attention to the abolitionist feminists, who criticize punishments in the form of incarceration in prison, as they deem it not effective. Abolitionist feminists aim to address the origin of the causes of social issues. These feminists have the objective to create a society in which prisons and police are obsolete. They believe this can be achieved by advocating for a drastic transformation of society's social and economic relations (Srinivasan 2021, P.158). However, according to the carceral feminists, the #MeToo movement is limited when it comes to exposing the harassers online and seeking accountability (Srivaniisan, 2021).

Finally, Srinivasan highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding gender-based violence. Particularly, one should recognize how different forms of oppression compound and intersect each other (2021). A discussion of power dynamics is of course basic to the feminist movement, as they focus on how to navigate these dynamics to center marginalized communities. These feminists emphasize community accountability in intersectional analysis and prioritize transformative justice over punitive measures.

### **3.5 Study case through the lenses of the feminists**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, women accusing Depardieu stimulated disputes and debates in the public sphere, both online and offline. Some from within the cinema and art industry defended him against the accusations, and online men from the mansphere, but also certain women, specifically from a certain age group. Feminists reacted too, and French President Emmanuel Macron's response to the accusations engendered even more reactions from the feminist community (20 Minutes Journal, 2023). Macron had stated that Gerard Depardieu "made France proud", and this sparked several controversies within the public sphere. Feminists have called the president out, for speaking for the French population on this issue when many disagree with the president and do not want to be associated with this stance or claims (20 Minutes Journal 2023). Nowadays it seems not to be surprising anymore to read about an actor or singer sexually assaulting a woman or a minor.

Feminists have accused the President of showing more empathy for the aggressor than for the victims (20 Minutes, Journal 2023). This resembles the case of Roman Polanski, the French-

Polish film director who won an Oscar for his movie “J’accuse” in 2020. His case has surfaced in several debates within the feminist community, as he has been accused twelve times of rape (Franco Inter journal, 2024). He has an extremely good reputation regarding his artwork: some call him “*Le Rimbaud du cinéma*” (“The Rimbaud of the cinema) (Franco Inter, 2024). What is different, however, is that Roman Polanski does not seem to have the same attitude behind the scenes as Gerard Depardieu has. People describe him as a gentleman, despite the resurfacing of his actions in the context of #MeToo (Franco Inter Journal, 2024). This shows that sexual predators can present themselves differently. Nonetheless, their reputation may be key for one to hinder the consequences of one’s action on another. In other words, it may seem more believable that Gerard Depardieu is a sexual predator based on his open vulgar comments in contrast to Roman Polanski who presents himself as a gentleman in the eyes of the public sphere. Ironically enough, both of those men are deemed to love women despite the accusations.

These cases have stimulated some feminists from the #MeToo movement to question whether we should honor an artist for his artwork only. This question is now at the center of the debate regarding Gerard Depardieu. Depardieu has received the Legion d’Honneur before, and now feminists are asking for it to be taken away from him. The minister of the Cultural Department of France, Rima Abdul Malak, has indeed opened a procedure to repeal the honor (Le Parisien, Bureau, 2021). The minister has stated that Gerard Depardieu’s attitude has embarrassed France (Le Figaro, Hausalter, 2023). Considering that some artists have stated that “*an attack on Gerard Depardieu is an attack on art*”, while the cultural minister and some in the #MeToo movement feel that Gerard Depardieu shouldn’t possess a Legion d’Honneur, there is a discussion about whether we should dissociate art from the artist. This discussion has been brought up several times before, such as when the Netflix documentary “Leaving Neverland” (2019) brought to light individuals who claimed to have been sexually assaulted by Michael Jackson. In the context of Gerard Depardieu, one may ask whether artists should receive honors when they are good at their job but represent a threat to others. Francois Hollande, former French president, has also taken a stand. He responded to Macron’s claims with “*No, we are not proud of him*”. This stance may, of course, be used as a political strategy to gain the votes of feminists and others who feel this way.

The television program in Europe1 “Pascal Praud et Vous” with the host Pascal Praud, featured an open discussion with people defending Gerard Depardieu (Europe1, 2023). Interestingly, most are women between 60 and 70 years old. They claimed that they had no issues being cat-called in the past on the streets, that they have themselves endured sexual harassment, but that there are worse things in life than Depardieu sexualizing 10-year-old girls’ horse riding. Those women argued that women nowadays are becoming too vigilant and are causing limitations to freedom of speech for people like Depardieu and other men who make “joky” remarks. In the comment section, one man stated that he had lost faith in women and wouldn’t rely on them ever again, which mirrors a MGTOW attitude.

Finally, on several social platforms, women have been spreading awareness of the case of Gerard Depardieu, while also calling the President out for his rhetoric. For instance, an activist on Instagram, Sofia\_sept7, posts and spreads opinions in relation to the #MeToo movement. She uses sarcasm to denounce both the actor and Macron’s rhetoric. She uses the hashtags #MeToo, #BalanceTonPorc, #MeTooTheatre, and #BalanceTonDepardieu. She also shares discourses and tweets from other people on X who protest against sexual predators in the film industry. Finally, she also shared a reel from the news page on Instagram “simonemediafr” of an interview with the actor Vincent Lindon. In this interview, the subject of Me Too and the

Cannes Festival were addressed. The actor claims that he stands with feminists in the #Me-Too movement in the movie industry. However, his request to “help me to help” stimulated critical discussions in the comment section, where people admonished him for asking for help to help to prevent sexual assault when the #MeToo movement is still active and does exactly that. Others saw his position as a positive step forward. Perhaps as a response, it has been decided that the 77th Festival of Cannes will be opened to #MeToo as head of the media (RTS info, may, 2024).

### **3.6 Wealthy white predators with no consequences**

It may seem shocking to see how white male celebrities are sometimes barely paying the consequences of their actions. As argued in this chapter, this is probably because of the patriarchal norms that are still entrenched in the industries of cinema and music (Srinivasan, 2021). For instance, though Romeo Elvis apologized for sexually abusing a young woman, he hasn't been sentenced to any form of punishment. Perhaps more importantly, his sister Angèle was harassed online and punished, especially by men claiming that she was not a real feminist because of the actions of her brother, or she was mocked using “#ThrowYourBrother” instead of the #MeToo translation in French “#BalanceTonPorc” (#ThrowYourPig). This example reflects how white wealthy sexual predators often do not have to face the consequences of their actions, but other individuals, in less powerful positions, do.

In an open letter to the Figaro, Gerard Depardieu openly wrote that he denies that he has ever assaulted a woman. He further states; “*Not everyone laughed. If, in believing to live in the present intensely, I hurt, or shocked someone, whoever it was, it was never my intention to hurt, and I beg you to excuse me for behaving like a child who wanted to have fun in a gallery.*” (BBC News, 2023). This mirrors Srinivasan's argument on wealthy white men being confused about when a woman gives consent for intercourse. Another thing he said in his defense was that Arnould had invited herself into his room, and that he took it as a form of consent. Gerard Depardieu is putting himself as the victim, seeks empathy on how he is oblivious to everything that is happening to him, and relates it to his humor and his will to live fully.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Srinivasan invites the reader to rethink traditional gender norms and the inequalities they sustain. This invites one to reflect on power structures and to critically engage within them. Her approach is based on intersectional analysis, which permits to understand and study gender inequalities and injustices. To overcome social and cultural consequences such as false rape accusations, pornography, and sexual education, one must advocate for more nuanced self-reflection to understand sexual politics and desire. The author highlights the importance of grassroots community-based approaches rather than centralized top-down initiatives. Moreover, to overcome these issues, one must critically challenge societal norms and power structures.

Although feminists from the various different sub-movements all aim to change the rules of justice, the characteristic of patriarchy is still extremely anchored in our society. Those patriarchal characteristics are present in the online and offline world and in sectors such as cinematography, politics, and music.

## **Chapter IV Consequences of the manosphere**

As previously mentioned, characteristics of the manosphere are visible in today's society, in the creative industries, in politics, and elsewhere. These characteristics include men's victimhood, as discussed and analyzed through Marwick and Caplan's research, and the inability of certain men to grasp when a woman gives consent. This is why the #MeToo movement is important: it makes those issues relevant and visible so that people become aware, and self-aware. The movement is being challenged by those ideologies. Nonetheless, it managed to make its stance visible in the public sphere: it was a hot topic, for instance, at the Cannes Festival 2024. In this chapter, I focus on the consequences of those two polarized discourses. First, I will delve into the results of echo chambers for those social groups. Second, we will look at the impact of the manosphere on the offline world. Furthermore, this chapter will explore these ideological battles resulting from gender division.

### **4.1 Echo and bubble chambers**

While an enormous variety of things are being said, shared, and discussed on online platforms, easy access to these discussions and ideas is being filtered with personalized algorithms. When one consumes a type of discourse and ideology online, it is easy to fall into an echo or bubble chamber. This means that the algorithm is manipulated to fit new information to one individual's personal preferences. However, being stuck in an echo/bubble chamber has drawbacks, such as just consuming one side of an ideological debate, without encountering or facing counterarguments. For instance, I consume news related to feminism, thus my feed's main ideology traits will be feminist discourses in which I am not directly confronted by information shared from within the manosphere.

The discourse in the manosphere on masculinity, relationships, and sexuality intersects with narratives and discourse surrounding Gerard Depardieu's behavior. Several individuals who spread misogynistic and fascist discourse, also rationalize, and justify the actions of the actor, which is consistent to their worldview. This ideology includes an emphasis on traditional gender norms and a rejection of feminist critiques. On platforms such as Reddit or Instagram, discussions about gender, societal issues, and relationships are topics of discussion, also referencing Gerard Depardieu's case, and these could in theory pose threats to the manosphere and subgroups that are feeding on patriarchal norms. For instance, a case such as Depardieu's on Reddit, triggers different responses to it, often feminist and misogynistic responses. Within those two binary groups, the manosphere is not open to the option of women being victims of sexual assault by this actor. Moreover, the preferred discourse of the manosphere is that Depardieu is the victim of a manhunt, disregarding the victims' stories. As previously discussed, these discourses provide broader insights into how individuals of the manosphere react to the accusations of sexual assault involving high-profile individuals such as Depardieu.

### **4.2 Manosphere's offline consequence on society**

Jacob Johansson states that there are consequences of the online discourses in the social groups that make up the manosphere in the offline world. To what extent is violence condoned? The alt-right knows how to use technology to share its political views. In the alt-right, several individuals are men and women (Johansson, p.6, 2022). It became prominent through the forum 4chan, in which alt-righters searched for a nostalgic internet scape that possibly never existed, one without the "mainstream" ideologies. This forum has forged many young men into alt-right individuals, (Johansson 2022, p.7) claims. It has also shaped several manosphere

subgroups such as MGTOW and incels and has become a feature of the new right-wing extremists (p.7). However, the alt-right has been less prominent in the last few years as their discourse often got banned in the mainstream media. The alt right\_ also played a role in helping Trump win the election and he promoted the alt-right in his campaign through the news (Johansson, p.6, 2022). Making the alt-right visible poses a threat to society. One of those consequences is shown through Trump winning the presidential election in 2016. Donald Trump has brought up the alt-right to the news, making them visible. This posed a threat to other individuals such as women, black individuals and the LGBTIQQ community who do not adhere to the alt-right's social norms. Moreover, those social norms are extremely racist, conservative and misogynistic. The red pill endorsement by Donald Trump ideologies, elevates ongoing backlash toward feminism.

This seems to show that if powerful men such as Trump endorse the red pill ideology, minority groups such as Indigenous individuals, black individuals, and also women, will suffer the consequences of it, and social movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter will continuously be hindered. In other words, there is a power dynamic. Moreover, Donald Trump describes the red pill as a conservative expression of resistance to changes in traditional gender roles. The endorsement of the red pill is a resistance to the sociopolitical and cultural gains of feminists.

Another consequence that affects the offline world is shootings. According to news websites such as the *New York Times*, *Vox*, and *Daily Beast*, recent shootings and outbreaks of violence are related to incels frustrated that PUA techniques did not work for them and are related to a sentiment of hatred toward women (Johansson, 2022). Furthermore, Jacob Johansson states, based on the manifestos of two shooters such as Anders Behring Breivik who killed 69 young people near Utoya island in 2011, and, Elliot Rodger who killed 6 people and injured 14 UC Santa Barbara students in 2014, that it has rarely been made clear that there are connections between sexual anxiety and right-wing nationalism, and that these have resulted in several shootings where the aggressor would first target the most beautiful girls before shooting the rest (Johansson, p.144, 2022). These acts are deemed as acts of terrorism, which represent a great danger to society. These types of shooters aim to create a fantasy worldview structure (Johansson, p.163, 2022). Moreover, this worldview is related to women as an idea and picture that was once desired and that got destroyed (Johansson, p.163, 2022).

### **4.3 Groupism among individuals**

A final consequence is worsening separation between genders. Popular in the manosphere is a traditional view of patriarchy, about how men and women are different, and have different roles to play in society, based on their biological differences (Johansson, 2022). The ideologies of feminism and #MeToo are utterly different. Because of echo-chambers one is unlikely to face counterarguments and be triggered to understand and perhaps be educated on the views from the other side. As a result, the manosphere presents a threat, and this may spill over into the offline world (Johansson, 2022).

Brubaker refers groupism as consequence to taking groups for granted in the domain of nationhood, ethnicity, race, and religion (Brubaker, 2004). He criticizes the tendency to view social groups as fixed and homogeneous. Brubaker views groupism as the primary actor of social conflicts. By illustrating them as unitary actors, leads to oversimplified and social and political analysis (Brubaker, 2004). Groupism seems to nowadays also be visible not only in nationhood, ethnicity and religion, but also in gender. This will be analyzed in the subsequently.

On several social platforms, one can identify comments that derive from the manosphere's ideologies. For instance, in Reddit on the Men's Rights Movement social space, several people share certain types of terms to describe their ideologies and their fear of women. These terms often have negative connotations towards women, such as earlier mentioned using the term "manhunt" when a well-regarded successful man is accused of sexual assault, "feminists wimps" is also a term that is recurrent on Reddit to describe women's discourse, but also used by Ian Ironwood for his book *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity* (2013). For example, one individual commented below an article on Reddit "Feminists don't like being reminded that they need men", and another responded by stating that men fought in World War II. This comment mirrors Jacob Johansson's claim that such men feel nostalgia for the old times but also illustrates the mentality of the men's rights movement in which women need men and men are not given enough credit for having fought World War II. It also suggests that men from the manosphere do not need feminists' "wimps", as they are the ones who had to go to war. They deem that feminists' "wimps" are just whims, and thus not serious or valid for society. Another example, on Instagram, is provided by reactions to a young woman who had made a reel explaining how her biological functions differ from men's. This video resulted in comments such as "*How can two things be different but equal. That doesn't exist*". This comment, presumably written by a man, suggests that because men and women are biologically different, they cannot have equal rights. Inequalities and separation of gender roles are often produced and reproduced within the manosphere (Lilly, 2016). Those ideologies are continuously reproduced through the type of discourse such as the one this Instagram user uses. In feminism, women deem their rights equal to men despite their biological differences, whereas in the manosphere women are considered as inferior to men and as objects of desire.

Skinner and Gottfried published an article on the enhanced gap between genders within young people's attitudes toward masculinity and women's equality (Skinner and Gottfried, 2024). Questions such as whether feminism has done more harm than good emerge and whether the term "toxic masculinity" is helpful. Other questions ask about approval of the influence of Andrew Tate. Based on a survey conducted by King's College London, the majority of young male respondents of the survey deemed the term 'toxic masculinity' unhelpful (41%), whereas 47% of younger women found it helpful, against 29% of young men. The study also shows that among men 29% have a favorable view of Andrew Tate, in comparison to just 7% of the women. Finally, 46% of women had a positive view of feminism in comparison to 36% of young men (Skinner and Gottfried, 2024). These numbers show differences in opinions among young adults in the United Kingdom. This mirrors Johansson's statement on how most incels are young individuals. The young age of these individuals is shocking not, this could be the result of the rise of social media that permitted those social groups to be created as a result of patriarchy and the new movements in relation to new views on gender roles and identity. As previously mentioned, insecure boys and men become unsure and insecure of a man's identity and its relationship with his masculinity and thus seek similar views for comfort on social media. This shows that ideologies and ideas are shared online within echo-chambers resulting in polarized views among young adults.

#### **4.4 Are there solutions against the manosphere?**

Is there room for improvement? Rejecting the manosphere does not mean accepting emasculation. How can men be prevented from joining those troubling social sub-groups that make up the manosphere? Although Reddit and other social platforms have enhanced their policies to counter hate speech and misogynistic discourse, the manosphere remains, for instance in forums. Even though it is less visible nowadays online, young men still find

themselves following these ideologies online, and Trump still supports the idea of the red pill endorsement and the alt-right (Vallerga and Zurbriggen, 2022).

To find a solution to the issue, one must understand what may trigger young men to join the manosphere. Vallerga and Zurbriggen (2022) argue that boys and men struggle with the pressure of traditional masculine roles which often harms and makes one insecure toward relationships. This pressure harms boys by imposing restrictive expectations. Those expectations are intensified within the belief that men must ensure their families' financial success. As a result, trying to move past these roles, men face severe gendered expectations, and thus turn to the manosphere spaces to navigate these changes. For some men, traditional gender roles create a cycle to conform to outdated norms that lead to relational and personal difficulties (Vallerga and Zurbriggen, 2022).

Furthermore, there is the pressure from society to move beyond restrictive gender norms, which may result in feelings of anxiety, and in turning to the manosphere for comfort (Vallerga and Zurbriggen, 2022). Further research on what drives members of the manosphere is required, for example in psychology, if we want to spread awareness and to prevent people from engaging in these kinds of dangerous and misogynistic discourses. The main challenge is to prevent radicalization. Also, encouraging healthy relationships between boys and men is important to mitigate the harm that comes from hanging on to traditional gender roles (Vallerga and Zurbriggen, 2022).

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Although the social group of the manosphere is not as visible as before 2017, they are still extremely anchored in society and on the internet. Moreover, Trump tried to bring the ideologies of the manosphere to light by endorsing the red pill. Furthermore, those social groups present a greater threat offline. As discussed, incels for instance become sexually frustrated and commit terrorist attacks such as shootings. This is an issue that should not be taken lightly. It has also been observed that gender divides are being enhanced. This is because of different viewpoints one may have on gender. The idea of gender roles is still extremely present, however, among women feminism has a significant influence on their own gender role. Men are becoming confused between the traditional gender roles and the deconstruction of patriarchy's ideology which may trigger them to join the manosphere for comfort. However, although one must encounter different ideologies to nourish one's opinion, it is difficult to do so on the online space when online users are stuck in echo and bubble chambers.

## Conclusion

Several troubling narratives are being spread online by different social groups. The manosphere encompasses several sub-groups that all present a threat to society to a certain extent. As discussed in the last chapter, online discourses among incels have resulted in enhanced frustrations and even terrorist acts such as mass shootings. The alt-right is supported by powerful individuals such as Donald Trump (Johansson, 2022). As discussed in the first chapter, all the manosphere's sub-groups show some fascist characteristics, although they do not necessarily identify as fascist (Johansson, 2022).

In the illustrative case of Gerard Depardieu, a clear polarization of ideologies has emerged between individuals who support the actor, including several celebrities and president Macron, and individuals who seek justice for the victims, for example through the #MeToo movement. People who support the actor often use the argument of the "manhunt", neglecting the victims' pain. As mentioned in the second chapter, some influential individuals in the manosphere, such as Ian Ironwood, perceive it as something great happening to society, as it "protects" men from being indoctrinated by feminist ideologies. Furthermore, men from the manosphere also deem themselves victims of feminist rhetoric, which they label as 'misandry'. As such, they use the concept of misandry to justify their hate speech toward women (Marwick and Caplan, 2018).

Nonetheless, not joining the manosphere does not mean one has emasculated oneself. Srinivasan (2021) argues that for one to implement change in a culture that accepts sexual harassment and aggression, one must self-reflect and challenge the societal norms and structure. Still, how can one prevent young men from joining the manosphere? Although confronting different viewpoints on a daily basis may encourage critical thinking, it remains challenging to do so in the online environment. This is because the algorithms result in online echo and bubble chambers. The manosphere enforces its ideology through online discourses and discussions, as is visible when cases emerge regarding powerful men being accused of sexual allegations, such as in the case of Gerard Depardieu. The ideology enforcement is also seen when Trump endorses the Red Pill, as well as other powerful or influential men such as Andrew Tate. This ideology's implementation counters social movements such as feminism, perhaps especially when a president sides with the predator without acknowledging the pain of the victims.

Cases like this also enhances the #MeToo movement, as it mounts a powerful response. Nevertheless, the enforcement of opposing social movements and ideologies results in gender separation and groupism. All in all, the manosphere poses a threat to society through terrorist actions, misogynistic, discriminatory, and racist discourse, and enhancing polarization.

Misogynistic discourses online are not unknown in society; however, there may be insufficient attention to the threat and problems they cause. Perhaps, if educational systems pay more attention to educating pupils on the danger echo chambers may pose, it may encourage more critical thinking regarding the platforms we use nowadays and the discourses we engage in.

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