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Doing masculinities online:
defining and studying the manosphere

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Editorial

1. The Manosphere: An Overview

The last decade has seen the expansion of a network of online spaces and communities accessed mostly by men who discuss issues concerning gender relations, sexuality, masculinity and its meanings. This phenomenon, which takes shape within a heteronormative framework, has been called the "manosphere". This term originates from a 2009 Blogspot entry entitled *The Manosphere*[1], and became popular through Ian Ironwood's 2013 self-published book *The Manosphere: a New Hope for Masculinity*.

The manosphere has become the subject of an expanding and diverse body of scholarship[2] which we make sense of and classify around various criteria throughout this Editorial. Some studies focus on specific empirical manosphere cases[3]. For example, Men's Rights Activism (MRA) and the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, both longing for a long-lost ideal of masculinity and a social status they wish to revive (Coston and Kimmel 2013; Schmitz and Kazyak 2016; Gotell and Dutton 2016); Pick Up Artists, Red Pill and Incel (involuntary celibates) communities, whose rhetoric centers on the crisis of masculinity and who advocate breaking free from a supposedly feminized society (Mountford 2018; Donnely *et al.* 2001; Salojärvi *et al.* 2020); Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), who take a separatist approach and reject dependence on women (Hunte 2019; Lin 2017; Jones *et al.* 2019; Rudiger and Dayter 2020); and the highly misogynist Alt-Right movement which promotes white nationalism and supremacy (Hawley 2017; Lyons 2017).

Other strands of research in the field explore the pseudo-scientific theories and ideologies adopted by manosphere groups and the various practices they pursue and promote, these include:

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[1] https://www.webcitation.org/6LQ2vg9BN.

[2] The expansion of scholarship in this field can also be observed in the many theses and dissertations that have been produced on this phenomenon, some of which are referenced in the contributions to this Monographic Section.

[3] See Lilly (2016) and Ging (2019) for suggestions on how to classify these groups.

- the construction of gender relations that objectify and dehumanize women and reduce them to sexual objects and interchangeable goods (as explored by Dordoni and Magaraggia in this Issue);

- the development of a subcultural language made up of acronyms and relying on violent terminology, hate speech and frequent references to rape (Dragiewicz 2008; Gotell and Dutton 2016), hence the neologism "rapeglish" (Jane 2018). The shared opposition to feminism amongst rather different manosphere groups is reflected in the widespread use of the term "misandry" which has gradually become part of the discursive practices of these subcultures (Marwick and Caplan 2018);

- the creation of hierarchies of masculinity that differentiate between men who operate in the manosphere and distance them from those who do not. The latter are othered and stigmatized based on notions of masculinity capital (*sensu* Bourdieu), and are variously labeled as "soyboys" (Jones 2020), "normies" (Nagle 2017), "simps" or "cucks" (Hunte 2019). They are accused of being submissive to women, feminized, inadequate, and even unwitting accomplices (bluepilled) of the further feminization of society and its inevitable social decline (Kendall 2002; Quinn, 2002; Rodriguez and Hernandez, 2018).

Through these practices and discourses, processes of othering are reinforced with the creation of various abject subjects (Butler 1993) who reinforce and blur the boundaries of hegemonic and legitimate masculinities (as seen already in studies of derogatory labels such as "fag", see Pascoe 2005). The performances of masculinity that are thus enacted strengthen hegemonic powers of men over women (Menzie 2020), but they also construct internal hegemonies amongst men which can lead to fluid alliances built on shared experiences of victimization and of a sense of betrayed masculinity (Ging 2019). Moreover, as Farci and Ricci suggest in this Section, differentiations and alliances within the manosphere are also based on the socio-technical characteristics and affordances of the platforms used by these groups, such as Reddit[4] (Khan and Golab 2020; Ribeiro *et al.* 2020), Instagram (Rodriguez and Hernandez 2018), Telegram (Semenzin and Bainotti 2020), and Youtube (Papadamou *et al.* 2020; Mamié *et al.* 2021).

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[4] Reddit is an online community that allows its registered users (redditors) to share links, opinions, contents and news. The website is organized in thematic communities (subreddits), both created by users and by administrators, which can be rated by users, thus determining their position and visibility on the website.

The literature converges in identifying two key issues around which even the most different of manosphere groups concur: the critique of feminism and its association with a feminized and misandrist society (Hunte 2019), and the need to reclaim and reaffirm a vision of masculinity perceived to be under siege (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016). These aspects, according to Ging (2019), are essential in establishing manosphere groups as emotional communities. Indeed, the homosocial bonding within and between these online communities facilitates the sharing of stories of victimization, of frustration for the loss of a long-gone gender order, and the venting of anger – what Jane (2014) defines e-bile. This form of techno-mediated manosphere homosociality favors participation in multiple similar groups and internal migrations between different groups (Ribeiro *et al.* 2020). Through mechanisms of echo-chamber and ante-chamber these inter- and intra- group movements can favor processes of radicalization. The latter can, in turn, trigger transitions to increasingly more violent and politicized views, for example by establishing links between the anti-feminist and misogynist practices of the manosphere and those of the extreme right (Verza 2019; Mamié *et al.* 2021).

This Monographic Section builds on the insights of the expanding body of work briefly outlined above, whilst addressing aspects in the field that remain less explored. In what follows we present an outline of key themes and analytical perspectives that emerge from the seven contributions to this Monographic Section.

The first theme pertains to the contents and boundaries of the manosphere. Scholarship in this field adopts very broad and inclusive definitions of the concept of manosphere, for example through the use of terms such as "confederacy" (Ging 2018), "coalition" (Mountford 2018), "connection" (Ging et al. 2020), "conglomerate" and "network" (Ribeiro *et al.* 2020), often paired with the adjective "loose" (Ging 2018, 2019; Ribeiro *et al.* 2020; Van Valkenburgh 2021). This terminology implies a degree of vagueness and indeterminacy, as conveyed by the term "loose", although it is not always clear whether the notion of "looseness" applies to the phenomenon itself or to the theoretical and conceptual framework used to analyze it. Overall, we can say that the umbrella-term manosphere is used in academic scholarship and in media discourse to delineate a vast range of realities that differ from each other, but which have also a lot in common.

This Monographic Section aims to critically address the processes that give shape and reproduce the manosphere, understood as above, and to question its very definition and loose boundaries. In doing so, we propose making sense of the manosphere by adopting and extending Messner's (2000)[5] concept of 'politics of masculinity' to include a vast spectrum of reflexive practices[6] that 'reflect' masculinity and 'reflect on' masculinity, i.e. gendered practices that in 'doing gender' can both give shape to new understandings of masculinity and reinstate its more 'consolidated' meanings.

The second analytical dimension that the articles of this Monographic Section shed light onto is geographical. Most research on the manosphere focusses on the US or, less commonly, on other Western anglophone countries (such as Australia and Canada). In Italy, the phenomenon remains under-explored, with some exceptions (Deriu 2007, and more recently: Farci and Righetti 2019; Dolce and Pilla 2019; Vingelli 2019; Verza 2019; Semenzin and Bainotti 2020; Longo 2020; Bainotti and Semenzin 2021; Cannito and Mercuri forthcoming). This consideration raises the issue of the spatial dimension of the manosphere. As Ging states (2019, 642), the analysis of masculine practices performed within the manosphere

> is further complicated by the transnational nature of this space and its attendant overlaps between local, regional, and global configurations of practice. In addition to this, the processes of social embodiment central to the project of hegemonic masculinity can be both erased and intensified, as required, by the technological affordances of social media. Anonymity enables contributors to create fantasy personas or avatars, liberating them from physical limitations.

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[5] Messner's (2000, 12) model of the "Terrain of the politics of masculinities" consists in a geographical triad that makes sense of political discourses along three different dimensions: men's institutionalized privileges; the costs associated with the adherence to narrow understandings of masculinity; and, finally, differences/inequalities amongst men.
[6] The use of reflexive here draws on Crossley (2005, 9) and the distinction he makes between reflective corporeal techniques and common techniques.

Interactions and practices within the manosphere are for the vast majority online (rare exceptions include Pick Up Artists who hold in-person meetings, e.g. in seduction courses), but this does not mean that they are de-contextualized. The cultural repertoires they draw from are in part globalized, although centered mostly on an Anglo-American subcultural lexicon. But they also engage with more localized cultural and symbolic references, as exemplified by De Gasperis' work (in this Section) that looks at the symbolic use of the early nineteenth century Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi by the Italian Incel community. Similarly, the relationships between models of masculinity (e.g. chad vs. Incel, alpha vs. beta man) are played out with different nuances in different socio-cultural contexts. For example, the opposition between the university sports champion and the nerd student that makes sense and is commonly used in North America, in the Italian context is differently exemplified by the juxtaposition between the Mediterranean Latin lover[7] and the pale, sports-shy, bespectacled young man.

Closely linked to the importance of geographical contexts is the geopolitical dimension of center-periphery intersections within the manosphere. The connection between antifeminism, nationalism and white supremacy has already been explored in the literature, and recent research has also highlighted the emergence of new forms of identity politics adopted by minoritized groups to claim their own model of masculinity. An example of this, is the Asian American Men's Movement (MRAsian), a "'manosphere-adjacent' subculture" (Liu 2021, 95) which aims to neutralize stereotypical representations of Asian men as feminized and de-sexualized in contrast to equally stereotypical representations of hyper-sexualized Asian women. White supremacy, which actively circulates as an ideology in many North American manosphere groups, is therefore in conceptual tension with constructions of masculinities in what are viewed as more peripheral manospheres (see for example Scarcelli in this Section).

Liu's research on MRAsian puts emphasis on another key dimension of the manosphere: its intersectional dynamics which, however, tend to be less explored with

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[7] So-called "*bomberismo*" is an example of the digital permutation of this well-known figure: see https://www.vice.com/it/article/gv3vqx/cose-il-bomberismo-pagine-facebook-italiane   e https://www.facebook.com/PastoriziaOfficial/.

more attention devoted to white, young and heterosexual masculinity. As Massanari (2017) argues, the sociotechnical features of popular manosphere platforms, such as Reddit, generate a toxic technoculture that attracts and valorizes racialized and gendered (read: white male) geek subjectivities. It is therefore possible that the same inequalities and stratifications that give shape to marginalized masculinities (Connell 2005) can be mobilized as resources to modify and enhance one's positioning within the manosphere. Whilst it is difficult to be sure about the demographic characteristics of manosphere participants, cultural backgrounds and inclinations can be somewhat detected from the materials shared and discussed online, and from the active distancing from, and even contempt for intellectualism and various practices perceived as too liberal, such as veganism (as reflected in the derogatory term "soyboy"). In sum, manosphere participants cannot be exclusively identified as white, heterosexual, middle class men, and more needs to be done to explore how other multiple intersecting identities are reflected, represented and interact in this landscape.

Lastly, the difficulty of pursuing a more intersectional analysis of the manosphere raises one final dimension which this Monographic Section elaborates upon: the challenges of researching the manosphere with the methodological approaches available. As further explored below, social research on this phenomenon has successfully deployed digital methods, such as virtual ethnographies and content analyses, but the field is also showing great potential for interdisciplinarity and methodological innovation.

The remaining parts of this Editorial are organized around three sections. Section two presents the contributions that form part of this Monographic Section around the three major themes that they reveal. Section three explores methodological challenges and ethical issues that are faced when studying the manosphere. Finally, in section four we outline some of the areas that this Monographic Section did not cover in details and we reflect on possible new avenues for future research in this field.

2. A Closer Look at the Monographic Section: Contents, Repertoires and Boundaries

The Monographic Section presents issues cutting across its seven contributions as well as unique perspectives and dimensions of the manosphere that each elaborates upon. Moving from the particular to the general, in this section we focus on three major and partially overlapping themes that emerge from the analysis of these articles: anti-feminism and misogyny; linguistic and cultural repertoires of the manosphere; and boundaries within the manosphere and relationships between online and offline worlds.

2.1 Anti-feminism and Violence Against Women

The theme of anti-feminism, closely linked to misogyny, is a common thread in all contributions but it is addressed more centrally and systematically in Dordoni and Magaraggia's and in Cousineau's articles.

Both sets of authors compare two groups – Dordoni and Magaraggia look at Italian Incel and Red Pill closed forums, and Cousineau explores /r/MensRights and /r/TheRedPill on Reddit. Their analysis reveals the centrality of anti-feminism and violence against women in the construction of different models of masculinity within each group. Common to all four is the potency of the rhetoric of the crisis of masculinity. Their members make reference to a supposedly natural gendered social structure whereby heterosexual men should dominate by virtue of their physiological and anatomical characteristics, but which feminism and contemporary women have overturned causing men's malaise and disorientation. This rhetoric of social transformations takes shape through the deployment of discourses of male victimization (Oddone 2020) and ensuing female supremacy. The latter manifests itself in romantic and sexual relationships between genders, in family matters (especially around the issues of abortion and divorce), and in social structures and institutions, such as the labor market. Manosphere groups analyzed by Dordoni and Magaraggia and by Cousineau embody the Red Pill philosophy but position themselves differently vis-à-vis intra- and inter-gender hierarchical relations. As Dordoni and Magaraggia explain,

> on the one hand, in the model represented by the Redpilled, we find frustration and destabilization for the loss of male power, and hatred for the feminist movements that, according to them, have usurped men's spaces, roles and

rights. On the other hand, in the Incel model, we also find the self-representation of men as fragile, sad, oppressed, denigrated, and doubly frustrated: they define themselves as beta men, lonely, ugly, poor, depressed. The ideal model of both masculinities is the alpha male, strong, virile, charming and a leader, with an important job. If for the Redpilled this dominant model can be achieved, for the Incel it is only an unattainable ideal (Dordoni and Magaraggia, p. 47, our translation).

So, groups that openly recognize themselves in the label 'Red Pill' – whether in the closed online forum investigated by Dordoni and Magaraggia or in the subreddit /r/TheRedPill that Cousineau explores – reclaim a hierarchical power structure between genders drawing on pseudoscientific theories that apply dubious interpretations of biological evolutionism. In these instances, the rhetoric of the crisis of masculinity is predicated upon often violently expressed demands for revenge and vindication against women and feminists. Particularly poignant in this respect, is an expression used in one of the fora investigated by Dordoni and Magaraggia, where participants complain that women have invaded male homosocial spaces such as gyms and end up "always raping everything" (p. 52). The subordination and marginalization of women are integral to the construction and performance of hegemonic masculinity, and feminists in particular are resented for promoting women's rights (including the much-opposed access to gyms) that hinder or at a minimum interfere with men's right to be and act as alpha males.

Another shared feature between the Italian Incel group analyzed by Dordoni and Magaraggia and the subreddit /r/MensRights investigated by Cousineau is the pervasive victim mentality they display. Whilst /r/MensRights groups blame the social structure for penalizing men and favouring women, Incel participants target their frustration at their impossibility of having romantic and sexual relationships with women. Incels claim to be doubly victimized: due to their appearance[8], which disadvantages them in the heterosexual relationships market, and due their relegation at the bottom of the hierarchy of masculinity and impossibility of ever becoming alpha men. The resentment that is generated from this

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[8] Identifying as ugly men is a key feature of Incel masculinity.

lowly social positioning is not directed at the hierarchy itself, which is taken as a biological given, but at women. The markedly anti-women and anti-feminist sentiment is particularly evident in the Reddit groups analyzed by Cousineau. Here, as the author points out, gender relations are reduced to an individualistic level that reflect the typical posture of neoliberal society founded on individual responsibility and merit. The collective claims of feminism and its demands for social justice are in clear contrast with this individualistic orientation. Indeed, "social justice" in both MRA and Red Pill groups on Reddit is used as a derogatory term, as a synonym of female greed. Within this understanding, feminists (and women more generally) are considered as exploiters who want to live on the shoulders of hard-working men – a vision poignantly captured in the title of Cousineau's contribution: "Entitled to everything, responsible for nothing".

Individualism in the manosphere is visible also in Meszaros' contribution on the (male) right to consume and acquire sexual and intimate relationships, and, relatedly, in common references to the "LSM law", where Look, Status and Money put emphasis on the economic value of people on the sex market. The LSM law allegedly governs intimate and sexual relationships between men and women by sanctioning the competitive advantage of the latter to the detriment of the former. It also explains intra-gender dynamics: as chad or alpha, Red Pilled usually have high LSM, and thus occupy an advantageous position in sex markets compared to Incels. Once again, this unequal status between men results in resentment towards women, rather than in questioning the hegemonic construction of heterosexual masculinity which remains the model to aspire to. This "femmephobia" (Menzie 2020) is directed at the different constructions of womanhood that circulate in the manosphere, i.e. at "Stacys" (beautiful and powerful), at "Beckys" (less attractive, and turned feminist when unable to have a relationship with alpha men), and at women who supposedly have low LSM but still manage to have sexual relations by being "easy" (often referred to as "sluts").

In these manosphere groups, men not only assert their right to have sexual relations (a right, they claim, they are often denied), but they also feel that they suffer a "reverse" form of sexual violence when women exercise their right to choose, or when, by simply existing, "they appear seductive but are actually not sexually available" (Dordoni and Magaraggia, p. 52, our tralsation).

In Italian manosphere groups, processes of objectification and dehumanization of women are also highlighted by the use of the label "np", "*non persone*", not-people. We should note that the use of explicit violent expressions against women in the Italian context might be due to the focus, in this Monographic Section, on closed groups which tend to be less regulated and therefore at reduced risk of being banned compared to 'open' groups, such as those hosted on Reddit for example.

The use of violent language against women, what Jane calls "e-bile" (Jane 2014), has become a legitimate and central practice of masculinity in online homosocial contexts (Cannito and Mercuri forthcoming), contributing to the progressive normalization of misogynistic threats, especially rape threats, targeted at women. Thus, whilst violence against women is a means to build and strengthen male homosociality in the manosphere, it manifests itself with different connotations in different groups. In the case of the Redpill, violence is viewed a virilizing practice (Bellassai 2011), biologically determined, and typical of alpha men. For the Incels, violence is part of a set of "compensatory efforts to signify a masculine self" (Schwalbe 2014, p. 117) which emerge from the frustrated and frustrating (lack of) relationships with women. For MRAs, violence against women becomes an opportunity to address the violence that men suffer at the hands of women, a neglected issue, they claim, and therefore emblematic of men's social oppression.

To conclude this section, it is worth emphasizing the diffused sense of emotional fragility that emerges from the analysis of the manosphere. Even if expressed in collective spaces, however, this vulnerability is understood as an individualized experience and it is responded to with anger, viewed as a legitimate feeling and reaction for a man, whether online or offline. This aspect sheds light on the manosphere as a space for sharing that can support its participants in dealing with experiences of uncertainty deriving from economic insecurity and changing gender roles. However, these "emotional" communities (Ging 2018) fail to break away from traditional male homosocial dynamics and amplify the anti-feminism and misogyny which are, to an extent, not as glaring offline. Ultimately, victimization, misogyny and antifeminism shared online in the manosphere, even when they take more 'gentle' forms (see Farci and Ricci in this Issue), fail to grasp their cultural and social roots.

2.2 Cultural Repertoires and Masculinity: Global and Local Dynamics

The second theme that this Monographic Section sheds light on is the role of cultural repertoires shared within the manosphere and emerging most visibly in Capalbi's and De Gasperis' articles, and to a lesser extent in Farci and Ricci's. Frequent comments and discussions on cultural products and figures allow us to make sense of the manosphere not just as a community of practice (Paechter 2003), but also as a community of audiences which consume and interpret cultural products according to more or less codified cultural frames of reference.

The analysis of how Incel groups appropriate the figure of Joker (see De Gasperis) and Giacomo Leopardi (see Capalbi) offer a new perspective on the specific subculture of these communities. Whilst most scholarship (e.g., Ging 2019; Witt 2020; Papadamou *et al.* 2020) looks at the mythicization of Incel heroic role models of masculinity such as Elliot Rodger and other young perpetrators of terror attacks and massacres, less attention is devoted to alternative gender models that might be specific to different national and local socio-cultural contexts.

In her contribution, Capalbi focusses on the Italian Incel community's response to the film "Joker". Released in 2019, the film focusses on Arthur Fleck's life, his experiences of social neglect, abuse, stigmatization, violence and psychological distress, embodied by scars and body disfigurement, and his transformation into Joker. His scars are also associated with his rejection by a woman who will later become a victim of his avenging fury. Joker is, therefore, emblematic of two key aspects of the victimizing rhetoric of Incel identity: physical ugliness and oppression at the hands of women and feminist demands. Capalbi combines media and audience studies approaches to analyze how the Italian Incel Forum (*il Forum degli Incel*) interprets the character of Joker based on cultural repertoires, well-established in US Incel circles, that draw on Red Pill philosophy and on hierarchies of masculinity. In so doing, Capalbi shows the ambivalent reception of globalized cultural and media products by local audiences. In the Italian case, for example, whilst an Incel user is critical of the Americanization of Italian Incel culture, others complain that global cultural products such as South Park, Japanese manga and Harry Potter have been opposed by mainstream Italian censoring and moralistic culture. Similarly, the transition of the historic '*Forum dei Brutti*' (Forum of the Uglies) into the

'*Forum degli Incel*' (Incel Forum) was a result of Italian media's assimilation of the Italian online community with its American counterpart. Ultimately, Capalbi argues that through the consumption and interpretation of global cultural products such as the film Joker, Italian and American Incel communities reveal the close alignment of their discursive and ideological repertoires. Even if Italian Incels reject being assimilated into American Incel ideology, they all identify with Joker and what it represents, i.e. being ugly and a loser, and they all repudiate Batman, handsome, rich and essentially a chad with high LSM. Joker is *the* embodiment of the average white, straight, ugly man who, as a forum member puts it, has been "thrashed by society" (p. 117), is oppressed, and risks being censored, in its digital version, by so-called Nazi-feminists because of his association with the 2012 US Aurora Massacre. Members of the Forum reject any connection between the film Joker and this and various other violent events that took place in the US, and dismiss this alleged causality as "feminist hysteria". However, they also praise Joker, ugly and a loser just as they are, for having had the courage to take some form of (violent) action. The theme of violence remains, therefore, central in the influences of global media representations, even when consumed and made sense of within contingent and contextual repertoires.

De Gasperis offers an analysis of manosphere models which is even more rooted in the Italian socio-cultural context. Here, the romantic poet Giacomo Leopardi functions as an "Incel *ante litteram*" who, like Joker, was supposedly ugly and unsuccessful with women. However, the figure of Leopardi is different from Joker. The latter is an ugly loser who rebels against his fate and violently reclaims his power over those who stigmatized and marginalized him (men and women). Leopardi, on the contrary, expresses his aching loneliness through his poetry. Thus, whilst Joker regains his masculinity as a violent anti-hero, Leopardi remains emasculated. "*Giacomino*", the infantilizing diminutive used by a forum user to refer to Leopardi, both reinforces this devirilization and establishes an intimate connection with him. In her analysis of these dynamics, De Gasperis shows that the construction of masculinities operates through cultural and discursive productions and reinterpretations, which can be viewed as examples of a counterculture and read as instances of the performativity of language.

Leopardi is also positioned, on one hand, alongside other "ugly" Italian literature figures, such as Dante and Petrarca[9] who sang their unrequited love, and, on the other hand, in opposition to other figures, such as the poet and writer D'Annunzio[10] who embodied a successful masculinity, both professionally and with women, and is therefore referred to as an "alpha male" (also *ante litteram*). These examples shed light on the ways in which the globalized matrix of manosphere masculinities is appropriated and applied to a variety of localized contexts, cultural phenomena and products. Moreover, these analyses reveal a juxtaposition between references to mainstream and popular culture figures (such as Joker) and others which are more erudite (such as Leopardi). The talented poet rejected by women might well be the precursor of the contemporary nerd and *geek* who are at the roots of the Incel movement (Ging 2019). Or, he might well be a different character altogether, one with literary skills – as opposed to the technical skills of the nerd – and one that is made sense through a humanistic – as opposed to technical-scientific – cultural capital that marks a distinction with the socio-cultural repertoires of the Italian and American manosphere.

The other most relevant contribution to the theme analyzed in this section is Farci and Ricci's. In it, the authors explore the discursive production of Marco Crepaldi, a young Italian social psychologist who uses YouTube to divulge messages partly inspired by manosphere ideology, albeit not necessarily directed at a specifically manosphere audience. Crepaldi makes reference to gender essentialism and to pseudo-theories of biological determinism which hint at the losses that neoliberalism thrusts onto white, heterosexual cis men, subjected to an oppressive and hindering gendered socialization. Crepaldi's rhetoric and messages are, to an extent, different from those of the manosphere. For example, he makes explicit refence to the double sexism that disadvantages men and women alike, and in doing so he implicitly condemns the violence of the manosphere, although, through his logic, he ends up justifying its existence. Crepaldi never mentions the manosphere, but he hosts people who are variously

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[9] Dante (1265-1321), the author of the masterpiece *Divina Commedia*, and Petrarca (1304-1374), well-known for the sonnets of his *Canzoniere,* incidentally were married and had children.
[10] Gabriele D'Annunzio, poet and writer, author of the novel *Il piacere*, lived across the nineteenth and twentieth century, he died in 1938.

connected to it on his YouTube channel. For example, he interviewed a member of the Italian Incel Forum without ever problematizing their message, and therefore giving them access to his far-reaching platform.

Crepaldi distances himself from the language of the manosphere, but not necessarily its contents. In this way, Farci and Ricci point out, the soft-spoken and polite youtuber "does not deconstruct the roots of the male stereotypes that inflame the Incel's *howled* claims, but he merely dissociates himself from their behavior by offering his audience a comforting way to feel *morally* different, without ever really questioning themselves" (p. 173, emphasis in the original). By showing concerns for the plights of both sexes, Crepaldi might even appear as a supporter of feminist demands, but he also distances himself from what he refers to as neo-feminism, for example by attacking the feminist media platform 'Freeda' which, according to him, focusses entirely on superficial issues and demands.

Farci and Ricci suggest that Crepaldi's character and cultural production represent a "third way" of the Italian manosphere, neither openly anti-feminist, nor entirely pro-feminist, and one which is ambivalent towards the overall so-called costs of masculinity. In particular, it is unclear who bears these costs: whether the individual (white, heterosexual, cisgender men) or the broader social structure. In this case, as in the examples examined by Cousineau and Meszaros, the general pattern that emerges is the de-politicization of gender analyses and of manosphere masculinities. This approach also distorts feminism – obscuring its plural nature – and conceals the fact that the manosphere is a form of backlash (Faludi 1992) towards feminism and women's social advances to which platforms, such as Freeda, are giving visibility.

2.3 Rethinking the Boundaries of the Manosphere: Glocalisation and the Relationship Between Life Online and Offline

The third and final theme that emerges from the Monographic Section pertains to the boundaries of the manosphere.

Scarcelli's contribution is especially useful in allowing us to problematize the definition of this term. Drawing on in-depth interviews with adolescent young men belonging to closed Whatsapp groups, the author proposes a rearticulation of the

manosphere, understood as a community of gendered practices. These communities include also peripheral groups, connected, often without a clear reference, with the more articulated galaxy that makes up what we now call the manosphere. Scarcelli raises three important questions. The first concerns the definition of center-periphery in the manosphere context. Thinking about gender as a community of practice (Paetcher 2003) enables us to observe how these practices unfold and change over time, in some cases bringing groups which were originally peripheral to the manosphere much closer to its center. Scarcelli questions whether the adolescents he interviewed could be viewed as occupying an increasingly central position within the manosphere. On one hand, they share practices similar to those performed by groups that explicitly recognize themselves in the manosphere, such as girl-watching, digital doxing and slut-shaming, without having completely internalized and recognized their values and ideologies. On the other hand, they distance themselves from openly anti-feminist and misogynist positions. Nevertheless, the engagement in problematic homosocial online practices has the potential to unleash processes of radicalization that might lead, in turn, to a more complete and explicit identification with the ideological values of the manosphere and to the progressive assumption of a position of legitimate peripherality within what we define as the manospheric community of practices. In this evolutionary process, we can view Whatsapp groups, such as the ones that Scarcelli explores, as far from being naïve and only unwittingly engaging with hard-core manosphere cultural repertoires, but instead as spaces where these very repertoires are knowingly produced and exchanged with the 'manosphere central', in a dynamic and circular interplay of micro and macro levels. In this sense, the processes described in Scarcelli's contribution are quite similar to the ordinary practices that are commonly enacted within any local community of practices in homosocial contexts, with the difference that the digital dimension allows to reach wider communities whose boundaries go beyond those of "natural groups". Through the exchange of photos, memes and videos, closed Whatsapp groups operate as "digital locker rooms" that facilitate the dissemination of sexual contents involving women, often minors and other non-consenting parties, and easily drifting into revenge porn practices (Semenzin and Bainotti 2020).

The above leads to the second issue that Scarcelli's contribution emphasizes, i.e. how the affordances of different social media translate into different performances of masculinity that "dictate the posture and contents within the group" (p. 11). Values shared on the 'manosphere proper' are present in closed Whatsapp groups even when they do not explicitly refer to pseudo-scientific theories and explicitly ideological legitimations. It is through memes, the most frequently shared content in digital media, that violent, sexist and misogynistic messages are relayed within a, supposedly, playful and humourous register (Ferrero Camoletto 2013). The popularity and normalization of this type of visual content contributes to its taken-for-grantedness and therefore to the banalization of sexism. The latter, rather than being formulated as part of ideological identity politics, as seen earlier in part of the manosphere, becomes a mere and ordinary gender performance. The manosphere, therefore, cannot be identified only with angry, white, middle-class men, but it also includes multiple more or less intellectual orientations and everyday practices that open up its participation to a broader public.

The porous boundaries of the manosphere, therefore, do not present a clear demarcation or rigid separation between its practices and gender performances. This allows exchanges, connections and contaminations that reinforce and reproduce the dominant gender order and hierarchy, and can lead, due to the velocity of digital transformations and proliferation of online communities, to greater radicalization of extremist positions (Baele *et al.* 2019; Ribeiro *et al.* 2020; Mamié *et al.* 2021).

The final point related to Scarcelli's contribution has to do with the relationships between global and local. As the author states,

> I refer to practice as a relationship between *global and local:* neither the communities of practice nor the identities associated with them are formed in isolation. Masculinity and femininity, however local, are not formed in a social and cultural vacuum; they are influenced by the mass media, popular culture, normative backgrounds, and by all different forms of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, although communities of practice are necessarily local, they incorporate practices that may be common to a much broader constellation (p. 22, emphasis in the original, our translation).

Practices that 'may be common to a much broader constellation' include patriarchal culture which may go unnoticed in everyday life but is radicalized and amplified by the communities we explore in this Monographic Section. Patriarchy, in other words, finds a way of innovating itself, by appropriating the means and spaces offered by new digital technologies, whilst continuing to reproduce misogynistic content and gender inequalities.

The themes of the boundaries of the manosphere, of the relationship between online and offline life, and of the relationship between global and local also emerge in Meszaros' contribution. As far as the former two are concerned, the author reflects on the shared ideological background that unites some manosphere groups (in particular Pick Up Artists, Men Going Their Own Way and Incels) and the international dating market. Common ideological elements between these two can be observed in their critique of the instrumental hypergamic orientation of Western women, defined as "gold-diggers", and in the use of language exported from the manosphere, such as "unplugged from the Matrix". By focusing on the 'offline' world of the international dating market, Meszaros provides further insights on the possible interactions between online and offline spaces. Interestingly, it shows that the discursive and masculine repertoires of the manosphere influence offline masculine practices by providing them with validating cultural references and even moral justifications for their life choices.

Meszaros' article also offers an intersectional perspective on the links between the global and local dimensions of the practices of masculinity that she explores. Both men who participate in the manosphere and the men she interviewed – mainly American, Canadian, and Australian men who participate in "love journeys" organized by AFA (A Foreign's Affair) – make reference to the stereotypical figure of the highly desired 'Stacy' (Menzie 2020), a woman with high erotic capital, which, via the LMS law, can be translated into economic capital and prestige. However, when men are rejected by their fellow countrywomen 'Stacys', dynamics of de-humanization are set in motion (see also Dordoni and Magaraggia's contribution in this Monographic Section). This result, Meszaros shows, in a redirection of the men she interviewed towards women from Eastern Europe (Ukraine), Southeast Asia (Philippines) or South America (Colombia), whom her

male participants both fetishize and racialize. The juxtaposition of these models of womanhood – Stacy, the western, white, beautiful, unavailable and demanding woman vs. a beautiful, available, docile and young 'foreign' woman – constitutes a glocalized dimension of spaces and practices closely aligned with the manosphere. Furthermore, the men interviewed by Meszaros describe themselves as middle-class breadwinners (small entrepreneurs or middle managers), particularly affected by the economic crisis and by the changes in the increasingly flexible and de-regulated neoliberal market. Aware of embodying a model of masculinity which is a far cry from the hegemonic one, they feel discarded by Western women. Here, it is impossible not to notice similarities with the plight of the Incels and the 'betas' of the manosphere, who claim to be chosen by their fellow countrywomen only in their role as providers, as exemplified by the motto "Alpha Fucks / Beta Bucks" (Van Valkenburgh, 2021, see also Cousineau in this Monographic Section).

In the sexual and marriage markets beyond the West, these men are able to perform a successful masculinity and even gain positions in the hierarchy of hegemony, precisely because they are breadwinners. Here too, as in the case analysed by Cousineau, merit-rewarding neoliberalism, individualism and market laws (wherein freedom is freedom to consume) are applied to intimate and sexual relations (Zelizer 2005). The Incels analyzed by Dordoni and Magaraggia are once again relevant here, with their claim for the right as beta men to have sexual partners, even if this means having to pay for their services.

Meszaros' participants know that taking part in 'love tours' makes them, by their own admission, 'losers' in front of their friends and family. But in the manosphere context, where sexual relations are mostly understood instrumentally and transactionally, they are simply escaping the Western gender order by shifting relations with women to an economic level. In this sense, Men Going Their Own Way represent the other side of the choice spectrum for men, given their decision to escape from relations with women (Westerners "corrupted" by feminism) (Lin 2017) altogether. Meszaros' participants, instead, fully accept the commercial nature of their relationships, because, in the socio-geographical contexts in which they occur, they give them a much greater bargaining power. It can be argued, therefore, that the controversy with Western women is not so much about their supposed greed or about their denying men sexual and/or intimate

relationships, but it is rather about men (not) having complete power. The intersections between local and global and between online and offline is therefore articulated around what is viewed as centrally at stake in gender relations: the exercise of power by men.

3. Studying the Manosphere: Ethical and Methodological Issues

As a complex field of study, characterized by blurred boundaries, rapid changeability, and dynamic interchanges between online and offline dimensions, the manosphere entails specific ethical and methodological challenges and opportunities for those who wish to research it.

Scholarship on this phenomenon has explored most visible manosphere communities, often on prominent platforms such as Reddit, with some studies that look at intersections and cross-fertilizations between these communities (e.g. Farrell *et al.* 2020; Ging 2019; Ribeiro *et al.* 2020). Identifying less accessible manosphere groups which might operate in online spaces with high levels of gatekeeping or on the dark web, remains a challenge for researchers, as is the exploration of the fluidity and mobility of manosphere participants within online domains and across online and offline settings.

Advances in computational social sciences[11] and big data analytics offer new opportunities to explore the dynamism, interconnectivity and mutability of this dimension of digital social life (see for example Jaki et al 2019; Farrell et al 2019; Stephan et al 2020). Computational methods in the social sciences enable the mapping of digital networks and the analysis of large datasets: for example, in their study of seven online communities on Reddit with openly misogynistic content, Farrell and colleagues (2019) were able to analyze 6 million posts, from 300K conversations created over seven years. The growth of computation social sciences is a reflection of the popularity and need for

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[11] The use of computational tools (from basic data mining to the more sophisticated design and use of software and algorithmic solutions to automatically collect, structure and code large data sets) in social sciences is an important development that enables volume analysis, the variability of social data, digital media and other electronic databases. Therefore, what is commonly known as "computational social science" is a rapidly developing interdisciplinary scientific field that combines computational methods and practices with applications of social theory (Lazer *et al.* 2009; Shah *et al.* 2015).

these methods, but sophisticated technical knowledge is required in order to adopt them. In this respect, a methodological and broader epistemological challenge for the social sciences is to ensure that command of these methods is not in the 'hands' of just a few experts in specific geographical locations, for example English language-dominated, a development which could obscure large scale analysis of other thriving online communities, such as the Italian manosphere.

Of course, big data analysis, is and should not be the only or the preferred method of researching the manosphere. As the contributions to this special issue show, smaller-scale in-depth qualitative digital ethnographies can yield rich findings that capture individualized as well as collective expressions of emotions, ideas and more. With these approaches, it is possible to have relatively easy access to vast and varied rich ethnographic data, which can be collected without the researcher 'interfering' in the field. The empirical material is 'out there' with no need for researchers and participants to co-produce it. The researcher's role is rather to carefully select, filter and analyze the data in light of their research focus. The low costs involved in this type of data collection, compared to other more resource-heavy qualitative research methods, is another advantage of doing research online, as is the fact that this research can be carried out at most times, even in the context of the current pandemic, with all the limitations it has imposed on other more 'traditional' and less adaptable qualitative research techniques. Most contributions in this Monographic Section employed these methods, and in the few exceptions, researchers did not make direct contact with more radical manosphere groups in their ethnographic fieldworks but involved male adolescents who use closed whatsapp groups (Scarcelli) and men who access international dating agencies (Meszaros).

Whilst we can easily identify some of the advantages of using the research techniques mentioned above, their limitations should not be overlooked. One of them is the difficulty, even when using computational methods, in obtaining precise socio-demographic information of manosphere participants, who mostly operate through anonymized profiles. This clearly reduces the opportunities we have to explore their backgrounds and how these interplay with the discourses and rhetoric that are used. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, we should also consider that not all manosphere communities are accessible through mainstream platforms – some exist in encrypted digital spaces, others

might give access only through more rigorous screening – thus remaining largely invisible and therefore absent from studies in the field.

Another aspect to consider are the 'politics of accessibility' to the manosphere in relation specifically to the ethics of doing digital research. Key here is the fundamental question that researchers of digital spaces have been grappling with: are digital communities and platforms public or private spaces? The distinction between the two, public and private, is rarely clear-cut but it becomes even more complex and blurred when it comes to the digital sphere. Here participants might have different expectations on whether an online community they participate in is a space for private reflection amongst similar-minded people or whether they are fully aware, and perhaps even keen, that their contributions might be used for public consumption.

Questions that researchers of digital spaces need to consider are therefore: to what extent do participants in online communities expect their exchanges to be private? Is this expectation something that 'covert' researchers should be mindful of when reporting the data collected in published work? Should extracts from exchanges in online forum, such as the ones explored in this Monographic Section, be paraphrased and contributors' digital names pseudonymized? Should informed consent be sought before gaining access to these online spaces and in order to use and publish data collected there? We do not have firm answers to these questions which indeed remain highly contested and debated in social and other sciences (see, for example, Sugiura *et al.* 2016; Ravn *et al.* 2020). Moreover, as the Association of Internet Researchers (2019) amongst others, emphasizes, answers to these questions cannot but be highly contingent on the type of research that is conducted and its focus. As we see in this Monographic Section, our contributors decided not to paraphrase or anonymize extracts from the manosphere communities they study, based on the consideration that participation in them entails expectation of public access and use.

We need to consider, however, what the implications of reproducing problematic – in this case misogynistic and sexist – content is. Jane (2015) argues that one of the possible ramifications of the studies that recirculate what, as seen above, she calls e-bile is that researchers and research consumers themselves become almost accustomed to its violence and toxicity, to the point that this discourse could be taken for granted and, to a

certain extent, even tolerated, or amplified. The analysis presented by our contributors provides a critical framework which avoids such risks by addressing, contextualizing and making sense of the content presented.

Considerations about violent communication in the manosphere raise another ethical question: how should researchers respond to the use of language which might be in breach of laws and/or of platforms policies that are meant to protect against hate speech? Once again, there is no clear-cut answer to this question, given the diversity of jurisdictions and platforms policies in dealing with problematic online content. However, researchers have a responsibility to familiarize themselves with the policies and legal environments in which they operate, to abide by them and, ideally, to advocate for a change where protections and measures against hate speech are not yet present or lag behind.

The pervasiveness of hostile and aggressive attitudes towards women and feminism in the manosphere raises the issue of the vulnerability of researchers who wish to approach those who operate in it. Whilst the well-being of research participants should be central in social research, equally important is the need for researchers to avoid harms in the field. Contents shared within manosphere communities, such as hate speech and incitement to violence, can be stressful and harmful for researcher carrying out participatory observation, especially if this is conducted over a long period. Relatedly, another risk in the field is for researchers to become the object of targeted attacks by communities that use violence as part of their shared discursive practice.

Furthermore, even where there is no direct interaction between researchers and participants – as in the case of content analysis or digital ethnography – from a methodological point of view it is necessary for the researcher to reflect upon the epistemological perspective and positionality through which they approach the entire research process, from the development of research design to the analysis of empirical material. As far as we are concerned, the very decision to issue a call for a Monographic Section on this topic emerges from our positioning within a constructionist and feminist approach to gender. Through this lens, we strive to analyze the manosphere as a social phenomenon that operates withing a patriarchal matrix, strongly characterized by sexist, misogynistic and antifeminist contents, and, ultimately, we aim to sharpen the tools at our disposal in the fight to oppose violence against women and the marginalization of

different subjectivities. The decision to study empirical contexts motivated by extremist and anti-feminist ideological positions is therefore a political choice that informs our situated perspective and our scientific goals. It also implies, on a professional and personal level, putting ourselves at risk of becoming the object of attacks by the populations studied, which are rather familiar with the use of "shit storms" and other similar tools of intimidation[12]. It is in light of the possibility of these risks and of the violence they embody, that it is even more imperative to find individual and collective solutions and systems of support to study this social phenomenon in depth, and in doing so, to counteract attempts to silence critical academic analysis.

4. Reflections on Future Areas of Research

One of the aims of this Monographic Section was to expand the analysis of the manosphere in the Italian academic context. In doing so, we identified some areas of research in this field that remain less explored or even ignored, both in the contributions to this Section and in broader scholarship, and that we hope will be further explored in future research.

Firstly, manosphere groups, whether Italian or international, comprise a much broader range of communities than those analyzed here. For example, still overlooked in

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[12] Our Call for papers attracted the attention of a series of groups, self-described as the most authentic expression of the Italian manosphere, which complained to the journal's editorial team of not having been consulted on the drafting of the Call. At the invitation of both the Journal and ourselves to submit a contribution to be considered for the Monographic Section, the text that was submitted presented a meta-analysis of our Call and questioned its legitimacy. It was sent to anonymous peer review, as other contributions, and following the standard process of scientific assessment, it was evaluated as un-publishable in an academic journal. The reviewers agreed that this submission was closer to a manifesto or a pamphlet rather than a theoretically and empirically informed scientific article, both necessary requirements for publication in a scientific journal. The text was subsequently posted by its authors on various online platforms that are in line with the positions it expressed, and it received the support of many like-minded Associations and Forums.

manosphere literature are: groups of separated fathers (for some exceptions see: Kaye and Tolmie 1998; Petti and Stagi 2015; Cannito and Mercuri forthcoming), possibly because they appear to be less violent and "dangerous"; Pick Up Artists, who retain an offline and online hybrid nature and have an approach which is more "motivational" than vindictive; and in the Italian context specifically, groups such as *Uomini Beta* (Beta Men), *La Fionda* (The Sling), and *LUI - Lega degli Uomini d'Italia* (League of Italian Men), who are closely linked to the their local context and, in some cases, are more closely associated with political movements and activism that are not exclusively digital.

Another largely unexplored issue is the role of women who participate in the manosphere. The more or less violently misogynistic positions and language adopted by various manosphere groups are likely to result in different degrees of accessibility by female users and in a variety of possible reactions: from the belief that any form of female presence is an unjustifiable interference and as a punishable violation of a rigidly homosocial male space, to its tolerant acceptance, to the co-optation of women who accept the redpilled vision of reality and therefore know how to 'behave themselves' in the restricted roles/spaces they can occupy.

In light of these final considerations and of the literature and contributions to this Section, as reviewed above, we turn now to the final part of this editorial where we wish to outline what we consider to be fruitful future research directions in this field.

The first of these directions concerns the temporal dimension of the manosphere. At the outset of this editorial we already addressed the spatial dimension (geographic and geopolitical) of the manosphere. But studying it also requires an analysis of its diachronic component. On the one hand, this entails investigating the evolution of online platforms, their technical developments over time and their impact on the online practices adopted by their users. Looking at these aspects includes taking into account forms of control, censorship and sanctions adopted by those who administer these platforms to contain or prevent unlawful violent content, and how they are circumvented through migrations to other more tolerant and less monitored digital spaces, such as Telegram for example (Semenzin and Bainotti 2020). On the other hand, the evolutions of the configurations of various online groups are also worth exploring more. The positions they express and the practices they adopt, in fact, can be conceptualized and metaphorically represented (see,

for example, Ribeiro *et al.* 2020) not as an archipelago of islands with more or less frequent exchanges between their populations, but rather as a magmatic terrain whose conformation and whose borders, internal and external, are extremely mobile and volatile.

A diachronic approach could also focus on platform users, for example, through a reconstruction of their sociocultural background and their gender socialization; or via a longitudinal analysis which compares the positions and practices assumed by specific participants over time; or by taking a life course approach (as already pioneered by Donnelly *et al.* 2001), to get a better sense of users' trajectories in relation to other areas of their biography. These types of research could be facilitated by the availability of data archives within the platforms used, and by taking advantage of digital data mining techniques.

Another approach would be to try to gain access to those who have left the manosphere and who might have subsequently assumed positions of criticism and distancing towards it.

Another area of further investigation could focus on one of the novel aspects of these online spaces (compared to offline homosocial spaces): the common practice of sharing vulnerabilities between men to openly express feelings of inadequacy vis-à-vis dominant standards of hegemonic masculinity. The construction of Western masculinity, especially for young men, entails an explicit and constant distancing from the stigmatized identities of so-called "fags", "queers" and "effeminates". The figures of these "non-men" act as a gender regulating mechanism and shape configurations of masculine practices in different contexts of interaction (Pascoe 2005). It is interesting, therefore, that in the manosphere, sharing one's frustration over the inability to fulfill expectations of male physical prowess or of sexual and economic success is not viewed as discrediting and emasculating, but quite the opposite, it is re-interpreted as a new way of doing masculinity. Digital spaces can provide a potential resource to give voice to one's own vulnerability, opening up new expressive and potentially transformative possibilities of re-thinking masculinity. In this respect, the manosphere can represent both a privileged observatory of gendered emotional reactions, and a place of potential deconstruction and re-construction of gender relations (starting from intra-gender ones), to reveal a more constructive 'third way'

which distances itself from the focus on "men's misery" (Ciccone 2017) on one hand, and misogyny, violent frustration and resentment (Ciccone 2019) on the other.

It is equally interesting to observe that whilst the Red Pill philosophy is at the original core of manosphere discourses, its use has become rather diversified, as have the models of masculinity performed in various groups, creating alignments, similarities and synergies between them and across geographical contexts. The manosphere, therefore, is a site where a plurality of masculinities is performed. But it is also a space of recognition of different masculinities and of the hierarchies that exist between them. Hence, its potential for a pluralization that can deconstruct norms of gender and masculinity is never realized: alpha and beta labels continue to reify categories of masculinity, and any form of diversity keeps being conceptualized and reduced within very specific regulatory frameworks and hierarchical systems.

The points advanced above shed light on the absences that characterize the manosphere and its study, i.e. the general lack of references to experiences that deviate from the norm of heterosexuality and whiteness.

Heterosexuality is generally taken for granted by manosphere participants: the Red Pill philosophy is itself based on a representation of the social structure that relies on strictly binary inter-gender gender relations. Sexual relationships around which much of the manosphere's discourse and resentment develop are always understood within a heteronormative framework[13], and the basic biological determinism that informs Red Pill ideology does not leave room for more complex gender subjectivities. Nevertheless, the centrality of heteronormativity as a distinctive feature of the manosphere might represent an obscuring factor, also amongst researchers, of other online realities and frameworks. Whilst online contexts favor the proliferation and radicalization of anti-feminist and anti-feminine instances, they also afford visibility to alternative models and practices of gender and masculinity that remain under-explored and generally less visible also to manosphere participants. For example, non-misogynistic online communities and their inclusion/exclusion from the manosphere are dimensions to be further investigated. Openly pro-feminist groups such as the Italian *Maschile Plurale* (Plural Masculinity)

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[13] Pick up Artists exemplify this, with their very existence based on sharing seduction skills learned by men and targeted at women and rooted in pseudo-psychological interpretations of gender characteristics.

which represents critical voices "from the outside" are cases in point, as are communities of exiles from the manosphere, or groups that, albeit less popular, propose non-dominant models of masculinity that constitute counter-cultures and alternative narratives "from within".

The other absence around which a promising direction of investigation could be developed is that of whiteness and processes of racialization. This Monographic Section is undoubtedly characterized by a western-centered focus reflected in the groups studied, the authors, and the editors of this editorial. The practices of masculinity and gender relations explored present cultural specificities – albeit built on a global scale – that concern, for the most part, European and Western contexts. This makes our conclusions only generalizable to an extent. It would be very interesting to look at ways in which hierarchies of masculinity and gender are constructed in other global contexts and across and within different cultures.

Furthermore, the whiteness of those who participate in the manosphere is often taken for granted by those who participate in it and by those who study it. Indeed, practices of masculinity in the Western manosphere focus on Western men whose whiteness is assumed as the norm. It would be interesting, especially at a time of heightened awareness of the centrality of race and racial constructions in social relations, spurred by Black Lives Matter movement, to understand how environments in the manosphere that are not explicitly supremacist operate and whether ethnic and racially minoritized groups share the same vision of gender relations that circulate in mainstream and white-dominated manosphere spaces.

To conclude, we wish to question whether the conceptual frameworks currently available in men's studies scholarship are fully adequate to describe the new configurations of masculine practices acted out in the manosphere. For example Ging (2019) uses the term hybridization to explain how masculinity in the manosphere is becoming more complex through the introduction of new shared emotional dimensions. We wonder, however, whether hybridization can be viewed not only as the adding of new facets of masculinity, but as the strategic relinquishing and distancing from what is differently perceived as emasculating, whether it is women's sexual power, the influence

of feminism in society, or the hard reality of daily life, ultimately to take refuge in a virtual homosociality.

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