



“It’s Getting Difficult to Be a Straight White Man”: Bundled Masculinity Grievances on Reddit

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Abstract

This article examines a case of internet posts discussing social issues affecting men and masculinity. Analysis of 500 posts containing masculine coded language on the subreddit r/unpopularopinion suggests that masculinity, especially when intersected with straightness and whiteness, is discursively constructed in an imagined social hierarchy where the plight of straight white men is invisible. By framing opinions as “unpopular,” these posts suggest that while the poster’s view may be objectively true, it is disvalued in mainstream discourses. Three key findings emerged from this analysis: First, regardless of the particular social issue discussed, efforts to reduce social inequality were negatively evaluated on average. Second, negative posts were more popular on the site; thus, amplifying the visibility of grievances. Third, masculine coded language is structured on Reddit, such that certain issues are bundled together to generate salient, interlocking themes indicating a robust meaning system. Overall, these findings suggest that criticisms of social equality are embedded within a discourse of threatened masculinity, straightness, and whiteness. This research extends past work on internet discursive practices related to masculinity and gender by showing the pervasiveness and intersectional nature of masculinity threat in digital forms.

Keywords Masculinity · Men · Masculinity threat · Reddit · Discursive practice · Heterosexuality · Whiteness · Men’s rights

Over the past several decades, support for gender and sexual equality has been increasing along several dimensions. More men are likely to support gender egalitarianism in the home, politics, and work than they have historically (Shu & Meagher, 2018). Similarly, men’s opinions about same-sex relationships, once a defining feature of masculinity, have changed drastically (Diefendorf & Bridges, 2020). For example, it is less acceptable now for men to espouse openly anti-gay or sexist views than it was historically (Diefendorf & Bridges, 2020). Though views on gender and sexuality may be changing, we also see evidence of critical responses to these shifting conceptions of masculinity. From Men’s Rights Activists and the rise of misogynist internet spaces, what Ging (2019) calls the Manosphere, to mass shootings

fueled by male anger (Silva et al., 2021), to gendered critiques of what some refer to as the rise of “cancel culture,” it seems that these shifting gendered meanings are not equally embraced by all men.

As with other popular phrases like “political correctness” or “wokeism” used to capture a particular social phenomenon, the exact meaning of cancel culture is sometimes nebulous. Typically, however, it refers to a phenomenon by which a public figure experiences public shaming or the withdrawal of support for the expression of no longer socially acceptable views or behaviors pertaining to topics like race, gender, or sexuality (Bouvier, 2020). Critiques of cancel culture suggest that social change, especially change involving gendered, racial or sexual meanings, may be experienced as a zero-sum game such that historically powerful groups feel unfairly harmed by expectations of ideological conformity (Norris, 2021). With the increasing digitization of communication, those who hold and wish to express opinions not in line with these expectations have populated Manosphere spaces on 4chan, 8chan, and Reddit, where semi or complete anonymity protects them from public response and condemnation.

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To better understand the gendered dynamics of cancel culture, we examine what, exactly, some of these opinions might be by analyzing posts related to men and masculinity on an internet message board, or subreddit, entitled “Unpopular Opinions.” Reddit is a fruitful place to examine discourses of masculinity because of its propinquity to online conservative bastions frequented by politically conservative straight white men (Daly & Reed, 2022; Gaudette et al., 2021; Ging, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). As such, the discursive practices in this space may shed light on shifting definitions of masculinity that might be harder to capture in interview and observational data where men may present themselves as more politically liberal than they are, perhaps due to fears of social condemnation (Pettigrew et al., 2013). In essence, we suggest that Reddit functions as a technological civil sphere where people can express themselves without censoring “the political” (Eliasoph, 1998), or those topics, often ones involving inequality, that historically are omitted from polite conversation to preserve social ties.

In this study, we ask, “What opinions are considered ‘unpopular’ pertaining to men and masculinity?” An analysis of 500 posts from r/unpopularopinion, demonstrates that unpopular opinions relating to men and masculinity reveal current debates about, and shifting definitions of, masculinity. Based on these debates, we argue that actual or perceived increasing racial, gender, and sexual equality is framed as a threat to the status of straight, white, cisgender men. We introduce the term “**bundled grievances**” to capture the way that threats to masculinity are not best understood as singular, but as intersectional.

Changes in Masculinity

Historically, masculinity in westernized societies has usually been defined in reference to a variety of unmasculine others – children, upper-class men, immigrants, African American men, women, and more recently, gay men (Kimmel, 2017). While the specific other may vary, what has remained relatively constant is the association of normative masculinity with whiteness, heterosexuality, and middle-classness. As such, increased rights for marginalized groups have destabilized privileges associated with being white, straight, middle-class, and male.

These changing definitions of masculinity extend beyond the local and are tied to global economic and political shifts (Connell, 2012; Salzinger, 2016). For certain groups of American men, global economic shifts have been particularly painful. Over the past 30 years, some groups of men in the United States have seen their real wages decline (Shierholz, 2013), manufacturing jobs disappear (Autor et al., 2017), and felt the increasing absence of union power (Rosenfeld et al., 2016). As Hochschild (2016, p. 2020)

writes, it has been “an era of numerous subtle challenges to [American] masculinity.”

Not surprisingly, given the association of American masculinity with occupational success, whiteness, heterosexuality, and economic self-sufficiency, this decline has been particularly sharp for working-class white men. In turn, they have responded with both rage and mourning, a phenomenon Carlson (2015) calls “mourning Mayberry.” Carlson suggests that contemporary American white men are trying to regain “masculine dignity” (2015, p. 24) in a culture where they no longer have access to what felt like a simpler time associated with a mythical town that reflects a certain set of racial, classed, gendered and sexual norms. They mourn what they perceive as a loss of traditional values, especially regarding masculinity (Carlson, 2015). For these men, this era has felt like one of increasing gun control, government regulation, and too many laws protecting gender, sexual, and racial/ethnic minorities (Hochschild (2016). In this sense, Trump’s promise to “Make America Great Again” was in many ways a promise to “make men ‘great again’ too...” (Hochschild, 2016, p. 229). While not empirically true, these men felt that gains for historically disadvantaged groups were losses for men like themselves.

The contemporary gendered moment then is one characterized by what Connell calls an “incoherence in gender relations” (2012, p. 4), a tension between a “modern” masculinity characterized by egalitarian beliefs and practices and a “traditional” masculinity, characterized by more patriarchal beliefs (2012). Paying attention to this incoherence is central to evaluating the relationship between gender inequality and social change, as gender inequality is both flexible and adaptive (Connell, 2012). What initially seems like change or progress may actually indicate more complicated social currents.

Diefendorf and Bridges (2020) underscore an argument about an incoherence in gender relations, specifically in terms of sexual prejudice. They argue that understandings of gender and sexuality “have shifted in ways that make them less easily recognizable, but effective in preserving enduring systemic, institutionalized and structural mechanisms involved in the reproduction of inequality.” Such shifts obscure gendered values by reframing social issues. For example, some groups of white men frame white masculinity as a stigmatized identity in a way that clouds the gendered and racial advantages that often accompany such an identity (Bridges, 2021). This strategy is part of a larger process that Bridges and Pascoe (2014) describe as “hybrid masculinity,” or the way that “men occupying a diverse collection of privileged identities mobilize configurations of masculinity that work to simultaneously secure and obscure their relative positions of authority and power” (Bridges, 2021, p. 664). Indeed, while younger generations of men are generally perceived as more egalitarian overall, emerging

research suggests that, especially in terms of support for LGBTQ people, this is not always true (Worthen, 2021). Such research emphasizes a need to examine how men perceive the impact of social changes relative to their own social location.

Masculinity Threat

One way to understand how contemporary configurations of masculinity are formed in response to “others” is through the concept of masculinity threat. The concept of masculinity threat suggests that when a masculine identity is threatened men respond with compensatory behaviors, or behaviors that restore a claim to normative masculinity (Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2021; Konopka et al., 2021; Vandello et al., 2008). When men believe their status as a man is under threat, they overcompensate in response (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020). In other words, when a man’s masculinity is threatened, they often respond by “overdoing” those things that they believe qualify them as masculine.

When men’s masculinity is threatened, they may respond by intensifying inegalitarian beliefs, endorsing violence, or more strongly expressing support for harm. Threatened masculinity can result in intensified negative attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities, specifically gay men (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Willer et al., 2013), feminine gay men (Glick et al., 2007), and trans folks (Harrison & Michelson, 2019). Men who are told they score low on a masculinity scale are also more likely to espouse attitudes supportive of sexual assault or coercion (Munsch & Willer, 2012). This is even true in terms of fantasy, as threatened masculinity is associated with violent rape fantasies and the use of violence against enemies (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020). Research also shows that threatened men exhibit more support for war and are even more likely to say they want to buy an SUV (Willer et al., 2013). Compensatory responses like these are more pronounced among men who endorse normatively masculine traits, values, and practices (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019). For example, men who report being amused by sexist and anti-gay jokes (O’Connor et al., 2017) and those who engage in gender harassing behavior (Hunt & Gonsalkorale, 2014) are more likely to engage in compensatory responses to masculinity threats. While responses to masculinity threats may be intensive among men who endorse normatively masculine ideologies, such responses are not limited to these men. In examining narratives about threatened masculinity among young men who espouse egalitarian ideas about gender, Munsch and Gruys (2018) find that these men still support the subordination of women and other men in response to these threats.

Moreover, masculinity threats do not need to be directed at a specific man; indeed, they can be a threat to the general

meaning of masculinity (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019) or a perception of a more diffuse social threat (Cassino, 2018). As Cassino (2018, p. 52) writes, “Men who feel that their gender identity has been threatened, whether by specific threats like loss of relative income or more diffuse threats, like a society that they perceive to be biased toward women, are changing their political views in response.” As an example, research by Carian and Sobotka (2018) finds that men who think that men’s group position is threatened are more likely to express favorable opinions of more masculine presidential candidates. Similarly, Cassino and Besen-Cassino (2020) find that a threat of unemployment is interpreted and framed as a gendered threat. Men express attitudes and engage activities laden with gendered symbolism to augment their masculinities (Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2020). These meaning systems do not exist apart from actions; instead, meaning and action are better thought of as related (Norton, 2014). Cassino and Besen-Cassino (2020) find, for instance, that worsening economic conditions for men increased gun sales.

Masculinity threat can also result in the acceptance of group-based inequalities that connect various attitudes and actions (Weaver & Vescio, 2015). That is, such opinions and beliefs about gender hierarchies do not exist in isolation, but form a relational system of meaning, or cultural system, that together strengthen gender group identity. People most often express ideas or hold opinions in bundles that are – however unevenly – comprehensible. As Norton (2014 p. 171) writes, “Meaning in cultural systems is shaped by the relationships between different elements in the system, but it is not determined in a singular way.” This bundling is important because threats to powerful groups and identities are often tied together in ways that invite a larger reaction than singular threats (Diefendorf, 2023). Here we suggest a similar model for understanding masculinity threat — under conditions of perceived threat at a large scale (e.g., cultural shifts), men engage a system of meaning that is organized and recognizable to in-group and out-group members alike, although perhaps in different, contested ways, that taps into the concerns of multiple identities and yet overall, its effect is to bolster claims to a shared idea about the status of men in society.

Studying Reddit

Reddit is a social media aggregator site hosting countless “subreddits,” each distinguished by a unique *r/* in their URL. Increasingly, social scientists have been drawn to Reddit as a research site (Amaya et al., 2021; Davis & Graham, 2021; Duguay, 2022). As of December 2021, each of the ten most subscribed subreddits has more than 24 million subscribers (*r/announcements* being the largest with more than 80

million subscribers). Users, even without a subscription, can explore a range of general interest and topical subreddits, and research suggests that Reddit's user base is growing (Duguay, 2022). Although used in many countries, users and subscribers are disproportionately from the United States and western European countries (Amaya et al., 2021).

In addition to studying Reddit's users, scholars have examined discursive contestations on Reddit over myriad social issues. While large subreddits dedicated to general political news are relatively diverse in terms of the views expressed (Duguay, 2022), smaller subreddits dedicated to special interests tend toward ideological homogenization. Notably, many smaller subreddits have garnered attention for their misogynistic and anti-feminist positions (Daly & Reed, 2022; Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019; Ging, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Massanari, 2017). This is particularly true of subreddits connected to the social movement known as "the Manosphere" (Ging, 2019). Users on subreddits such as *r/The_Red_Pill* and other Manosphere sites argue that men are disadvantaged in modern society because of liberalism and feminism. In finding community with other like-minded users, these subreddits become hubs for anti-feminist sentiments. Not all internet forums are explicitly anti-feminist though. Nevertheless, a driving assumption undergirding much of how people use anonymous forum-style websites is that most users are men (Phillips, 2015). This assumption facilitates a de facto male homosociality appealing to straight white men (Brooke, 2019; Phillips, 2015). And, while not altogether untrue, as more Reddit users are men than women, this social dynamic often leads to misogynistic online behavior (Amaya et al., 2021; Massanari, 2017; Phillips, 2015).

In this article, we study the subreddit *r/unpopularopinion* as a way to examine how Reddit users express unpopular, or canceled, views on relevant social topics. In doing so, our aim is to better understand the role of gender ideology in this discursive space specifically, and how masculinity threat structures relationships to social equity generally. We ask, "What opinions are considered 'unpopular' pertaining to men and masculinity?"

Method

Data and Sampling

Data for this study were collected from the subreddit *r/unpopularopinion* in early 2021. The forum is described as "For your Opinions that are Unpopular," and is one of the 50 most trafficked subreddits with more than 3 million subscribers and 10,000 or more subscribers on the site at any given moment. Using the *mkearny/rreddit* R package, we sampled from the total population of posts to date (Kearney,

2019). We limited the sample to posts including masculine words. Each sampled post contained one or more of the following words in the title or main body of text: man; men; male(s); masculine; masculinity; masculinities; husband(s); boyfriend(s); grandfather(s); father(s); uncle(s); nephew(s); son(s); brother(s); boy(s); bro(s); dude(s); homo(s); fag(s); gay(s); soyboy(s); misandry; misandrist; alpha; beta; incel; mra. These data do not include posts where masculine words were absent from the title or main text but were included in the comments.

This scrape yielded an initial sample of 80,833 posts, or all posts including such language from February 2012 to January 2021. In addition to post data, we also wanted to quantitatively analyze user engagement. The number of comments on a post is one way to approximate engagement. The range of comments on posts was 0–9,116, with a median of 15 and a mean of 41.85 comments. A total of 22,306 (27.6%) of the posts had little to no engagement (< 10 comments). Most posts ($n = 54,594$; 67.54%) had moderate engagement (10–99 comments). A small group of posts ($n = 3,697$; 4.57%) had a "high" level of engagement (100–1,000 comments), and an even smaller group of posts ($n = 236$; 0.3%) had a "viral" level of engagement (> 1,000 comments). To systematically analyze post content, within the sample of 80,833 posts, we randomly sampled 600 posts and oversampled 100 posts from both the "high" and "viral" strata for analysis.

We further narrowed our sample by manually excluding irrelevant data. Given the scrape collected posts based on text specificity and not contextual usage, many posts did not relate to masculinity per se, or words were used in ways that matched their gendered meaning but were not germane to the study. For example, an excluded post ended with a quote attributed to "a bunch of other dudes in history." The final sample used for analysis includes 320 randomly sampled posts, 88 from the high strata, and 92 from the viral strata ($N = 500$). This mixed-method sampling strategy strikes an analytical balance between massive computer-assisted studies of Reddit (see Duguay, 2022) that are generalizable but difficult to code for complex meaning and humanistic approaches (Ging, 2019) that are less generalizable yet attend to depth of meaning.

Coding

Coding began with the establishment of intercoder reliability among the researcher team by using a subset of posts that each person independently coded before the team met to compare and norm (Compton et al., 2012). In addition to the standards described by Compton et al. (2012), we also calculated Krippendorff's alpha with bootstrapped standard errors (Hughes, 2021). Acceptable levels of intercoder reliability vary, with coefficients of .90 or greater being

highly acceptable and coefficients of .70 being acceptable for exploratory studies (Lombard et al., 2002). As discussed by Neuendorf (2011), reliability score thresholds should also be examined relative to data type. For nominal data, scores higher than .75 indicate agreement with scores between .40 and .75 allowing for tentative conclusions. The Krippendorff coefficient for this study is .76 with a possible range of .71 to .81.

We generated 30 thematic codes (for example, “race”) that were not mutually exclusive. Each post was also coded according to its valuation of the social issue(s) it discussed: positively, negatively, mixed, and random. The positive code means a post expresses an opinion that is in favor of measures taken to lessen social inequality—negative is the inverse. Posts that expressed both positive and negative evaluations were coded as mixed. A minority of posts ($n=41$; 8.2%) were not about social issues at all, but were relevant insofar as they discussed a specific man, father, etc. These posts were coded as random.

Analysis

Analysis began with assessing the distribution of codes within the sample of posts. Although 30 codes were initially identified, 7 codes were removed from the analysis because they were rare or tangential to the study’s aims. Analyzing the remaining 23 codes as a singular representation of the ideas within this corpus points to how users frame masculinity, and variation in the volume of codes points to the popularity of themes within the unpopular opinion board. Table 1 details the codes, their definitions, and representative examples of posts for each code.

However, posts were typically more complicated than a singular theme as human-coders identified overlapping codes in most posts (see Fig. 1).

We supplemented the human-deduced connections with a correlation-based pattern observation strategy that identified themes that are more or less likely to co-appear in the same post. Specifically, we constructed a correlation matrix from the post-by-theme matrix. As the post-by-theme matrix is binary (e.g., each theme is coded as 1 for present or 0 for absent for each post), we generated tetrachoric correlation scores (Costner, 1965; McCarthy & Casey, 2008). We used the “tetrachoric” function in the psych package in R version 4.0.4 (Revelle, 2021) and constructed a heatmap visualization of thematic correlations. Because identifying thematic overlap, or patterns of correlation, is imprecise from “eyeballing” the heatmap, we constructed a cluster diagram based on k-means clustering with the factoextra package in R (Kassambara & Mundt, 2017).

Below we present our findings in two steps. First, we attend to the content of the posts in terms of their general themes and analyze how themes intersect with valuation

codes and engagement. Second, we analyze the heatmap and clusters to assess the discursive thematic bundling of masculinity threat.

Results

Analysis of 500 posts related to men and masculinity on the subreddit r/unpopularopinion revealed three main findings. The first is that the modal post expressed negative opinions about increasing social equality in ways that suggested white, straight cisgender men are victims of increasing social equality. The second finding is that negative evaluations are highly engaged on the site by users; thus, amplifying the visibility of these “equality grievances.” The third finding is that masculine coded language is structured on Reddit such that certain issues are bundled together in posts that reveal salient interlocking themes suggestive of a robust meaning system, something we term “bundled grievances.” In the results presented below, please note that most quotations of posts have been shortened and lightly edited for readability. Editing did not change the meaning of the post.

Social Inequalities

The majority (91.6%, $n=458$) of sampled posts on r/unpopularopinion discussed social equality, whereas a minority of posts (8.4%, $n=42$) did not pertain to social issues at all. Figure 2 shows the distribution of themes across these posts. A key similarity across posts was the valuation sentiment expressed about social issues. Whereas a minority of posts (11.4%, $n=57$) viewed social equality positively, the majority (60.2% $n=301$) viewed social equality negatively.

With more than half of the posts (60.2%) sampled from r/unpopularopinion expressing a negative perspective on social equality, most often targeting gender, racial, sexual minority, and trans equality, we observed numerous instances where posts aired grievances about the current political climate and minority visibility.

For instance, a post entitled “Leftists have turned around the meaning of the word ‘offensive’” states,

Most of the stuff that is called offensive today, in my opinion isn't offensive at all. On the other hand, a lot of the stuff that is being protected by accusations of offensiveness ... is actually offensive in my eyes. LGBT parades full of people dressed and behaving in ways that make them look outright ugly, almost as if they deliberately intend to be ugly in any way imaginable.

The post goes on to critique drag queens, trans rights, art, accusations of sexual assault, and the glorification of ugliness. The critiques within this post are emblematic of

Table 1 Thematic Codes, Definitions, and Examples

Code	Definition	Example
Bodies	Posts addressing bodies and/or appearance	<i>East Asian women are a lot more attractive in terms of looks than Western women</i> Let's just compare the facts: Asian women are generally shorter, more petite, cuter, almost childlike sometimes. They also usually have a slimmer build, with more narrow hips and a flatter chest contributing to an overall less curvy appearance. They're thinner usually and actually watch what they eat, not to say there aren't white women who watch what they eat too but it's less common for them to be diet conscious. Round soft face, small chin, their eyes, overall more neotenous facial features which make them appear more youthful and thus more attractive to males. A lot of Asian countries place more importance on cuteness over being hot. A cute small not curvy woman in a really long sweater is a lot more attractive than a stacked white chick in a bikini
Media	Posts addressing media content or figures, movies, music or celebrities	<i>"Hustlers" is woke and womanizing liberal agenda</i> I can't believe Hustlers has good critics and audience scores on IMDB & Metacritic. Even before the movie, the trailers shows that men are paying women less in the strip club and shows that all men are maninist. Men are drugged so they can steal their money regardless of their background and this is what these idiots call empowering and independent. This means that they are still relying on men and that they are "teaching" those young girls the wrong thing. Now the film set up could have been interesting but the social justice interjection is a huge turn off as well as besides that the movie is boring. People are even thinking J Lo deserves an Oscar despite her acting was sub-par as well as the leads and there's totally a lot of actors who should deserve this [...]
Sexuality	Posts addressing sexual identities, cultures or topics	<i>People aren't homophobic. You're just weird.</i> I'm a gay guy. I've got a beard, a build, and I dress like most humans do. I don't lisp when I talk, and I don't spend my time gossiping about other people in a weird Jersey Girl accent [...]. I don't dress in drag and attempt to stick my anus in the faces of bewildered pedestrians at exhibitionistic pride parades. People know I'm gay, and you know how much homophobia I've experienced in my life? ZERO. Not even from ultra conservative people [...]. Much of what we call homophobia today isn't an inordinate fear of gay people. It's not even really a fear. More of a mild to aggressive weirded outness at guys who use their homosexuality as a staging ground for obtusely bizarre, exaggerated feminine behavior [...]
Money	Posts addressing the economy, earnings or other economic topics	<i>Women malevolently setting up their marriages for divorce money are a bigger threat to kids than older men marrying younger women</i> Women shame fifty old men marrying thirty year old women. They are also happy when a woman of poor character wife sets up a divorce trap for her husbands wealth while playing suffering heroine at the same time. Society and culture need to shame cunning women more and encourage successful men even more
Feminism	Posts addressing feminism or the feminist movement	<i>feminist groups subtract from the overall womens movement</i> the real problem is that women have a feminist group in the first place and that means that regardless of the real issues society hasn't been making women feel treated equally there fore there is a problem, that can be solved by society as a whole not by a group of only women that are known among men as being aggressive. Women can be aggressive as they want about the issue anyone's allowed to but they have to be smart about it. I find a lot of feminists that are subtracting from the movement by making other feminists look bad just because they act on the same level of intelligence that the people who didn't allow women to vote in history did [...]
Relationships	Posts addressing aspects of romantic or intimate relationships	<i>Sorry, but you can't just pick and choose the pieces of equality that suit you [...]</i> Let me give some examples: Many women I know of, want the right to work and have the same opportunities and wages as men (totally understandable); however if you want this, you can't expect your male partner to pay for everything you do (for example pay for dinner always or pay [...] if you go away on vacation). [...] *Want a heavy item moved? At least try and move it yourself before assuming that it is a man's job to do so. [...] To be clear, I'm fully for gender equality and I completely understand that women are oppressed in various societies and cultures, but in many instances, I have seen some women who "pick and choose" where exactly they want to be 'equal' and never consider that men should be seen as equal when it doesn't suit them. It pisses me off. [...]
Race	Posts addressing race, racial identity or racism	<i>People will defend Cardi B because she's a woman and a minority and they will have no remorse about it</i> Cardi B openly admitted to drugging and robbing men when she was a stripper. Imagine if a celebrity who was a white man came out and admitted that? They would be (rightfully) in trouble, yet since Cardi B isn't white and doesn't have a penis people will continue to defend her and support her music. It's sickening that absolutely no one seems to care about this
Politics	Posts addressing the political system, partisanship or using the word politics/political	<i>Democrats and liberals should be separated into a 4 party system</i> I am a democrat but I don't believe in metoo and gay rights how ever i am still bundled into the same group as sjws same goes for republicans not all of them are alt right or trump supports therefore we need a 4 party system

Table 1 (continued)

Code	Definition	Example
Sex Practices	Posts addressing sex, sexual practices or sexual desires	<i>I'd rather jerk off than attempt to fuck a land whale</i> I used to browse the hooker section of Backpage and craigslist just to see the type of hookers in my area and 95% of the ads on these sites were either stolen Instagram model pics or Precious the movie looking bitches. The fat ghetto tatted bitches would charge like \$60 for 30 min and I'm like fuck you ain't worth it plus I might get robbed by big Tyrone. Even if you're a virgin the smart move would be to stay home and use that money to make your jerk off sessions better. I thought about this and if I had a choice either be an incel for life or marry Precious hands down with out hesitation I would choose incel
Violence	Posts addressing violence or physical harm, including gun violence	<i>It's not a bad thing to be wary of one group or to think one is worse than another based on some context</i> Men are stronger than women. Men also make up more violent offenders than women. It's simply surviving to notice that you are statistically more likely to get beat by men as a woman or as a man. [...] It's the same thing as saying 'don't go to downtown Chicago'. Obviously, not all people from Chicago are bad people, but it's not discrimination to say 'hey, I'd rather avoid this unsafe part of town because of all the unsafe people'. The same goes for any other sort of demographic. Sorry. That's just stats. Statistically, are you more likely to die in the hands of a taller person or a shorter person relative to you? Another example would be Honduras has a high murder rate. It doesn't mean there's any sort of hate towards people from Honduras [...]
Legal	Posts addressing laws, legality or the legal system	<i>Congratulations to women!</i> In light of International Woman Day, let's reflect on all the progress that has been made in the criminal justice system. In USA, women get 63% shorter sentences than men for the same crimes, and are 2× less likely to be jailed in the first place. In UK, women will only be jailed for "serious" crimes. What constitutes a "serious" crime? Well apparently not pedophilia: "Female nursery school manager, 44, who watched child rape videos and told chatroom pedophiles that babies were 'f***ing sexy' is SPARED jail". Hmmm... what do you think would happen to a 44 year old man? Or how about attempted murder? Nope, not a serious crime. So on this special day, let us celebrate 2-tier justice system as a necessary step towards gender equity and female empowerment. And remember kids, feminism helps men too. Fight patriarchy!
Sexual Assault	Posts addressing sexual assault or harassment	<i>No, you being groped doesn't make you a survivor</i> [...] The guy who grinded you at the club without your verbal consent was trying to kill you? [...] FML grow up world. I get that we are trying [...] to grapple with sexual violence. I get that touching a woman without receiving her consent beforehand [...] is risky [...]. I also understand that there is a wide spectrum of sexual gestures which can be psychological harmful to the recipient and result in their need years of work to piece themselves together and overcome. But unless the man was trying to kill you you didn't survive anything. Language like this is calculated to make a global demographic of sexually oafish young men look like murderers. [...] I think consent is sexy. I also think a large majority of "survivors" out there need to drink a juice box and shut the fuck up
Dating	Posts addressing dating or courtship practices	<i>In dating, looks prevail, not that so called "confidence"</i> My experience in dating has led me to the conclusion that looks play a big factor in this game called dating. And the number one lie that made PUA to bring a ton of money from idiots is the phrase "looks don't matter"; therefore, you must have the "game" in your inner core. Game means nothing more than having confidence. If confidence plays a big factor in dating industry, then how do you explain that a 5'5 Asian has the same dating options as a 6'1 Chad who plays sports and has an athletic build? Or how a poor and ugly man can flirt with ton of women by simply having confidence and succeed? Simply, no one of them can't have that, because women hate to stay around a guy who has only confidence. All they want is looks, money and status
Attractiveness	Posts addressing appearance specifically in terms of attractiveness	<i>A lot of unattractive women pretend to be harassed</i> A lot of 'creepy dm' exposed posts seem incredibly unrealistic. You'll have a very overweight, not that attractive girl post these over the top screenshots of dms from accounts that are like a day old. Or she'll censor who it is from. It's not believable to me that very overweight, unattractive women have guys in their dms telling them how beautiful they are or how much they'd like to eat dat ass. Or you'll have those same women talk about how men on the street catcalled them or how someone wouldn't take no for an answer when asking them out...I'm not saying it doesn't happen but the sheer amount of unattractive women claiming this happens to them seems very dodgy to me
Arguments	Posts addressing the topic of arguments	<i>Female reddit users are more annoying than the males</i> Seriously, a good 70% of them can fuck off with their sassy replies. As soon as you get that annoying "honey" before a user proceeds to say something pretty degrading, it's most likely by a girl. r/women is pretty toxic on its own (banning people just for being dudes). Usually when a girl gets into an argument, some white knight shows up just because he wants that sweet virtual pussy. And when they bring up the fact that they're a girl, it's usually when it's unneeded so it just falls as "look at me, anon. I'm a girl on reddit!". Redditors are pretentious enough. Mix that with a girl, and you get a disaster. Now let's wait to see how many users are gonna call me an incel for this

Table 1 (continued)

Code	Definition	Example
Humor	Posts addressing humor or jokes	<i>If you make sexual jokes as a woman, don't act all bitchy when someone assumes you're a slut</i> 1.) women are rarely funny (at least in the way most men are) 2.) Vagina jokes are disgusting and so is anything about female sexuality, absolutely nothing funny about it when coming from a woman. Men can make much better jokes. 3.) It's shows you have little self respect depending on context (to an extent) especially if you make pervy jokes around men. 4.) Just don't be surprised if people treat you like a slut
Transgender	Posts addressing transgender identities or rights	<i>Saying you're trans, doesn't automatically make you trans [...]</i> There's this guy [...] that I follow on Twitter who identifies as a boy (ftm), but puts absolutely no effort into looking masculine. The only masc. thing about him is that he has his hair cut short, and even then, he wears long wigs often. Wears feminine clothing (dresses) makeup, shows off boobs, wears a full face of makeup almost everyday, no voice training, no HRT, nothing. He said he gave up on trying to appear masculine because he couldn't pull it off. As far as I know, that's not how it works. you don't just go, 'eh, I'm not masculine enough so I'll wear makeup and wigs and dresses and show off my boobs, but yeah I'm a guy.'? Am I insensitive or rude for feeling this way? It seems so unnatural to call him by he/him pronouns because of this. It's hard to take his gender seriously
Mental Health	Posts addressing mental health concerns including suicidality	<i>LGBT people who threaten to commit suicide unless they are accepted are terrorists</i> Using violence or threat of violence to spread your political message or try to force others to behave a certain way is legitimate terrorism and should be seen as such. What's the difference between "I'm gonna kill myself unless people stop being gay" And "Unless you call me a woman although I'm a man I'm going to kill myself" Both are equally despicable. Stop threatening others
Education	Posts addressing schools or the educational system	<i>The problem with diversity and wokeness is the culture surrounding it.</i> A few months ago I was fortunate enough to be exposed to a lot of people who were taking classes in college that educated them about the history of oppression in Canada, gender identity, and various topics associated with woke culture. Now, I personally believe that some of those classes (but not all) were created (possibly accidentally) to be propaganda. You can't convince me that a class on gender identity taught by a biased woman to the most impressionable members of society is a good thing, but that's what is demanded by these people and I find this to be legitimately disturbing. In the future, we won't look back on those classes or teachers fondly, especially not the ones in high schools. [...]
Incel	Posts addressing those who identify as "involuntarily celibate"	<i>I sympathize with incels</i> Of course not the radical ones who hate women, But the average guys who are probably depressed, lonely and relatively anti social. Not everyone can be this charismatic, gregarious person and not everyone wants to. So when people tell men that looks don't matter (an absolute lie) and reality blatantly reveals otherwise. [...] There's a strong chance most incels are good hearted intelligent people who are frustrated, envious because they have difficulty cultivating OPTIONS. [...] IF a man isn't naturally attractive (6ft + beard decent face) to an abundance of women looks wise he will have to face constant rejection, bad dates and dry spells. Wouldn't you be angry as well? [...] Men are kind of in a weird place right now, our traditional roles are changing, we are frustrated with dating and becoming more sexless and celibate, we live in a world of abundance with instant gratification at every corner many have lost their purpose and passion in life. We're being told we are trash, our dicks aren't big enough, we aren't tall enough, we aren't strong enough, we're committing suicide in droves and still expected to protect and provide despite more women graduating and earning significant incomes. [...]
Grammar	Posts addressing aspects of language or grammar	<i>Using the words "woman" or "women" as an adjective really bothers me</i> Full disclosure—I'm a man so I get that I don't have much of a say in these things. I'm a real pedant when it comes to grammar, and seeing these words used as adjectives, rather than the nouns that they are, in writing just bothers me. Example: "I was treated by a woman doctor" as opposed to "I was treated by a female doctor." I get that use of the word "female" as an adjective in such cases has been used in harmful ways and is now considered marginalizing and outdated, so I'm not advocating for that as a replacement. It just bothers me beyond reason from a grammatical perspective. That is all. Thank you for coming to my TED talk
Religion	Posts addressing religious identities, beliefs or practices	<i>So called "Conservative Women" are poofsters like all the rest</i> They act traditional and humble to fuck you over whenever it suits them, I bet these poofsters who pretend to be attracted to you don't even believe in God like they usually claim and secretly complain about the patriarchy and white males on the internet or at the local pub, fuck those poofsters
Abortion	Posts addressing abortion or social movements about abortion	<i>Pro-choice uses pro-life rhetoric when it's about a man</i> As soon as a there is a post about a man not wanting a child and wanting to opt-out, the rhetoric becomes uncomfortably pro-life... Should have used a condom Shouldn't have had sex. That's your responsibility!

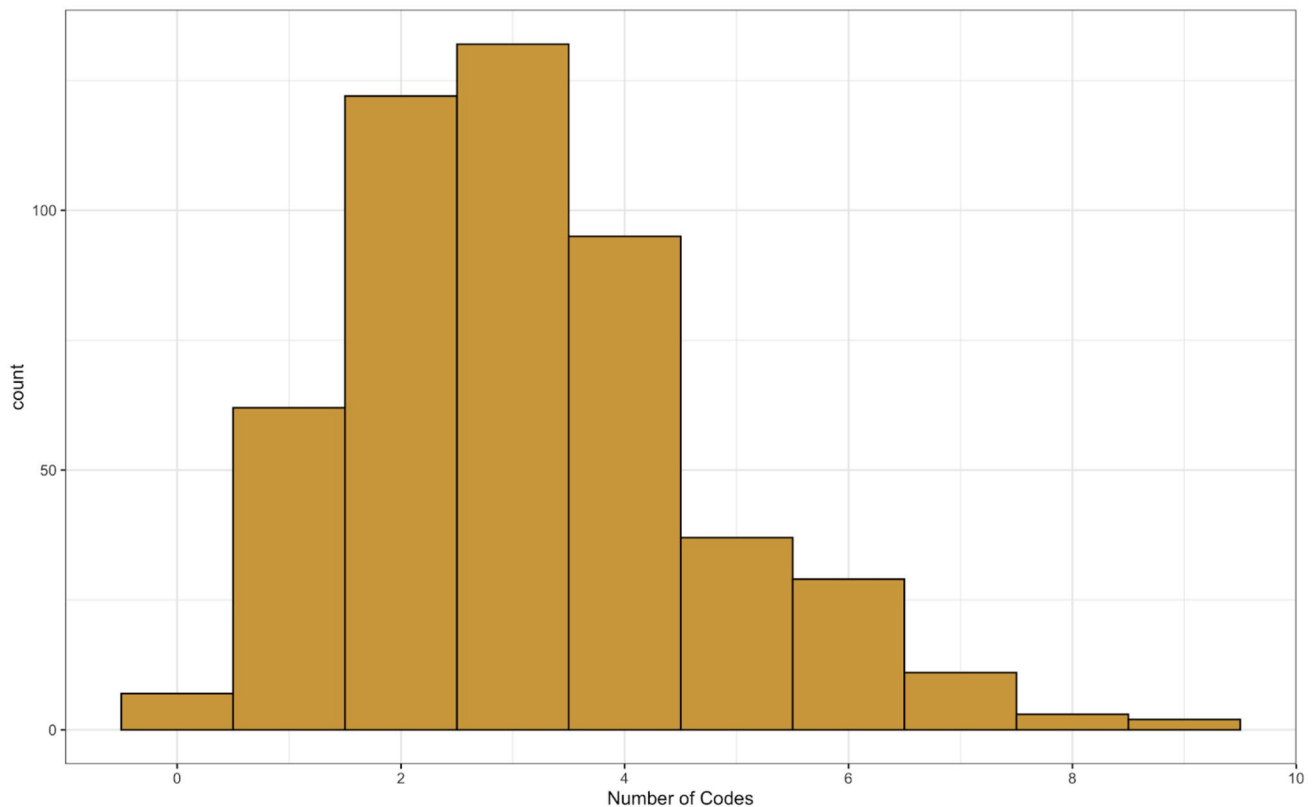


Fig. 1 Distribution of Overlapping Thematic Codes per Post

the negative perspective many posters take in this sample when discussing the various rights of minoritized groups.

Negative posts can be further distinguished into two groups. The first group suggests that to the extent issues of social inequality still exist (many negative posts suggest social inequality has been “solved,” rendering additional measures and advocacy unnecessary) the best approach to lessen inequality is with a “blind” approach that is applied to all individuals. For instance, a post entitled, “We shouldn’t be pushing women into careers where there aren’t enough of women in a certain field” argues,

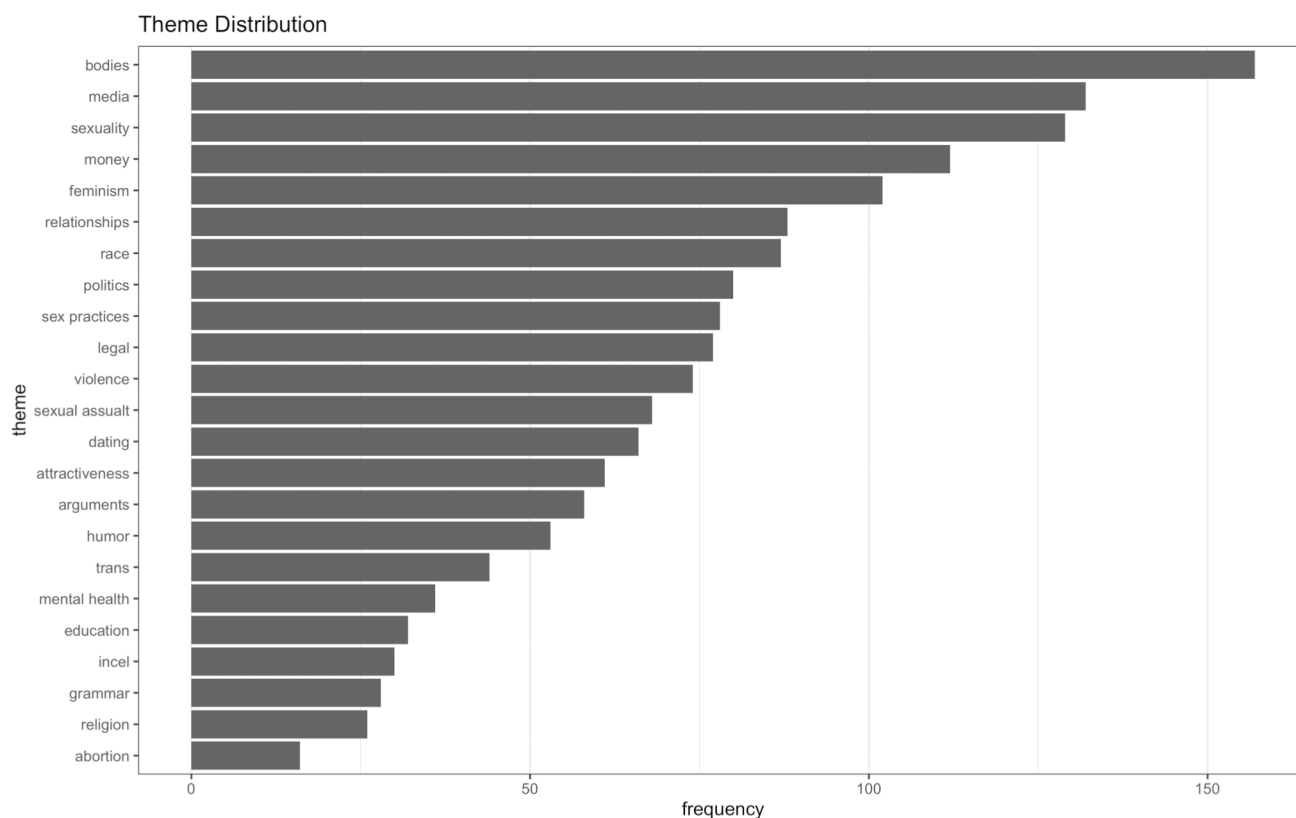
Look I don't get why there are scholarships for only women to get into stem/OTHER careers. I just saw on my college website that they're giving \$20,000 to women who go into stem. Why not give that scholarship to both WOMEN & MEN who go into STEM? By all means If a women is wanting and willing to go into stem then go ahead but don't discriminate against men by shielding them from scholarships that could be used for BOTH genders to help improve the future of our country!

Here, the poster acknowledges that STEM fields are valuable and views gender specific incentive programs as a threat to men’s ability to participate in such important careers.

By reframing the problem as a need to broadly incentivize STEM participation, the poster minimizes gender disparities in STEM enrollment.

The second type of negative post argues that social inequalities do exist but inverts typical claims about inequality such that privileged groups who benefit from social inequality (e.g., men, white people, straight people) are framed as victims. Feminism and feminists were specifically discussed in numerous posts of this type throughout the sample ($n = 102$), underscoring the way in which feminism has become a key talking point in discussions about men and masculinity in digital spaces (Brooke, 2019). For instance, a post entitled, “Feminism serves no purpose its just a bunch of angry hysterical women” reads,

It serves no purpose. I see no women oppressed at all in any sense. If anything women are praised more than men in modern society. I've had a female boss at literally 3/5 places I've worked at. I've never heard of males going to college on a male scholarship, but could you imagine the backlash if they had men's scholarships. Most of the stuff they do is cringey af [as fuck] too, like wearing vagina hats and whatnot. They always whine about how misogynist men are, I mean anyone who's really read all the articles on feminism espe-



Note. Themes were not mutually exclusive, and the total number of themes included in the analysis is 23

Fig. 2 Distribution of Posts across Thematic Codes

cially modern feminism its not really about equality it just seems like a bunch of angry women.

Posts such as these use anecdotal experiences as evidence to counter major talking points within discussions of social inequality. As is often the case, many posts argue that one (or several) social movements, in this case, feminism, are unnecessary and obscure the actual discrimination that is taking place against men.

More broadly, these posts discussed sexuality, race, and relationships in ways suggesting that white, straight, cisgender men are the true victims of social equality. With regards to sexuality, these posts sought to normalize heterosexual ideas such as men’s “creepiness,” which have been critiqued as part of “rape culture” (Hirsch & Khan, 2020). A post entitled, “Being ‘creepy’ is an inevitable part of young men learning to speak to women they’re interested in,” makes the case that,

Young men shouldn’t allow women who’ve never had to be the pursuer shame them for trying and not being perfect at it on their first tries. Young men get so much shit for being ‘creepy’. People give them disingenuous ‘advice’ in saying things like ‘talk to her like she’s a human’ as if that’s at all helpful or valuable...

A common point of discussion was shifting expectations in dating and courtship. The changing ideals within heterosexual courtship were framed as disadvantageous or even harmful to straight men. These posts sometimes normalized behavior that would otherwise be understood as sexually threatening to women. Other posts in this vein suggested that heterosexual men’s disadvantages in relationships are magnified by marriage and fatherhood. A post entitled, “I just lost my 3rd best friend to suicide today,” describes one man’s experience,

He killed himself because his drug affiliated wife (court-proven) won custody of their child. He worked 2 full-time jobs to pay for house renovations worth \$10k+ in order for CPS to allow him to see his kid once a week, after she drained his bank account and left (court-proven). As a hair dresser who works an average of 2 hours a day, lives at home with parents who pay all of her bills, she was able to convince the judge that he worked too much and would never be home to take care of the child. My first best friend to commit suicide did it because his 14 year military career was decimated in a matter of months. He was given prison time after a false accusation of rape from

a woman he Uber'd home. His wife left him and took their children, interior dash cam evidence aside. My second best friend to commit suicide did it because his unfaithful girlfriend cheated on him, recorded it, showed it to him and all her friends, and convinced him that it was his fault. Her social circle relentlessly attacked him for being a poor boyfriend. His crime: being deployed. What happened to "all men and women are equal"? I am completely onboard for 100% equality in all walks of life for females. As someone who escaped a false rape accusation myself, I can tell you that I am NOT onboard with this relentless onslaught of toxic femininity.

In the above post, the user touches on a web of complex issues about masculinity: work, fatherhood, relationships, and entanglements with the legal system, among other things. Key though is the suggestion that gender equality is a laudable goal in and of itself, yet men's struggles are overlooked and dismissed by institutions and authorities. In this post and others like it, the user wants to bring attention to the possibilities of gender equality going awry.

Although gender and sexuality were at the fore of many such posts, they were not the only axis of inequality discussed. The topic of racial equality was frequently woven into the posts as well. Specifically, being white was reframed as a disadvantage, much like being a man, and when combined together the two (or more) privileged identities result in increased dismissal. A post entitled, "Its getting difficult to be a white straight man in the modern world," states,

Hear me the fuck out before I get Downvoted and just trashed for this. Look around. Its starting to get seen as Being a self empowered woman, Black, Gay, or whatever you want to identify is now the normal. Which is great! Love it my moms gay and I couldn't be happier. one of my close friends is Black and we have a riot together. its how the world should be. Be what ya want and live your life. Everyone is now getting a voice and a term to speak. But Being a White Straight male Means I can't have my own problems. I can't get a word in at anytimes. Im just generally privileged so what do I have to complain about. Its starting to get a little insane IMO [in my opinion] and its just a complete fucking joke that I won't go as far as oppressed but the other spectrum like im on a pedestal and I should have NOTHING to complain about.

Finally, some negative posts describe examples that absolve the poster from engaging in behavior that would sustain social inequality. For example, a post entitled, "If we are not able to tell what gender you are, you have zero reason to bitch about it," states,

I am not bashing any type of gender/whatever the hell you identify with whatever makes you happy, good for you; this isn't about that. I have accidentally bumped into someone before and the first thing out of my mouth is "excuse me sir/ma'am". It's amazing what has happened when I have said the wrong one. I respectfully called you sir because you dress like a man (baggy clothes that hide your features), you look like a man, some of you also talk like a man. Without the exception of facial hair or having more than a split second to look at you before I excuse myself, how am I supposed to do this?

That is, to the extent that posters suggest that social equality is desirable, they excuse their own behavior when it comes to practices or beliefs that may sustain parts of unequal social hierarchies. Here we see how masculinity threats are read into everyday interactions just as they are read into perceptions of larger cultural trends.

Repeatedly, posts suggested that people who are not straight white men are valued more or have more rights than straight white men do. For instance, a post entitled, "Just because I'm a male, doesn't mean that my problems are invalid or any less important," suggests that men need support like other minoritized groups,

Guys get too much shit for no reason. Yes women's issues are a thing. Yes there is repression and many many problems for many many minorities. Those problems need to be solved, but here I am eating a shit sandwich for having a dick? When's the last time you heard of a widely available support network for men? Higher suicide rates, higher incarceration rates, un-realistic expectations. Innocent guys getting punished with heavy sentences for false rape claims. Guys being told to 'man-up' when they dare complain about anything. Prostate cancer rates higher than breast cancer, with a fraction of the non-for-profits that are specialized for it. It's tough out there.

Indeed, post after post attested that increasing equality for minoritized groups had outpaced men's gains, and many also suggested this comes at a cost for them. A post entitled, "Sick of all the MAWD [middle-aged white dude] hatred" states,

I'm a normal middle-aged, middle-class, suburban white dude with kids. Apparently, that alone makes me the devil. My opinions apparently don't count; my life experiences are irrelevant; and all my accumulated knowledge, wisdom, and expertise are the product of institutional racism or [something] *ism. Its one thing to hear this from looney academics and

internet virtue signalers, but when you start hearing this from fellow members of a non-for-profit charity that you have devoted untold hours, effort, and sweat, blood (literally), and tears to building and promoting, its time to just check out. Seriously....fuck this and the horse it rode in on.

This post exemplifies the core grievance of many posts on r/unpopularopinion. Many users do not see themselves or their views as impeding equal rights, or even as antagonistic to equity, often citing friends, families, partners, and their habits as anecdotal evidence of their support for equal rights. However, the specific intersection of masculinity, whiteness, and straightness is felt as a struggle in and of itself because the plights of privileged people are preemptively dismissed; their ability to express themselves feels threatened. Many even begin with the presumption that their “unpopular opinion” will be downvoted by users, so many users make appeals to readers to “hear me out.” This rhetorical call to action is a way for posts to bring attention to their “unpopular opinion” which they feel has some objective merit.

Virality

It is rare for a post to “go viral,” but the type of posts that do go viral speaks to the valuation of sentiments about social equality on this forum. A total of 236 posts in the original sample of 80,833 met our threshold for “viral,” which we defined as receiving more than 1,000 comments. The number of comments on viral posts in this sample ranged from 1,001–9,116. Comparatively, more than 20,000 posts had fewer than 10 comments, meaning that engagement for most posts is relatively low overall. When assessing the valuation codes of viral posts, we found that 79% were negative, which is considerably greater than the sample’s overall negative percentage (60.2%). Further, not only were viral posts more likely to be negative, but they were also less likely to be positive. Only 3% of viral posts are positive (compared to 11.4% of the sample). Thus, while posters may assume that negativity toward social issues is an unpopular opinion, it would seem that on r/unpopularopinion, the inverse is true.

Engagement, whether that be liking, voting, commenting, or sharing on social media, is one of the primary mechanisms contributing to the durability and visibility of online content. On Reddit specifically, “downvoted” content is more likely to be engaged with (Davis & Graham, 2021). Given that the sampled viral posts on r/unpopularopinion were overwhelmingly negative, many of them received numerous downvotes, sometimes more than 10,000, in addition to the comments. Due to the volume associated with being “viral,” the comments on these posts ranged widely,

from affirmation or disagreement to spam and unrelated randomness. But regardless of the content of the comments, the effect was the same — posts expressing negative evaluations of increasing levels of social equality are more likely to be amplified, whereas posts expressing positive evaluations of increasing levels of social equality are not.

Bundled Grievances

The third finding is that grievances are not random, they have observable patterned relationships with one another. Grievances co-occur with one another in ways that illustrate how masculinity threats do not exist in isolation but are part of a general constellation of threats to social privileges, something we call “bundled masculinity grievances.”

Analysis of the correlation of codes posts reveals a clustering effect. Observable thematic overlap within posts, as well as themes that do not overlap within posts, reveals how masculinity threat is expressed as bundled ideas about certain institutions, identities, practices, and emotions. Our analysis reveals four topic clusters: Courtship (Bodies, Attractiveness, Sex Practices, Incel, and Dating), Gender Policing (Humor, Trans, Sexuality, and Mental Health), Women’s Rights (Abortion, Relationships, Sexual Assault, Education, Feminism, Money, Violence, and Legal Issues), and Political Arguments (Grammar, Race, Religion, Arguments, Media, and Politics).

In Fig. 3, the heatmap shows positively correlated themes that are *more* likely to co-appear with increasingly red squares, whereas negatively correlated themes that are *less* likely to co-appear are increasingly blue squares. Themes that are *uncorrelated* with one another are indicated by white squares. The heatmap is organized to group more highly correlated themes closer to one another, which can be traced along the diagonal of the graph. Rather than rely on the densities of blue and red on the heatmap to guide our analysis, a k-means cluster diagram better shows the four most distinct correlational patterns, which we analyze below.

Courtship: Bodies, Attractiveness, Sex Practices, Incel, and Dating

The first cluster connects posts relating to contemporary courtship practices, which were often framed as disadvantageous to heterosexual men. Women are viewed as controlling the dating process, and men’s courtship tactics are stigmatized as “creepy.” These posts also contain discussions of women’s attractiveness alongside laments about the level of attractiveness men need to possess to command a woman’s attention. Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly, discussions of incels, or those who are “involuntarily celibate,” appear

in these posts (Daly & Reed, 2022). While not every thematic code appears in every post, the following post, “It isn’t unreasonable to want your girlfriend to stay off sites like Tinder” illustrates how these topics correlate,

...How can you have relationships with a girl when you are in a constant competition like this. That video was a punch in my face. As an ugly man, women don’t give me the time of day, but my brother is a decent looking guy who’s currently in a relationship and he caught MAJOR flak from his GF and her social circle for telling her she either has to get off the dating apps or it’s over. Like there was real anger directed at him for even **daring** to suggest she not entertain other guys all day long. How can people defend this behavior? Is this really what relationships have become in the modern age? A minimum of light cuckolding?

Posts such as these reveal how masculinity threat is embedded within the presumed advantages and disadvantages women and men have within heterosexual dating markets. In these posts, heterosexual masculinity is framed as active because men are the pursuers of women, but men must also be active in controlling women’s access to the dating market because the desirability of women in and of itself invites the possibility of *other men*, threatening the stability of their relationship. Thus, masculinity threat in this case is not simply insecurity in terms of one’s ability to attract women, but also in men’s ability to attract women relative to other men.

Gender Policing: Humor, Trans, Sexuality, and Mental Health

A second topic cluster, when taken together, suggests a relationship between humor and anti-trans sentiment. While these posts are often written as though the user is appreciative of an individual’s right to alter their body, they simultaneously uphold an individual’s right to make jokes about any subject while expressing essentialist ideas about biology that undermine the legitimacy of trans people’s experiences. A post entitled, “Transgender people are mentally ill,” for example, suggests,

I don’t have any problem with transgender people and I don’t care if they get sex change operations, there’s nothing wrong with that, but genuinely believing you are an opposite sex to the biological sex you were born as is technically a mental illness. Feminine males and masculine females are still males and females, they just don’t conform to the stereotypical gender roles society ascribes to their gender. It’s just as much a mental illness as genuinely believing you are another race or another species. You aren’t black or a cat just because

you **feel** and **believe** you are, you are whatever your biological makeup indicates you are. If you have the physiology of a white male human, you’re a white male human.

The above post is revealing because the assertion that people “believing” they are something other than what they have been labeled as is a mental illness ends with the intersection of “white male human.” Through critiquing trans visibility, straightness, masculinity, and whiteness, are set up as essential, biological, unavoidable traits, regardless of one’s identity, and therefore also worthy of recognition.

Women’s Rights: Sexual Assault, Feminism, and Legal Issues

A third topical cluster addresses women’s rights in terms of sexual assault, feminism, and legal issues. These posts were disparate in how they approached the topic, from users commenting on men’s right to physically defend themselves if a woman strikes them, to women’s seemingly unilateral control over children and abortions. Typically, these posts conclude by voicing the position that men are disadvantaged by socio-legal structures. For example, a post entitled, “Men are discriminated in our society” links women’s rights, legal issues, and violence,

Recently I took a closer look at a gym in my area. I saw they had a special room for woman only. That’s cool, I can totally understand that woman don’t want to be stared at or feel safe. But on the other hand, why can woman have more space in the gym and more stuff to exercise with then men? Men have to face longer waiting times than woman then. There should be a men only room then. This would fix the waiting time problem and the privilege woman’s have. Also it would benefit woman even more since when they decide to enter the common ground area it’s theirs since there are less men since they are in the men’s room. Again, it is understandable that woman want privacy but men are worse off due to that. Also woman parking lot are kind of bullshit too. Woman are equal to men but why do they get bigger parking lots then? Does that indicate that woman are actually worse then men in parking and therefore need bigger parking lots? Every feminist would say that woman can drive as good as men Cool, I believe them so why do woman need bigger parking lots then? They don’t. Fortunately you can’t get fined for parking in a woman parking lot as a man. Or at kindergarten: The zero tolerance policy is widespread. men have historically always beaten each other up in conflicts. Like in the middle age. Apparently it’s natural to man. Kindergarten will forbid that and break the natural development cycle of boys. It’s a fact that

boys who are raised without a father are more likely to commit murder So when boys are raised by woman, and taught the zero tolerance policy they will end up more aggressive than if they were raised my woman/ men together.

The above post begins with a seemingly innocuous observation, that some gyms provide areas specifically for women so they can exercise without being leered at by men. The poster then expands on this observation to critique increasingly more embedded institutional practices, such as marriage, education, and zero-tolerance policies, which they see as impeding men’s development while women’s needs are met. The post offers that women’s needs are even met to a point of excess, such as in the case of, we assume, expecting and recent mothers’ parking spots. The bundling of these policies for women is compared to the perceived lack of policies that benefit men in such a way that the post concludes men are discriminated against.

Political Arguments: Grammar, Race, Religion, Arguments, Media, and Politics

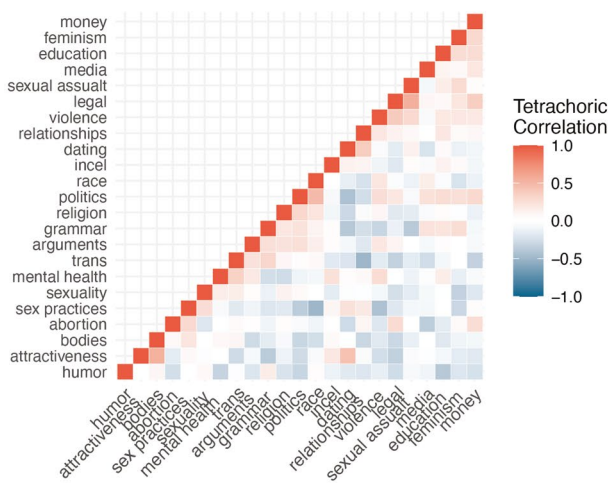
A fourth topic cluster includes what at first may seem like a disparate group of topics. However, we suggest what connects them is the “argument” theme. Race, religion, politics, and, as those who have spent much time on internet discussion boards know, grammar, are among the most contentious topics. Discussion of threats to masculinity via racial, political, and religious issues frequently involved rhetoric

and argumentation as a primary discursive tactic. A post entitled, “The George Zimmerman case is the most important CCW [carrying a concealed weapon] case ever, and was all about race” exemplifies a post that reflects race, media, and politics as bundled topics,

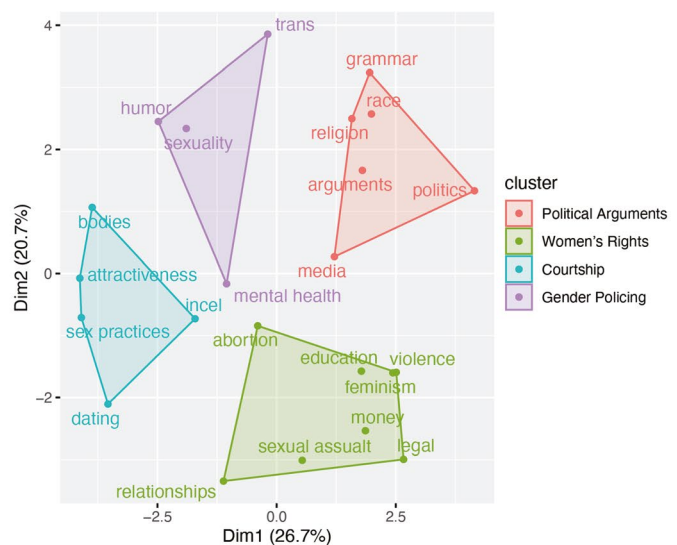
... The media, the Martin family, and their PR firm got the pic of the 12 year old Martin out, called Zimmerman a "white Hispanic", when he was actually a chubby brown guy, and whipped the masses into a riotous frenzy. The media ran with it before we knew Zimmerman's background. His name suggested a white guy, but in reality he's brown. His life was ruined, he's 2.5 million dollars in debt, and can never show his face for fear of being assaulted. If his name was Jorge Rodriguez, this case would have disappeared. If Trayvon Martin was Bryce Martin, no case. If you are a white guy who shoots and kills a young black man during a slow news cycle, you can be screwed. Hell, you can be a cop---like the guy who shot Mike Brown in Ferguson. He shot a guy who assaulted him, grabbed his gun, then charged at him. But the media still portrayed Brown as a "gentle giant" and the city burned. Darren Wilson is now working at a Wal-Mart, stocking shelves, and his wife had to quit her job. But race doesn't matter, right? Post-racial society and all that?

As the above post illustrates, issues such as racism were frequently discussed in terms of how names are racialized

A. Heatmap of Thematic Correlations



B. Thematic Clusters



Note. Panel A presents a heatmap of the tetrachoric correlations between themes identified in the content analysis or how themes overlap across the sample of Reddit posts. Panel B visualizes the pattern of these correlations locating clusters of codes that are more likely to co-appear in Reddit posts.

Fig. 3 Bundled Masculinity Grievances on Reddit

and suggested that ambiguity is leveraged by media pundits or other people pursuing political goals. These posts relied on logic and rhetoric as a way to disarm highly sensitive topics where critiques of whiteness, heterosexuality, or masculinity may be present, by crafting the debate in discrete terms devoid of emotion or personal experience.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the modal opinion on r/unpopularopinion is that current efforts to reduce social inequality have gone too far. The shared sentiment is that, in lifting up the voices of the historically marginalized, new, now silenced groups, have become the true victims of inequality. Qualitative analysis of these posts reveals that masculinity, whiteness, and straightness are often framed as social disadvantages. Such posts suggest that racial, gender and sexual equality have largely been achieved and/or that efforts to redress historical inequalities have exceeded their original intent. Indeed, posts often invert claims of inequality to suggest that white, straight, cisgender men are the ones who suffer from inequality the most because of aggressive social shifts towards equality. To the extent that inequality is a problem, posts suggest that gender, race, or sexuality blind policies are the best response.

Further analysis of the relationships between the topics discussed in this forum reveals that threats to masculinity are not perceived as discrete issues but rather exist in thematic bundles. We found four major bundles: courtship, gender policing, women's rights, and political arguments. Courtship grievances suggest that heterosexual men feel they are on the losing side of emotional and sexual pairing practices. Gender policing grievances are framed humorously and reflect what we know about the centrality of humor-based gender policing, often in the form of anti-gay epithets, to contemporary masculine identities (Pascoe, 2011). Women's rights grievances suggest that women have become culturally overvalued and have an excess of legal rights, which together render men powerless. Finally, the cluster of grievances regarding political arguments reflects the way that whiteness intersects with masculinity to render white men as particular victims of the current political order that is, purportedly, biased in favor of racial minorities. When looking at these bundled grievances, the sense that men are particularly scrutinized for holding such opinions, to the point of being devalued or discriminated against, is a particularly strong sentiment. Not only do many r/unpopularopinion users share this view, but the view is amplified by the mechanisms of Reddit. Negative evaluations of social equality are amplified by the hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of comments on posts that argue straight white men are victims of cancel culture. Virality, in this space, signals a sort of legitimacy for these views. This

social process articulates the threat of straight white men as a hidden truth at the core of today's real social issues.

These findings build on the literature suggesting that masculinity is a tenuous identity category that can be threatened by sexuality, effeminacy, gun rights, or economic disadvantage in several ways. First, this study shows how race is tethered to masculinity threat. Post after post suggests that whiteness is central to understanding how men understand their experiences of increasing equality as a gendered threat. Second, this study shows how these threats exist within larger constellations of meaning-making practices. Overall, these findings offer a nuanced view of cultural machinations being worked out in online spaces where users feel safe to prize masculinity over social progress.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study examines opinions that mainly focus on straight white men, it is difficult to know who the users are in an objective sense. This limitation means we do not know if users are grieving *their own* position or if these posts represent a diverse group of people discussing a social issue. We do know that most posts are in English. And, given their focus on issues in the United States, many users likely come from Western nations. Given our sampling focus and previous research showing Reddit users are disproportionately men (Amaya et al., 2021), it is therefore likely many users whose posts were examined here were men. Nevertheless, future research may want to parse the demographic characteristics of the people expressing their views from the way in which they evaluate social equity measures.

The findings of this study have implications for understanding the importance of larger cultural processes that future research should explore. In this space, users bemoan efforts to achieve gender, racial and sexual equality while collectively grieving their perceived invisibility, decreasing power, and perceived lack of cultural relevance. These posts show how in non-experimental conditions, pressing social issues like gender, racial and sexual equality are yoked together with institutions and practices in a series of bundled grievances. To that end, future research on masculinity threats should incorporate insights from cultural sociology suggesting that meaning is shaped by different elements in cultural systems, including organizations and social situations (Norton, 2014). Moreover, these elements might suggest that masculinity threats are also experienced as bundled threats by those occupying powerful social positions who have a direct influence on political discourses (Diefendorf, 2023).

Practice Implications

The findings of this study highlight how social equality measures are viewed as net negative in terms of resource

distribution and human rights because of the loss privileged social groups allegedly receive. In other words, social progress is viewed as a zero-sum game rather than a way of elevating everyone's quality of life. This suggests that social movements aimed at lessening social inequality may want to highlight how their policy suggestions will not result in gains for some groups at the expense of others and instead bring attention to how increased social equality benefits everyone. However, the findings also reveal a persistent masculinity threat, which when bundled with whiteness and straightness, is articulated as straight white men feeling vilified by cultural narratives. This emotional frame is powerful and explains how the erosion of the social conditions that were once favorable to this group has shored up an adversarial, rather than a cooperative, view of social equity (Hochschild, 2016). Overcoming this emotional wall will be paramount in building powerful and sustainable coalitions to advance social equity.

Conclusion

This paper shows how one of Reddit's most visited subreddits, r/unpopularopinion, is a digital space where users voice concerns about current events and related social equality efforts. Although users discuss a wide array of topics, systematic analysis reveals that negative perceptions of increasing social equality are patterned in identifiable ways. Examination of these patterns suggests that social grievances are bundled together such that specific issues are used as evidence of the cultural devaluation of straight white men writ large. Accordingly, an essential step for understanding why people react negatively to perceived and actual social equality is realizing how social progress is weighed against the perceived threat it poses to distinct combinations of privileged social identities.

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Data Availability Raw data are not available, however, coding and other details can be shared via Github to interested readers.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate This research was conducted ethically and in accordance with institutional guidelines for using social media data.

Human and Animal Ethics Not applicable.

Consent for Publication The authors consent and approve of this article.

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