

POLAND, “MISOGYNIST MOVEMENTS” (2016) -- PASSAGES

Deindividuated users are more likely to feel that ... responsibility for their actions can be transferred to the group, rather than assigned to individual actors on the basis of their actions. When examining the mobbing behaviors that emerge from sites such as 4chan, 8chan, and Reddit, an overarching identity ... is seen as the responsible actor, and criticism of individual actions is rejected as nonsensical or irrelevant. The occasional figurehead seems to wield immense power over the activities of the group and can direct members' actions to a series of targets.

Further, Kabay connects what are called “autotelic experiences” to the harmful outcomes of deindividuation. Autotelic experiences involve “the loss of self-awareness that can occur in repetitive, challenging, feedback-rich activities” such as gaming, coding, or even scripted and structured patterns of harassment... Autotelic activity usually involves engaging in the same action repeatedly, escalating certain aspects of it, and receiving environmental responses that encourage certain behaviors and discourage others...

Online harassment mobs generate a ... repetitive experience that provides members with self-defined patterns of feedback and rewards. Harassment and abuse may be scripted or shared language patterns will emerge; the group will reward more and more flagrant abuses and encourage more invasive types of attacks (leading to things like doxxing or hacking); feedback is given in the form of in-group encouragement and other reactions. Any response to the harassment is interpreted as “feedback,” whether it's encouragement from other abusers, being blocked or berated by targets, or having an account reported and deleted....

Deindividuation and autotelic experiences are a potent brew and, when experienced in tandem, are repeatedly connected to increased aggression, a willingness to commit illegal and abusive activities, and a reduction in the capacity for self-reflection. (Poland, 68)

DEINDIVIDUATION THEORY IS NOT ENOUGH – ALSO NEED TO CONSIDER CYBERSEXISM

[M]obs typically attack women of color, and particularly black women, before expanding their harassment to white women, women with a high-profile online presence, and eventually men, especially men of color. Harassment mobs are acting on the beliefs they hold—consciously or subconsciously—about their role and the role of their targets in specific cultural situations. Understanding how cybersexism and deindividuation interact is essential for understanding how hate mobs come to exist and for considering ways to circumvent or stop future mobs from forming. (Poland, 69)

MRAs can be found in many forums on Reddit, the social media and news website, including men's rights-specific subreddits, as well as within the Pick-Up Artist and Red Pill communities. Pick-Up Artists are men who use and teach one another to use manipulative tactics for hitting on women, with the goal of getting them into bed. Such tactics are often indistinguishable from sexual harassment and include activities like “negging,” or casually insulting women in the hopes of garnering a defensive reaction that continues the conversation. Red Pill groups, named after the red pill in the 1999 movie *The Matrix*, are devoted to discussing the moment members decided women have all the power in society and complaining about this injustice.

There are often deep divisions between Pick-Up Artists and Red Pill forum members—Pick-Up Artists want to attract and use women, while Red Pill proponents often want to have nothing to do with them. Failed Pick-Up Artists often move to the Red Pill camp. Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) are yet another subset of MRAs; these are men who say they want nothing to do with women or the institution of marriage and yet spend a great deal of their time complaining about and harassing women in online spaces...

While MRAs claim to have lofty goals and to support men in a society that is weighted against them, the reality is very different. An MRA is far more likely to be involved in harassing and abusing women than he is to be genuinely supportive of other men or working to solve the issues MRAs claim to care about so deeply. (Poland, 69-70)

What MRAs have in rage, harassment, and violence against women, they lack in actual activism. MRAs regularly complain about the lack of support for male victims of domestic violence and the scarcity of shelters for men in that situation, yet A Voice for Men—which regularly conducts fundraisers to keep itself running and Elam's pockets lined—has done nothing substantial to create or support such a shelter. (Poland, 75)

GAMERGATE

In August 2014 the Internet blew up—or so it seemed to many people. A geyser of hatred that had been building mostly below the surface of various online communities finally broke through, and the explosion has yet to come to an end. (Poland, 75)

It all started with what has become known as the “Zoe post,” a continuation of domestic violence that became the springboard abusers used to enact violence on as many marginalized people as possible. Written over a period of weeks about video game developer Zoe Quinn by Eron Gjeni, Quinn’s former boyfriend, it is an inflammatory piece: more than nine thousand words long and filled with a mixture of hyperbolic accusations, personal information, and outright lies. It is exactly the kind of narrative angry and reactionary misogynists enjoy latching onto when looking for an excuse to harass and abuse a woman. Gjeni crafted the post to elicit precisely that reaction. He posted the screed in the comments sections of various game-related websites, most of which deleted it. Then, he created a Wordpress site solely for the post, and it ended up on 4chan...

[W]hen Gjeni’s post went live, the low-level whispers of harassment became a roar that drowned out everything else. In an article about the history of the event Quinn recalls the first night: “[Her] phone began buzzing uncontrollably. Angry emails from strangers flooded her inbox, calling her a ‘slut’ and linking to a blog she’d never seen before.... Within minutes, a friend warned Quinn that someone had altered her biography on Wikipedia. It now read, ‘Died: soon.’... The next day, the real horror began.” Gjeni’s post was out in the world, and the face of Internet harassment was about to change. (Poland, 76)

The harassment escalated from calling women sluts and whores to sending rape and death threats, doxxing, SWAT calls, and stalking, both online and off. Thousands of new Twitter accounts were created for the express purpose of engaging in this abuse, with their users swarming to attack each new target, and more were built to take their place after each new account was suspended... (Poland, 77)

Another favorite Gamergate target, to no one’s surprise, is Anita Sarkeesian. Creator of the *Feminist Frequency* series and the Kickstarter that produced *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*, a YouTube series about feminist analysis of sexist elements common to video games, Sarkeesian’s continued presence was a natural outlet for Gamergate’s ire. Many of the same arguments used against her initial series continue to be used, including, bizarrely, that she is a fraud, despite having delivered on her Kickstarter and then some. This argument is offered amid the misogynist, racist, and antisemitic arguments that have been continuously leveled at her for years, including showing her face redrawn to look like a famous piece of Nazi propaganda.

At the height of Gamergate, in October 2014, Sarkeesian was forced to cancel a speaking engagement at Utah State University after the university received a threat that said, if she spoke, there would be “the deadliest school shooting in American history.” The threat included a list of the various weapons—including a semiautomatic rifle and pipe bombs—the person claimed to have. When the school refused to put any additional security in place or prohibit weaponry from being brought to the lecture, Sarkeesian felt she had no option but to cancel her appearance.

Gamergate supporters continue to send threats, harassment, and abuse to Quinn ... Sarkeesian, and all of the people who voice their support for Gamergate’s targets or their opposition to Gamergate’s behavior, including academics attempting to study Gamergate or any form of online harassment. Even when those sending the threats identified themselves as adherents of Gamergate, people accused Sarkeesian ... Quinn, and others of falsifying the threats themselves to gain attention. A favorite line of Gamergate’s is that such women are “professional victims,” who concoct elaborate schemes to create the appearance of harassment, up to and including fleeing their own homes, in order to garner news attention and, somehow, money. (79)

[Mike] Cernovich, [Milo] Yiannopoulos, and [Christina Hoff] Sommers all found a marketing opportunity in Gamergate: a constantly active audience willing to buy whatever it was they felt like selling that day. No matter what their stance had been previously, their support of Gamergate guaranteed that followers of Gamergate would hang on their every word. While Cernovich and @Nero were certainly responsible for coordinating a great deal of harassment, Gamergate also developed its own outlets for that activity. After being banned from coordinating attacks or even discussing Gamergate on 4chan, its members moved over to 8chan, a website built on the same principles as 4chan but without the modicum of humanity 4chan moderators have tried to enforce in recent years. (Poland, 82)

EMMA ALICE JANE, “BACK TO THE KITCHEN, CUNT” (2014)

This article explores the signal characteristics of gendered vitriol on the Internet – a type of discourse marked by graphic threats of sexual violence, explicit ad hominem invective and unapologetic misogyny.

Despite the risk of causing discomfort or offence, my case is that e-bile must not only be spoken of, but must be spoken of in its unexpurgated entirety because euphemisms and generic descriptors such as 'offensive' or 'sexually explicit' simply cannot convey the hostile and hyperbolic misogyny which gives gendered e-bile the distinctive semiotic flavour that I intend to highlight. Furthermore, the anonymous or quasi-anonymous producers of such discourse are likely to benefit from the fact that their utterances and actions are considered too abhorrent to repeat or discuss in mainstream contexts. In a nut shell, my case is that examining unexpurgated examples of e-bile is the only way to get any meaningful sense of the phenomenological reality of this discourse – a task which must precede the canvassing of possible remedies and interventions. (Jane, 559)

These examples illustrate a number of recurring characteristics of e-bile in that: they target a woman who is, for one reason or another, visible in the public sphere; their authors are anonymous or otherwise difficult to identify; their sexually explicit rhetoric includes homophobic and misogynist epithets; they prescribe coerced sex acts as all-purpose correctives; they pass scathing, appearance-related judgments and they rely on ad hominem invective. These missives are not offered primarily as documentary evidence of personal suffering or to map the contours of individual experience, but to offer a diachronic perspective on gendered e-bile by showing that it has been circulating for many years, and that – as we will see – its rhetorical construct has remained remarkably stable over time. (As an aside, I note that 'don't feed the trolls' – the usual words of wisdom offered to the targets of e-bile – have been resoundingly ineffective in my case. I have never replied or responded to e-bile which has been sent to me directly, or which has circulated about me in online fora. There was, however, no perceivable reduction in the stream of sexualised vitriol I received until I ceased writing journalistic commentary in 2012.) (Jane, 560)

JANE ON SARKEESIAN (P. 562):

In mid 2012, feminist blogger and gamer Anita Sarkeesian spoke publically about being subjected to a concerted and multi-pronged 'hate campaign' of online harassment (Sarkeesian 2012b). Sarkeesian was targeted after launching a crowd-funding campaign to fund a series of short films examining sexist gender stereotypes in video games (Sarkeesian 2012c). This prompted a 'cyber mob' attack (Sarkeesian 2012b) which resulted in, among much else: her Wikipedia page being vandalised with pornography and altered so that it read that she was a 'hooker' who held 'the world record for maximum amount of sexual toys in the posterior' (Greenhouse 2013); her website and YouTube channel being spammed with abusive comments and attempts being made to publically circulate her home address and phone number (Sarkeesian 2012b). In the aftermath, the first result returned by the Google search engine when it was asked to search for her name read, 'Anita Sarkeesian is a feminist video blogger and cunt' (Plunkett 2012).

Sarkeesian's Feminist Frequency website provides a meticulous documentation of the 'abusive cyber mob tactics' she maintains were employed as part of a choreographed campaign intended to silence her (Sarkeesian 2012b). In a blog entitled 'Harassing, Misogyny and Silencing on YouTube', she posts an unedited screen shot of more than 100 abusive comments that were logged over a two-hour period beneath one of her videos on YouTube (Sarkeesian 2012a). These, she says, represent 'only a tiny fraction' of the thousands of comments she received in total and include remarks such as 'She needs a good fucking, good luck finding it though' (radioactivetoy89 cited in Sarkeesian 2012a); 'so you're a bolshevik feminist jewess that hates White people . . . fucking ovendodger' (haploguy cited in Sarkeesian 2012a); 'fuck you feminist fucks ... fuck off faggo' (Arto572 cited in Sarkeesian 2012a) and 'Back to the kitchen, cunt' (TheDaveKD cited in Sarkeesian 2012a). In another blog headlined 'Image Based Harassment and Visual Misogyny', Sarkeesian re-posts pornographic photo manipulations (such as images in which ejaculating penises have been edited onto her photograph) and 'rape drawings' (including a picture of her being sexually assaulted by the Nintendo video game character Mario) that circulated so widely they reached the status of Internet memes. There are also screen shots of an online game called 'Beat Up Anita Sarkeesian' which invites players to 'punch this bitch in the face' (Sarkeesian 2012b). With each click, a photo of Sarkeesian becomes increasingly bloodied and bruised before it turns completely red. Reflecting on the gendered dimensions of the online campaign against her, Sarkeesian writes:

The image based harassment I'm discussing here is not part of any legitimate discourse but instead falls squarely into the category of misogynist abuse. It's a critical distinction and is evidenced by the fact that all of the images are attacking my gender or presumed sexuality and rely heavily on pre-existing sexist stereotypes....(Sarkeesian 2012b) (Jane, 562)

Drawing on a multitude of obloquious messages re-tweeted by women via the #MenCallMeThings thread on Twitter, Doyle also identifies a number of themes and sub-themes of misogynist communications online. These include: the claim that female targets are weak, oversensitive, hysterical, irrational and so on... the suggestion that female targets are simultaneously whores

and yet 'not worth fucking'... and all manner of miscellaneous threats of violence... (Doyle 2011a). Reflecting on this material, Doyle notes the 'overwhelmingly impersonal, repetitive, stereotyped quality' of the abuse, the fact that 'all of us are being called the same things, in the same tone':

What matters is not which guys said it: What matters is that, when you put their statements side-by-side, they all sound like the exact same guy. And when you look at what they're saying, how similar these slurs and insults and threats we get actually are, they always sound like they're speaking to the exact same woman. When men are using the same insults and sentiments to shut down women . . . we know that it's not about us; it's about gender. (Doyle 2011a, emphasis in original)

The cyber medium is new but the e-bile message has roots in a much older discursive tradition: one which insists women are inferior and that their primary function is to provide sexual gratification for men – and then denigrates them for this self-same characterisation. The litany of gendered e-bile examples furnished in this article provides key insights into these new articulations of misogyny. Among other things, we have seen: that such discourse relies on hyperbolic and sexualised derision; that e-bile amplification often follows e-bile exposure and the electronic venom directed at one woman is all but indistinguishable from that directed at another. One of the perverse paradoxes of e-bile is that the most personal of insults, attacks and threats can seem generic, predictable and almost tedious as a result of their ubiquity. By the same token, the anonymous or quasi-anonymous status of the perpetrators ... also has the effect of erasing the individual and coalescing all these mephitic voices into one.

The increasing number of first-hand accounts and examples of online vitriol make an arguably convincing case that e-bile is becoming more prevalent, as well as rhetorically more noxious. Moreover, while such discourse may once have circulated infrequently or only in Internet niches, gendered e-bile has now become normalised such that it is now acceptable to express even the most minor disagreement through the most affronting, offensive and aggressive sexualised venom. (Jane, 566)

In conclusion, I have argued that the risks associated with staying silent or speaking only obliquely about gendered e-bile in scholarship far outweigh the unpleasantness involved in examining this material in its uncensored entirety. There is ample evidence to support the proposition that there is a pressing need for scholars to confront gendered e-bile – in all its unexpurgated ugliness – because: (1) it has become such a dominant tenor of Internet discourse; (2) it has many self-generating properties and is therefore likely to become even more dominant; (3) its cruelty, hostility and misogyny would likely be considered entirely unacceptable if it was present to such an extent in other public domains; (4) it causes suffering and is likely reducing the inclusivity of the cybersphere; (5) it provides critical insight into the degree to which misogynist views are still held by many in the community and (6) for various reasons, thus far it has received insufficient attention in scholarship. (567)

GING, "ALPHAS, BETAS, AND INCELS: THEORIZING THE MASCULINITIES OF THE MANOSPHERE" (2019) -- PASSAGES

[W]hile there are some continuities with older variants of antifeminism, many of these new toxic assemblages appear to complicate the orthodox alignment of power and dominance with hegemonic masculinity by operationalizing tropes of victimhood, "beta masculinity," and involuntary celibacy (incels). (Ging, 638)

Nagle asks, "Can a retreat from the traditional authority of the nuclear family into an extended adolescence of video games, porn, and pranks really be described as patriarchal?," and concludes that it cannot. (Ging, 641)

[Do] the technological affordances of social media, such as speed, anonymity, platform algorithms, and social disembodiment, facilitate new and different ways in which to assert male hegemony[?] (Ging, 641)

[G]eek males embrace some aspects of hypermasculinity, such as the valorizing of intellect over emotion, but do not comply with others, such as sexual and sporting prowess. Therefore, although they are white, male and possess significant cultural capital, they perceive themselves as marginalized. (Ging, 642)

Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere is further complicated by the transnational nature of this space and its attendant overlaps between local, regional, and global configurations of practice. (Ging, 642)

The five key categories or interest groups identified as hubs of the manosphere were MRAs, men going their own way (MGTOW), pickup artists (PUAs)/game, traditional Christian conservatives (TradCons), and gamer/geek culture. It is important to note that, unlike the other categories listed, only a subsection of geek and gamer culture are part of the manosphere. (Ging, 644)

The most striking manifestation of this homogenization is the proliferation of red pill terminology, which started on the /r/TheRedPill subreddit dedicated to antifeminism and the defense of rape culture but which has subsequently spread into

MRA and MGTOW spaces. Even the TradCon site Masculine by Design features a Red Pill tab, along with Bible studies, Christianity, game, sex, and never marry a woman over thirty (NMAWOT). (Ging, 645)

The most striking features of the new anti-feminist politics are its extreme misogyny and proclivity for personal attacks. This marks a significant departure from men's rights before social media or what Papacharissi (2014) terms "the rationally based deliberative protocols of public spheres," coupled with a clear move toward what Ahmed (2004) describes as "the cultural politics of emotion." (Ging, 645)

This tendency toward personalized attacks supports the argument made by Papacharissi (2014) that emotion—in this case anger—is a key driver in the political coalescence of digitally networked publics. (Ging, 647)

[T]he discourse of white male suffering has become a dominant trope in American culture and is a deliberate strategy to reinstate the normalcy of white male privilege through the articulation of its loss. This oscillation between hegemonic and subordinate patterns of discourse [privilege and dominance / suffering and loss] is especially evident in the manosphere's appropriation of evolutionary psychology.... (Ging, 648)

[E]volutionary psychology ... relies heavily on genetic determinism to explain male and female behaviors in relation to sexual selection. (Ging, 649)

Certainly, white male privilege has been disturbed by a number of well-documented factors: destabilization of the labor market and the alleged "feminization" of the postindustrial workplace (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005); downward mobility, wage stagnation, and underemployment (Kimmel 2015); and a growing recognition of the rights of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender people, and people of color. (Ging, 652)

While the manosphere is by no means an ideologically homogenous bloc, accommodating much infighting between Christian and atheist, homophobic and progay, and pro- and anti-MGTOW and PUA elements, what is perhaps most striking is the way in which ostensibly contradictory masculine formulations—alpha, beta, jock, geek, straight, gay, Christian, and atheist—can coalesce around any number of contentious issues or flash point events when the common goal is to defeat feminism or keep women out of the space. (Ging, 653)