Farewell Manly Strength: Masculinity and the Politics of Emotion

by

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Abstract

Masculine identity has been historically defined through invocations of various forms of negative emotions within the domain of psychoanalysis, psychology, gender studies and American history. By theorizing men and masculinity as seemingly perpetually in crisis, theorists of masculinities do a disservice to the members of our society who have historically been disenfranchised by the bearers of patriarchal privilege, regardless of how these men feel. This text explores the relationship between masculinity and emotion, urging readers to consider the ways patriarchy has modulated in response to the feminist movement using the concepts of crisis masculinity, post-truth politics and gaslighting.
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Introduction

This work is an attempt to understand how patriarchal masculinity is both challenged and reinscribed as a response to feminism and queer movements. The ways in which masculinity and men's socio-political and economic power and status has been threatened by various waves of feminism has, I argue, resulted in what I shall conceptualize as "patriarchal modulation to feminism". Patriarchy's modulation often takes form as negative affects and as crisis masculinity, two concepts which are central to this thesis. For example, the history of masculinity scholarship has been centered on masculine identities rooted in anxiety, fear and uncertainty. The significance of these emotional connections to gendered self-understanding leads to invocation of concepts such as “masculinity in crisis” –a tool which, I argue, serves to undermine the lived experience of oppressed and marginalized bodies and re-focus conversation of white, heterosexual male bodies.

A prime example of modulation, I suggest, is visible in the recent "affective turn" in the academy and the increasingly visible uptake of emotion by the most privileged bodies under patriarchy in recent decades. In stark contrast to theories which read masculinities as detached or unemotional, I am interested in how masculinities and masculinity scholarship use emotion. My approach is informed by the idea that “[e]motions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices” (Ahmed 9). As such, I examine how emotions are deployed under patriarchy at the macro and micro levels. All of my chapters address this modulation. In Chapter One, I focus on the history of masculinity scholarship and its relationship to negative affects in order to highlight patriarchal modulation in response to social change understood as crisis masculinity. This chapter focuses more specifically on theories of gender. In Chapter Two I examine gender as it is lived, pointing to men’s movements alongside the scholarly uptake of affect theory by a group of largely male scholars, which both illustrate patriarchy’s modulation to operate on the level of emotion. By structuring my work in such a way, I hope to illustrate that “issues about gender [are] never just contemplative, but always [have] to do with social action” (Connell xii). Pointing to this tension at the beginning of my work serves to underscore my thesis statement –namely, that theories of masculinity which are contingent on negative emotion/affect exist in a discursive, reciprocal relationship with men’s lived experience. Finally, in Chapter Three I explore the story of Jordan Peterson as a prominent example with which to illustrate how
the concepts of patriarchal modulation and crisis masculinity may be seen today. Additionally, Chapter Three outlines the link between post-truth politics and gaslighting—tools which are mutually constitutive and operating on both micro and macro levels.

The macro-level operates at the level of politics: exploring masculinities at the level of US federal politics illustrates the appropriation of the mantle of identity politics by a demographic of white, cis-gendered, straight men—an appropriation which, in turn, helped Donald Trump succeed in winning the US federal election. As I will show, the ideology of groups such as men’s rights activists and Tea Party voters rests upon a legitimization of subjective, emotional truth claims. These emotional truth claims most frequently, within both masculinities scholarship and in men's movements as well as in public resistance to feminism, take the form of negative affects and crisis masculinity.

Although intersubjectivity and federal politics may seem worlds apart, it is my contention that the underlying force behind both the macro and micro levels outlined herein stem from an intentional misreading of power—one which divorces power from theories of systematic oppression and instead situates power on a personal, subjective plane. My hope is that by reading patriarchal masculinity through the lens of emotion, people across the gender spectrum may be empowered with more lucid understandings of the complexities of contemporary gendered identity formations.
Chapter 1
Masculinities and The Invention of Crisis

Masculine identity has been historically defined through invocations of various forms of negative emotions within the domain of psychoanalysis, psychology, gender studies and American history. “Negative emotions” or “affects” can be understood as “feelings of emotional distress” and more specifically, “a construct that is defined by the common variance between anxiety, sadness, fear, anger, guilt and shame, irritability, and other unpleasant emotions” (Stringer 1303). In its most extreme form, the relationship between negative affect and masculinity has led to the idea that masculinity is in the midst of a ‘crisis’. Crisis masculinity is a concept which has been deployed widely and across disciplines. In this chapter I outline the scholarly and cultural emergence of crisis masculinity, and explain how it is deployed with rather varied agendas. My critique of crisis masculinity stems from a feminist perspective informed by a commitment to social justice. The central argument of my project is that by theorizing men and masculinity as seemingly perpetually in crisis, theorists of masculinities do a disservice to the members of our society who have historically been disenfranchised by the masculine bodies who are the bearers of patriarchal privilege. I suggest that, instead, studies of masculinities and men’s movements need to remain cognizant of how “affect, feelings, and emotions are deployed and what this means for critiques of these movements and for scholars of men and masculinities” and further, of “how affect can be misused and abused for political and ideological ends that seemingly have very few intellectual claims that can be certifiably proven” (Alan 37). With this in mind, in this chapter I illustrate how anxiety, anger and fear remain at the heart of most (if not all) theories of masculinity.

1 Masculinity Studies: An Introduction

As one of the first anthologies in this academic subfield, Adams and Savran’s 2002 text The Masculinity Studies Reader is a useful resource which attempts to render coherent a collection of the vast expanse of research pertaining to the subject. Their introduction notes the difficulty in compiling a reader of masculinity scholarship because it was (and remains) highly contested terrain which has never received widespread institutional status. This tension is not dissimilar to tensions in queer and trans studies, wherein some influential voices which are widely considered homophobic or transphobic provoked important resistance and critical response. For example, although masculinity as an academic pursuit is a branch of women and gender studies,
masculinities studies must also account for (and resist) those influential anti-feminist voices such as Warren Farrell, and *The New Male Studies Journal* which have emerged and influenced the discourse of masculinity studies.

Adams and Savran define masculinity studies as a field “dedicated to analyzing what has often seemed to be an implicit fact, that the vast majority of societies are patriarchal and that men have historically enjoyed more than their share of power, resources, and cultural authority” (2). Navigating the world of masculinity comes with its challenges: the scholarship is indebted to the politicization of the male identity, and is often bound up with men’s movements. One might say that masculinities theory and men’s identity politics occupy distinct yet overlapping terrain. As such, I have attempted to divide this work into two streams: the first, which will be covered in this chapter, is concerned primarily with theories of gender. The next chapter will explore gender as it’s lived, in the form of politically motivated movements such as men’s liberation and men’s rights activism.

This discussion of crisis masculinity as a form of patriarchal deflection is, largely, a critique of the binary gender system. However, in order to make this critique, my argument necessarily relies on certain presumptions of gender as binary, and presumptions of cis-normativity which are all too common in scholarly work and in the media at large. I hold fast to the view that masculinity is able to be expressed by all bodies, regardless of biological sex, intrinsic or preferred gender. At issue here is that when masculinity is discussed in terms of crisis, the implied subject of discussion is invariably the masculinity of straight white men.

1.1 Crisis Masculinity

The concept of “masculinity in crisis” has been in circulation within masculinity studies for many years, finding different incarnations from its emergence in the early 1990s up to the present, with several works representing key texts that built up this discourse. In 1994, psychologist Roger Horrocks published *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies, and Realities*. Horrocks argues that “masculine identity is in deep crisis in Western culture - the old forms are disintegrating, while men struggle to establish new relations with women and with each other,” and that “[m]ale identity is shown to be fractured, fragile and truncated” (Horrocks 3). In 1998 sociologist John MacInnes wrote *The End of Masculinity: The Confusion of Sexual Genesis and Sexual Difference in Modern Society*, wherein he argues that masculinity has always been in
some sort of crisis due to the “fundamental incompatibility between the core principle of modernity that all human beings are essentially equal (regardless of their sex) and the core tenet of patriarchy that men are naturally superior to women and thus destined to rule over them” (52).

In 2000, Sally Robinson published *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*. This book explores the way “that white men are tempted by the possibilities of pain and the surprisingly pleasurable tensions that come from living in crisis” (Robinson 2). The concept of crisis masculinity extends further than the realm of social sciences and the humanities — even archaeologist Peter McAllister, author of *Manthropology: The Science of Why the Modern Male Is Not the Man He Used to Be* (2009), claims in an interview to “have a strong feeling that masculinity is in crisis” because men “are really searching for a role in modern society; the things we used to do aren’t in much demand anymore, and it seems we’re having a little trouble finding a way to establish ourselves” (Rogers, “The dramatic decline of the modern man”). Several¹ other publications regarding crisis masculinity lend to a body of work wherein the idea that “certain historical moments are more stressful for men than others. . . [has become] canonical in thinking about historicity” (Reeser 20). In addition to these scholarly and popular publications, crisis masculinity continues to circulate widely as a concept in news media. Last year *The Irish Times* published “What can we do about masculinity in crisis?” on July 11, 2016. This article deflects attention from the gains made by feminist activism and re-centers the discussion around white male bodies (Sweeney). *The New York Times* published an op-ed entitled “Before Manliness Lost Its Virtue” on August 1 2017 wherein crisis masculinity is invoked to explain the populist support behind the Trump administration (Brooks).

Johnson claims in his 2014 book *The Gender Knot* that a “society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being *male dominated, male identified, and male centered*” and is “also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women” (5,6). Drawing from Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity², we can

¹ For further reading on crisis masculinity, see Beynon, John (2002); Ghaill, MM (1996); Walsh, F (2010); Clare, A (2010).

² Defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 77).
assume that the most privileged form of masculinity will be the one most closely linked to patriarchal ideals. Given that patriarchal masculinity is rooted in the domination and subjugation of others, it’s no surprise that theories of crisis masculinity overwhelmingly focus on moments of social and cultural upheaval which place men’s social and cultural privilege in a contested position. Examples of this phenomenon abound: take for example the Terman and Miles M-F test, which emerged in order to render certain gender expressions appropriate and legitimate, and was a tool created primarily to soothe the anxieties of Depression-era men so “they could be certain that they were ‘real’ men, regardless of their performance in the workplace” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 206). By encoding gendered norms into psychological data, masculinity became confirmable and its concomitant neuroses conveniently assuaged (that is, unless one strayed from the dominant script).

In order to understand the political significance of theorizing masculinity as crisis, one must approach the concept from several angles to appreciate that this concept has been invoked by groups with rather varied agendas. Interestingly, the lens of crisis masculinity has been deployed in equal measure by contemporary angry white men, such as Tea Party voters and men’s rights activists, as it has by those seeking to resist the hateful and anti-feminist viewpoints of the former groups. Take for example a panel which took place at the University of Toronto in March of 2017 entitled “Men’s Mental Health: A Silent Crisis.” This event was hosted by the Canadian Association for Equality, a men’s rights group with headquarters in Toronto and chapters across Canada. The Canadian Association for Equality (CAFE) claims that their official mandate is to “focus on the status, health and well-being of boys and men, where attention, investment and support for educational and social programs stands at a level that is far from equal to the seriousness of the problem, while also being significantly underdeveloped compared to the resources in other important areas of social improvement” (*Canadian Association for Equality*).

The CAFE’s rhetoric is consistent with that of most men’s rights groups; namely, this group trades on the misguided belief that feminism has succeeded in achieving gender parity and that the social landscape is now less inhabitable for men. For such groups, re-centering the discussion of gender equality on masculinity’s supposed crisis works to bolster their anti-feminist viewpoint while simultaneously obscuring the anti-feminist motivations which are central to their cause.

On the other hand, crisis masculinity has been discussed in masculinities scholarship that is vehemently pro-feminist, such as in Michael Kimmel’s 1996 book *Manhood in America: A*
Cultural History. In this text, Kimmel notes that the concept of crisis masculinity has its roots in historical writings about fin de siècle era America. During the end of the 19th century, “the entry into the public sphere of large numbers of women, newly freed blacks, and immigrants; and the closing of the frontier” left “men to feel frightened, cut loose from the traditional moorings of their identities, adrift in some anomic sea” – during this period “manhood was widely perceived to be in crisis” (Kimmel, Manhood 78). Given that an integral component of patriarchy is a society that is male-centered, it’s fitting that male historians would use the language of crisis to describe masculinities in an era of advancement for women and racial minorities. The concept of crisis masculinity has likewise been invoked by feminist theorists looking to draw attention to the effects of feminist movement on masculinities. Take for example Susan Faludi’s 1999 book Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man, wherein Faludi claims:

The outer layer of the masculinity crisis, men’s loss of economic authority, was most evident in the recessionary winds of the early nineties, as the devastation of male unemployment grew ever fiercer. The role of the family breadwinner was plainly being undermined by economic forces that spat many men back into a treacherous job market during corporate ‘consolidations’ and downsizings. Even the many men who were never laid off were often gripped with the fear that they could be next — that their footholds as providers were frighteningly unsteady (Faludi 595).

Faludi’s compassion for men’s plight as a consequence of feminism’s cultural advances was certainly a breath of fresh air for men in a male-centered society, many of whom were probably beginning to feel like they didn’t exist at all given the amount of attention being paid to women’s experiences for the first time in history. However, in light of the fact that crisis masculinity is so easily deployed by both feminist and anti-feminist groups with very different agendas, it is clear that this concept is fraught and overly simplistic. By focusing on the phenomenon of white hetero-masculine anxiety, fear and anger as a result of feminist movement, the very real anxiety, fear and anger experienced by other groups is minimized or placed under erasure. Rather than examining why these groups have needed to mobilize, what they have sacrificed to achieve civil liberties, and how they have fought for their share of systemic privilege, much of the work of masculinities scholarship re-centers the discussion on how men felt about these social and cultural shifts.
In particular, one notes a common trope in masculinities scholarship which situates all men as occupying a position which is somehow outside the sphere of *true* power. Indeed, even R.W. Connell’s famous multiple masculinities model points to the idea that few, if any men, are truly the bearers of hegemonic masculinity (yet all men benefit from this social ideal to some extent via the patriarchal dividend). What we are left with is a lot of work about men who are uncertain whether they have what it takes to be a man, and who are frightened about that uncertainty. Indeed, in the face of so much scholarship centered on men’s anxiety about living up to the rigors of *true* manhood, American studies scholar Bryce Traister poses some significant questions in their 2000 article “Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies.” Here, Traister urges readers to consider some tough questions regarding what had by then become the status quo in American masculinities scholarship:

Are there actually no “real men” out there? What do we do say to the African American men still being dragged around behind pick-up trucks driven by white men? To the gay college student mercilessly beaten unconscious and left to freeze to death over the course of a cold Wyoming prairie night? To the women and children hiding in underfunded shelters? I just do not know whether the vicious masculinity behind these crimes is enduring a “crisis” in any way comparable to that of their victims, or if instead we are dealing with a manhood smoothly coherent, frighteningly competent, and alarmingly tranquil: that is, with ‘men as men’ (Traister 292)

Traister’s questions make transparent the theoretical misdirection which takes place in discussing the supposed crisis of masculinity. It’s true that, as queer studies and gender theorist Judith Halberstam points out in their 1998 work *Female Masculinity,* “too many studies that currently attempt to account for the power of white masculinity re-center this white male body by concentrating all their analytical efforts on detailing the forms and expressions of white male dominance” and that these works simply “amass information about a subject whom we know intimately and ad nauseum” (3). However, much has taken place in the world since this text’s publication in 1998. We are entering an era of unprecedented gender fluidity, with gender neutral, or gender queer, and trans bodies acquiring increasing visibility in the public sphere. In light of this, I believe it is necessary to establish new theories of masculinity, or at the very least challenge the old models which situate masculinities as detached, unemotional, anxious, and uncertain. This is work that can be undertaken without reiterating “the fragilities of male
socialization, the pains of manhood, and the fear of female empowerment” (Halberstam 19) so common in much masculinities scholarship to date. The widespread cultural fascination with masculinity in crisis has a long history which was established in the earliest theories of gender and sexuality.

1.2 Gender and Psychoanalysis

Masculinity scholarship can be traced back to the emergence of a theory of gender outlined by Sigmund Freud in his 1905 work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Adams and Savran 9, Connell 8). In the essay entitled *Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes*, Freud outlines briefly the concept of the Oedipus complex and its pre-history for boys and girls. Freud offers up some path-breaking assertions with this work, such as the idea that all humans have bisexual dispositions, and that “pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content” (Freud 20). Freud also points to gender as (at least partially) constructed through social life via the family unit, a viewpoint which has been taken up and expanded by many contemporary theorists who promote gender artifactualism. However, Freud’s perspective on gender is quite reductive and contradictory to these points, as he claims that the essential component of sexual difference hinges on the presence or absence of a penis. Feminine identity develops as a result of penis envy, whereas masculinity is the inevitable consequence of the fear of castration. Although obviously rooted in a phallocentric perspective, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* represents a watershed moment in masculinity theory because it offers analysis of both femininity and masculinity, and hints at the significance of semiotics in identity construction which psychoanalytic theorists such as Jacques Lacan would later develop much more extensively. While far from a comprehensive critique of gendered power imbalance, Freud recognized that, at the least, the anatomical distinction between the sexes was not neutral, but was instead rooted in a hierarchy which was contingent on emotional experience. Importantly for my thesis, here we can note the emergence

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3 Defined as “the tendency to conceptualize and depict gender as being primarily or entirely a cultural artifact” (Serano 117).
of a theory of masculinity rooted in negative affect: the fear of castration is central to male identity construction.

Neo-psychoanalytic theorists would take a more conservative approach to gender identity which lends credence to the concept of masculinity in crisis, abandoning Freud’s theory of bisexuality and along with it, his complex and multi-layered understanding of gender. Most widely known is Carl Jung’s theory of the persona/anima, which he first outlined in his 1953 *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. The *persona* is theorized as one’s socially constructed sense of self, while the *anima* is one’s unconscious self which is comprised mostly of repressions of certain archetypes. The archetypes were initially theorized as cultural or historical influences which could help explain emotional paradox. The notion that archetypes could help explain emotional paradox is rooted in an understanding of identity that is not relational or contextual, and is instead centered on beliefs and ideas about the way things should be. We might ask: to what extent does this animate the concept of masculinity in crisis? The persona and anima were considered to be opposites and were thus assigned genders, with the persona being informed by a masculine identity and the anima informed by the feminine. The Jungian approach has been critiqued for its binary conception of gender; masculinities scholar R.W Connell writes in 1993 that while “Freud was struggling to overcome the masculine/feminine polarity, Jung not only settled for it, but presented the familiar opposition as rooted in timeless truths about the human psyche” (13). Jung’s theory of gender renders masculinity (as persona) as socially constructed, while femininity (as anima) simply is. In light of this, it’s unsurprising that masculinity remains a gender expression of uncertain stability. Jung believed masculinity to be rooted in archetypes, eternal unconscious understandings which were held by collectives (Connell 12). By extension, femininity, too, is an expression of a timeless archetype. Modern Jungian writing thus interprets “feminism not as a resistance to the oppression of women, but as the reassertion of the archetypal feminine” (Connell 13). As such, Jungian theory has proven to be a significant tool for anti-feminist activists to oppose feminist movement based on a belief in an archetypal balance between masculinity and femininity.

The final concept of this section is the semiotic approach to psychoanalysis as outlined by Jacques Lacan, which I illustrate is linked to negative affect and crisis masculinity. Indeed, Lacan has “arguably been even more important than Freud for theorizing the relationship between men and masculinity” (Adams and Savran 11). According to Connell, Lacan’s
perspective of masculinity grants this gender expression “the occupant of a place in symbolic and social relations” (20). Drawing from Freud’s theory of Oedipus, Lacan points to how “repressions create[s] a system of symbolic order in which the possessor of the phallus (a symbol to be clearly distinguished from any empirical penis) is central” (Connell 20). In Lacanian theory, the masculine is linked to a symbolic understanding of gender. The semiotic power of the phallus is understood as significantly cultural—rather than a biological given --and can therefore be subject to critique and political refusal. Lacanian psychoanalysis offered a useful framework for feminist theorists, as it effectively (and monumentally, for those interested in the social construction of gender) liberated gender identities from biological determinism, thus providing the conditions of possibility for resistance. Lacan’s theory of the phallus is described by Elizabeth Grosz as “the valorized signifier around which both men and women define themselves’ (qtd in Adams and Savran 11). This symbol is representative of a masculine and cultural ideal which is ultimately unattainable. Significantly, the “fact that the penis is phantasmatically linked to, but cannot become, the phallus, is a source of considerable anxiety” (Adams and Savran 11). Here we see further evidence of the relationship between masculinity and negative affect.

1.3 Early Roots of Masculinity in Crisis: Psychological Sciences and Social Control in Early 20th Century North America

Symptoms of what came to be known as crisis masculinity emerged in North America in large part due to economic upheavals, which forced a cultural re-imagining of the definition of ‘manhood’ (Reeser 20). The link between (hetero)masculinity and economics has been outlined at length by masculinities scholar Michael Kimmel, who points to the emergence of North American masculine anxieties at the end of the 19th century when the workforce was flooded by women and minorities (Manhood 78). A similar tension is identifiable as having taken place between the two World Wars during the Great Depression. According to Kimmel, the “depression had forced many men to abandon their faith in the marketplace as certain to confirm their manhood” (Manhood 206). In an increasingly untenable economic world, it became difficult to ground one’s identity in these culturally-imposed, “manly” career accomplishments. Consequently, other justifications of masculine legitimacy were sought by scholars and thinkers, who were motivated by a rapidly shifting cultural landscape which had left unemployed men searching for meaning.
Psychology can be linked to the relationship between masculinity and negative affect. This discipline “offered some solace” to anxious men, as it offered a way for masculinity to “be redefined away from achievement in the public sphere and reconceived as the exterior manifestation of a certain sense of oneself” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 206). As I illustrate, the “sense of oneself” which psychology helped instill in men during this era was contingent on a repudiation of femininity and, by extension, homosexuality. It is important to note that psychoanalysis was not influential in North America at this time – instead, behavioral psychology emerged in the 1920’s as a psychological approach to human behavior which “denied any intrinsic life to the mind” (Mills 3). Later, neo-behaviorism as developed by B.F. Skinner in the 1930’s also took into account emotions and introspection, but not to the degree that psychoanalysis privileged introspection; Skinner felt that “mental and physical events were substantively equivalent” (Mills 6). Significantly, almost all psychologists working during the 1920s and 1930s shared a common belief that “psychological research would have direct social implications” (Mills 3) and that the “theoretical goal of psychology is the prediction and control of behavior” (qtd. in Mills 4). Contextualizing behavioral/neobehavioral psychology as a form of social control in the 1930s serves to situate the emergence of psychology as a means of policing gender and sexuality. Here I must re-iterate: psychology was used to combat the destabilizing effects of the 1930’s economic downturn on what had heretofore comprised the social conventions of masculine gender expression.

During the Great Depression, “[s]exuality emerged as the central element of American manhood” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 100), and as such, American society required a way to quantify and assess this aspect of identity. Consequently, in 1936, psychologist Lewis Terman and associate Catherine Miles developed an “M-F” scale which measured gendered behaviors and attitudes in order to offer parents a better understanding of their child’s “mental” gender, outlined as follows:

[Terman and Mile’s] M-F scales included an inventory of 456 items and utilized state-of-the-art psychological personality tests — including Rorschach ink blots, projective tests that asked children to imagine themselves in various situations, and standard attitude and knowledge inventories — to position each test taker along a continuum from Masculinity at one pole to Femininity at the other. An individual’s answers to these tests, administered primarily to adolescents, both boys and girls, in junior high schools across
the country, spelled success or failure in acquiring a gender-appropriate identity. For those who failed, their gender-inappropriate personality could be seen as a kind of ‘early warning system’ for future homosexuality. . . (Kimmel, Manhood 207)

Masculinity, which had previously been marked quite simply by the social order was subject to empirical verifiability by Terman and Miles as part of a shift in North America toward an emphasis on scientism, statistical analysis and social control. Importantly, the M-F test was conceived not only to determine whether a child displayed a mental disposition appropriate to their gender role, but made a direct correlation between those with ‘aberrant’ results and homosexuality. By encoding masculinity and femininity into science, Terman and Miles simultaneously rendered homophobia part of a healthy masculinity, underscoring once more the significance of negative affects in the construction of masculine identities.

Interestingly, Terman and Miles’ M-F test relied quite heavily on the exploration of emotion, linking psychological understandings of masculinity to the negative affect of fear noted earlier. Participants in the test were asked to quantify their emotional responses to a series of hypothetical situations, noting whether they felt “a lot, some, a little, none” in regards to “the following emotions: anger, fear, pity and wickedness” (Kimmel, Manhood 208). Thus it is unsurprising that certain emotions were considered masculine, such as anger and wickedness, whereas fear and pity were considered more feminine responses.

Terman and Mile’s M-F test was being employed by school districts in the United States as recently as the 1960’s, and formed the “basis for virtually all studies of gender-role acquisition ever since, including some of the most widely used psychological tests in our nation’s history: the Strong Vocational Interest Blank (1943), the Guilford Temperament Survey (1936), and Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (1972), still the most widely used complete personality inventory” (Kimmel, Manhood 209). Based on the significant influence of Terman and Mile’s M-F test within the history of psychology, one sees clearly the ways in which “issues about gender [are] never just contemplative, but always [have] to do with social action” (Connell xii). Psychoanalysis and psychology paved the way for critical discussions (and frequently, correctives) of masculinity and femininity as lived experience. However, neither discipline had a neutral influence on the construction of gender and sexual identity. Indeed, the centrality of social control to neo-behavioral psychology illustrates the patriarchal influence on social science.
1.4 Feminism, Gender and Sexuality

The era of the 1960’s-1980’s brought with them a relatively rapid set of changes to the gendered economic sphere. The writings which emerged at this time influenced changes in the lives of women and men and are necessary in contextualizing the concept of crisis masculinity and its link to feminist movement. Understood by many feminist scholars as the “second wave” of feminism, this era saw the publication of bestselling works of feminist thought such as *Sex and the Single Girl* by Helen Gurley Brown in 1962 and *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan the following year. Although these writers differed in their approach, both were remarkably successful – *Sex and the Single Girl* “sold two million copies within the first three weeks” (Weigel 137). These texts advocated for women’s financial independence, with Brown’s text emphasizing the link between one’s career and sexual autonomy.

1974 saw the publication of a pioneering work entitled *Woman, Culture & Society*. This anthology of scholarly papers was edited by feminist anthropologists Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, and focused on re-thinking anthropology by centering women, both as researcher and as the topic of study. Pointing to the male-centeredness of anthropological field work served to highlight the patriarchal lens through which many other disciplines were being filtered. In 1979, anthropologist Gayle Rubin published “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex.” This text provides a critique of Marx, Levi-Strauss and Freudian psychoanalytic theory in order to establish Rubin’s theory of the sex/gender system. The sex/gender system can be explained as a way of organizing society around sex and gender, and more specifically, a way of organizing society in a manner that oppresses women. By critiquing the structures theorized by Marx, Freud and Levi-Strauss, Rubin illustrates that women’s oppression is not integral to social organization, but is instead a product of it.

The idea that attaining a career could offer resolution to the plight that women faced was critiqued by black feminist scholars as a privileged position. In 1984 Gloria Watkins published her second book under the pen name bell hooks. This text, entitled *Feminist Theory*, pointed to the fact that when writers such as Friedan and Brown described the plight of women, they were really referring to “the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle- and upper-class, married white women – housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of life” (*Feminist Theory* 1). Friedan, says hooks, “ignored the
existence of all non-white women and poor white women” and “did not tell readers whether it was more fulfilling to be a maid, a babysitter, a factory worker, a clerk, or a prostitute than to be a leisure class housewife” (Feminist Theory 2). Feminist Theory offered an approach to feminist discourse which took into account issues of race and class. By critiquing essentialising discourses surrounding women’s experience, hooks opened up space for scholars to question the gendered category of women itself.

1.5 Gender and Sexuality

The late 1980’s and 1990’s were home to a new school of feminist thought, theorized by many as the “third wave.” Works such as de Lauretis’ Technologies of Gender (1987), Sedgwick’s Epistemology of the Closet (1990), Halperin’s One Hundred Years of Homosexuality (1990) were hugely important in the discourse. The 1990 publication of Gender Trouble by Judith Butler made waves in women’s studies departments by blending French critical theory with psychoanalysis in order to explore how gender is enacted via a theory of performativity. The centrality of performativity to gender is articulated in Butler’s updated 1999 preface to Gender Trouble, wherein she outlines that “[t]he view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (xv, xvi). Performativity shows us that “what we take to be an ‘internal’ feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures” (xv, xvi). Significantly, Butler gave voice to the complexities of gender identity, arguing that if “one ‘is’ a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered ‘person’ transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (4).

Through this work, Butler challenges homogenizing understandings of masculinity and femininity, noting the relationality and contextual/historical specificities of gendered construction. Interestingly, although this text was written almost thirty years ago, the concept of crisis masculinity continues to circulate throughout popular culture as though masculinity itself were a coherent category. By setting forth the notion that gender is never static, Butler forever
implicated gender in “the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (Butler 4, 5). Theorizing gender via a theory of performativity which has been dictated in large part by social forces led to theories of gender being explored in the academy — what was long called Women’s Studies has largely given way to Women and Gender studies in many institutions, although this process has been ongoing and contested. 4 Discussion of gender’s construction and performativity opened up space for new theories of masculinity, such as those brought about by the work of R.W. Connell.

1.6 Hegemonic Masculinity and the Multiple Masculinities Model

In 1995, R.W. Connell published a landmark work in gender studies entitled Masculinities. Following in the tradition of third wave feminist and queer theory, this book explores how masculinity is performed within a gender matrix which is influenced by patriarchy. Connell’s work stresses the significance of relationality in establishing theories of gender, noting that “[w]hen conditions for the defense of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded” and that new “groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony” (Connell 77). Connell’s work is indebted to Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. Hegemony refers to “the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (Connell 77). Mapping this Marxist concept onto the world of gender, Connell asserts that not only masculinity, but certain performative iterations of masculinity function hegemonically under patriarchy. By setting forth the notion that “[a]t any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted,” hegemonic masculinity “can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 77). Taking the Marxist analysis one step further, Connell outlines a hierarchy of masculinities which operate concurrently. Sociologist and gender theorist C.J Pascoe offers a succinct outline of Connell’s taxonomy in her 2007 book Dude You’re a Fag:

4 For more on this tension see Scott’s “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” The American Historical Review. 91.5 (1986) : 1053-1075.
Hegemonic masculinity, the type of gender practice that, in a given space and time, supports gender inequality, is at the top of this hierarchy. Complicit masculinity describes men who benefit from hegemonic masculinity but do not enact it; subordinated masculinity describes men who are oppressed by definitions of hegemonic masculinity, primarily gay men; marginalized masculinity describes men who may be positioned powerfully in terms of gender but not in terms of class or race. Connell, importantly, emphasizes that the content of these configurations of gender practice is not always and everywhere the same. Very few men, if any, are actually hegemonically masculine, but all men do benefit, to different extents, from this sort of definition of masculinity, a form of benefit Connell (1995) calls the ‘patriarchal dividend’. (Pascoe 7)

As Pascoe notes, few men actually perform their gender in a hegemonically masculine way. However, Connell is more concerned about cultural representation and ideals of masculinity, arguing that although “individual holders of institutional power or great wealth may be far from the hegemonic pattern in their personal lives,” their cultural position represents the “correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power” (77). According to Connell, this is the reason that the “top levels of business, the military and government provide a fairly convincing corporate display of masculinity, still very little shaken by feminist women or dissenting men [—it] is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority)” (Connell 77). Connell’s work offers a significant contribution to understanding patriarchy, as his notion of the patriarchal dividend implicates all male bodies to varying degrees. It also helps us understand exactly what is at stake when masculinity is described as enduring a crisis: the hegemonic ideal of masculinity is somehow in jeopardy.

The ‘queer’ approach to gender theory opened up space for masculinity to be discussed as more than just being male, as is evidenced by the publication of Judith Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* in 1996, which explores how masculinity is performed by women. This text takes issue with the notion that “[g]ender. . .is reversible only in one direction, and this must surely have to do with the immense social power that accumulates around masculinity” arguing that “[m]asculinity. . .has been reserved for people with male bodies and has been actively denied to
people with female bodies” (Halberstam 269). The ways in which masculinity has been guarded by males is examined, guided by the idea that:

\[\text{exchanges between male and female masculinities. . .have the potential to go both ways. The question, then, might be not what do female masculinities borrow from male masculinities, but rather what do men borrow from butches? If we shift the flow of power and influence, we can easily imagine a plethora of new masculinities that do not simply feed back into the static loop that makes maleness plus power into the formula for abuse but that re-create masculinity on the model of female masculinity. (Halberstam 276)}\]

Although the third wave of feminism offered the social construction of gender (or what can be referred to as gender artificialism) as an alternative to the gender determinist viewpoints in circulation, trans feminist activist and biologist Julia Serano supplies a critique of both approaches in her 2013 book *Excluded: Making Feminism and Queer Movements More Inclusive*, claiming them each to be overly simplistic. Serano begins by affirming that gender artificialism is appealing, because “[g]ender determinists have mischaracterized biology as ‘programming’ us and ‘predetermining’ our behaviors, and this misconception has often been used to justify the marginalization of women, and of gender and sexual minorities” whereas theorizing gender as “a performance. . .seems to allow us to intervene, to overturn this regime, and to replace oppressive genders and sexualities with more liberated ways of being” (145).

Serano points to the dubious narrative which underpins the good/bad dichotomy through which many gender theorists understand the debate between gender determinism and gender artificialism. Indeed, the gender determinist notion that “LGBTQIA+ people are simply ‘born that way,’ and therefore. . .deserve the same rights and respect as heterosexual and cisgender folks” has undoubtedly made “it far easier to move through the world as an openly queer person than it was twenty or thirty years ago” (Serano 145). Similarly, gender artificialism has been deployed for the last century in defense of patriarchal ideas, such as “Sigmund Freud’s hardline gender artificialist theories [which] were used to pathologize queer people and to portray girls and women as inferior to their male counterparts” (Serano 146). As such, Serano contends that a dogmatic adherence to either perspective misses the mark.

Serano establishes a theory of gender and sexuality that she calls a holistic (rather than homogenizing) model which “attempts to accommodate difference rather than focusing narrowly
on sameness” (152). This theory has three basic tenets, which can be summarized as follows: 1) although we are biologically similar, our genetics and physiology are always unique; 2) all human behaviours are complex traits which are the result of a limitless amount of environmental, social and biological factors and; 3) all humans are implicated in the biological just as they are in the social. Serano’s holistic model challenges mind-body dualisms which inevitably result in gender policing and sexism. By advocating for a holistic model, the point is to focus less on promoting gender artifactualism’s possibilities and instead, on challenging sexism and oppression in all of its forms. This work points us to the notion that the binary system of gender itself is highly unstable. Indeed, one might be able to point more convincingly to a “crisis in gender” rather than a crisis in masculinity.

2 Conclusion

Centering theories of masculinity around the concept of crisis serves to overwrite the crises experienced by marginalized groups whose social advancement placed traditional patriarchy under scrutiny. However, the overwhelming prevalence of this concept in theorizing masculinities under late capitalism indicates that the disjunct between the ideals of patriarchal masculinity and men’s lived experience is becoming increasingly marked. With this in mind, it is necessary for feminist activists to consider the ways in which patriarchy has modulated in response to feminist activism – how does crisis masculinity offer us an example of the way emotional truth claims can gain traction when deployed by dominant groups? This question will be explored in the next section of my thesis.
Chapter 2
On The Patriarchal Modulation to Feminism

In the previous chapter, I explored the history of masculinities scholarship, emphasizing the centrality of negative affects to the growth of the discipline. By outlining the centrality of felt or perceived injustice on the part of men’s gendered self-understanding, I underscored the historical emergence of subjective and individualizing truth claims which have come to the fore of our political landscape. My task in this chapter builds off the critique of crisis masculinity, extending into the realm of experiential knowledge and philosophy of emotion. By examining the men’s movements which have formed as a reaction to feminist movement, I shed light on the relationship between patriarchy and emotion. Specifically, this work extends on feminist theorist Liz Kinnamon’s concept that “[p]atriarchy operates at the register of emotion where it can’t afford to operate through violence or coercion” (1). I bolster this argument by looking at the emergence of affect theory in the 1990’s by a group of largely male theorists who have consistently placed feminist philosophy of emotion under erasure. The growth of affect theory, commonly referred to as “the turn to affect” occupies a unique space within this project, because it serves as both a case study and a framework with which to couch my argument.

As I illustrate, affect theory emerged in the 1990’s as a discipline which offered new and exciting potential for theorists, while ignoring the feminist body of work around philosophy emotion which began in the 1970s. Affect has been described as a circulating and autonomous intensity, in contrast with feminist philosophy’s focus on relationality. How are we to account for the pioneer mentality of affect theory, which posits affect as something new—and more specifically, something autonomous, divorced from relationality? Does the turn to affect provide evidence of a very real investment by masculine bodies into the realm of emotion? And finally, what parallels can be drawn between dominant groups who use emotional truth claims to shift away from responsibility, and this turn to a universalizing conception of affect that ignores feminist histories of scholarship on emotion?

At the micro level, this chapter explores how contemporary masculine subjectivities have been shaped by an increased patriarchal investment in the realm of emotion. Here I explore the relationship between gendered forms of emotional manipulation and patriarchy. This includes a discussion of the deployment of truth claims rooted in individualizing sensibilities that overlook
structural and systemic operations of privilege and patriarchal power claims by anti-feminist activists.

3 Affect and Emotion

Emotion and affect significantly influence our mediation and understanding of the world—as Megan Boler discusses in her 1999 book Feeling Power “[e]motions are inseparable from actions and relations, from lived experience” (2). Emotions are highly gendered, as both “‘women’ and ‘emotions’ have historically been relegated to the private and domestic spheres of the home, of caring for others” which are “spheres outside the province of the politically governed, public spaces constructed and inhabited by men” (Boler, Feeling 6). As such, my project rests on an understanding of “emotions as collaboratively constructed and historically situated, rather than simply as individualized phenomenon located in the interior self” (Boler, Feeling 6). That being said, it would be a mistake to conflate the terms affect and emotion, or to proceed in a discussion of the political and cultural significance of emotion without first outlining the genealogy of these two concepts.

This chapter discusses the emergence of affect theory within the academy, comparing and contrasting it with the significant body of work which preceded it: feminist philosophy of emotion. By highlighting how affect theory and philosophy of emotion are projects which are heavily inflected by gendered and patriarchal forces, the shifting relationship between patriarchal masculinity and emotion comes into view. As developed in Chapter 1, negative emotions have been at the heart of theories of masculinity, and these emotions are central to the deployment of concepts such as crisis masculinity. Importantly in the case of crisis masculinity, feeling is integral to maintaining patriarchal cultures—one feels disenfranchised by losing some share of structural power, and this feeling is legitimated by a dominant culture which affirms that masculinity is indeed in crisis. Interestingly, affect theory serves to theorize affect as both new, unexplored territory and not implicated by social structures (such as those which might inflict patriarchal anxieties).

This discussion begins with the emergence of affect theory (which has been referred to as the affective turn) first in order to situate it against a landscape of feminist philosophy which preceded it and continues to flourish. By illustrating how the affective turn is theorized as distinct from feminist philosophy of emotion and somehow new, I illustrate how “emotions have
not been considered ‘noteworthy’ within the male-defined perimeters of historical scholarship” (Boler, Feeling 19). In light of this, readers are encouraged to read the history of affect theory while bearing in mind the previous chapter’s discussion of patriarchal modulation in response to the feminist movement. As noted by Boler in a 2016 interview with Michalinos Zembylas, what is strange “about the ‘affective turn’ is the resounding silence about the feminist interventions. . .that arguably laid the groundwork for the popular uptake of “affect theory” in this 21st century” (“Interview” 23). In particular, I wish to draw attention to the way affect is so often theorized as autonomous, separate from the relational or social structures which underpin feminist theories of emotion. Boler highlights this trend, suggesting that in light of “the persisting binaries that link women with emotion, men with reason –surely gender (and race, and class) are central to analyses of affect within patriarchal cultures” (“Interview” 23). This section illustrates that “the affective turn” offers a distinct example of the way patriarchy has modulated in response to feminist work on emotion. By claiming that affect is not rooted in relationality, and defending this claim with empirical evidence that is tenuous at best, affect theorists undermine the cultural implications of emotion amid the post-truth political era.

3.1 The Turn to Affect

Brian Massumi, a leading scholar in affect theory, writes in his 2002 Parables for the Virtual of “a growing feeling within media, literary and art theory that affect is central to an understanding of our information and image-based late-capitalist culture” (27). Within neoliberal society, affective responses have become increasingly commoditized and quantified in measures to ensure product sales, and are frequently tracked by social networks to reach wider audiences. This phenomenon has been noted by media and advertising scholars since as early as 1983, evidenced in Moore and Hutchinson’s article The Effects of Ad Affect on Advertising Effectiveness, which discusses a subject’s greater willingness to consider buying products after viewing advertisements that elicited a positive emotional response. These techniques have evolved into a marketing tactic known as neuromarketing, a practice which “seeks to predict and manipulate consumer buying behaviour by decoding how instinctive drives and affect can be triggered to enact automatic buying responses” (Nemorin 60). In light of the pervasive influence of affect and emotion to late-capitalist culture, it should come as no surprise that the mainstream political realm is similarly afflicted. As Sara Ahmed expresses in her book The Cultural Politics of Emotion, emotions can be read as more than just psychological states, but “as social and
cultural practices” (9). With this in mind, the history of affect as a philosophical concept is explored and situated within (and against) a history of feminist work on emotion.

Affect, although used widely as a theoretical and philosophical tool, is a slippery term without one fixed or agreed upon definition. Indeed, attempting to write or read about affect is difficult for, as O’Sullivan notes, “you cannot read affects, you can only experience them” (qtd. in Hemmings 1). According to Nigel Thrift, we can distinguish at least “four different approaches to this term” which include “(1) affect as a set of embodied practices, (2) affect based around the Freudian notion of drive, (3) affect as neo-Darwinian, and (4) affect as becoming” (qtd. in Zembylas 308). Bearing in mind affect’s widely varied interpretations, any attempt to write a totalizing, monolithic explanation of this concept would not be productive given the scope of this paper. As such, I explore a partial history of affect theories, underscoring the ways which it may be understood as similar to and distinct from emotion (and the concomitant tensions associated with this distinction). Thus I offer here a brief historical analysis of where and how affect emerged within the philosophical tradition, and examine the different ways interlocutors have utilized affect and expanded the realm of affect theory. Gaining an understanding of the history of affect theories serves to situate my work on emotion within a canon of feminist theory, and clarifies why I chose to approach theorizing masculinities around emotion.

The term affect first appeared in the work of Benedict Spinoza in his 1665 book Ethics, appearing as affectus. This term has been translated as both ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ throughout history, although recent translations tend toward using ‘affect’ for reasons explained herein. Spinoza outlined affect as “states of a body by which its power of acting is increased or lessened, helped or hindered, and also the ideas of these states” (51). He notes, importantly, that a “human body can be in many states in which its power of acting is increased or lessened, and also in others which render its power of acting neither greater nor less” and that while “a human body undergoes many changes it can retain impressions or traces of objects that it has interacted with and consequently it can retain the same images of things” (Spinoza 51). Spinoza’s conception of impressions and traces continues to reverberate in the world of affect theory. However, Spinoza recognizes “only three primitive, or primary, or basic affects: pleasure, unpleasure and desire,” (77) and believes that all other psychic states or emotions are constructed from one or a combination of these affects. Thus Spinoza understands emotions and affects to be synonymous
with each other, in contrast to contemporary theorists who discuss affect *in relation* to emotion, dichotomizing emotions and affect into somewhat disparate camps.

So, if affect isn’t emotion, then what is affect? Hemmings claims that affect “broadly refers to states of being, rather than to their manifestation or interpretation as emotions” (Hemmings 5). Affects may be understood as states inhabited by bodies *prior to* cognition of these states, which are then manifested as emotion. This implies that affect is pre-cognitive and autonomous, whereas emotion is rooted in consciousness and subjectivity. Gilles Deleuze’s work on affect theory draws heavily from Spinoza’s ideas, but makes a significant departure from the emotional realm, focusing instead on the idea of potentialities (or what Deleuze refers to as immanence). Spinoza notes that, at the time of his writing *Ethics*, “no-one has yet determined what a body can do” (52). Taking up this idea, Deleuze approaches affect as a notion of circulating intensities between objects. Here, we can understand objects to mean anything existing on earth, be they plants, animals, or other bodies. As Zembylas notes, Deleuze argues that “instead of asking questions that pertain to whether something is ‘true’ or not, we should consider what things ‘do’ to us...rejecting any metaphysics based on identity” and rather, seeing “individuals as products of affects and powers —that is, as effects of difference” (309). Deleuze was concerned with the way social and political forces are implicated in our becoming. Differentiating between emotion and affect is necessary because, it is theorized, the former is entangled with social and political forces to a much greater extent than the latter. Zembylas offers a lucid explanation of the difference between the two terms:

> In a sense, then, ‘‘emotion’’ belongs to the terrain of the subject while ‘‘affect’’ exceeds it. Massumi observes that Deleuze theorized affects rather than emotions because emotions are embedded within dominant social practices and institutions while affects follow ‘‘lines of flight,’’ escaping planes of consistency and predictable directions. Unlike the predictability of emotions, affects are conceptualized as forces that continuously make unpredictable connections with other bodies in a constant process of becoming. ‘‘Love’’ and ‘‘hate,’’ for instance, as intensities and forces exceed the confinement of a body, while ‘‘I love’’ or ‘‘I hate’’ are subjective expressions of one’s awareness and knowledge within a specific social and cultural context. (310)
If we accept that affect can escape the social structures which dictate emotionality, then affect can offer a hopeful area of inquiry for theorists. However, this position has come under scrutiny from philosophy of emotion for several reasons. Before being able to tackle this critique, the concept of affect should be fully developed by exploring its critical utility from the viewpoint of its advocates.

One reason for the appeal of affect theory in recent years is as a response to what have come to be seen as trappings of power relationships and social determinism inherent to poststructuralist thought such as theories which are grounded in linguistic philosophy. This move is reminiscent of the way social constructionist theories of gender were resisting theories rooted in naturalizing narratives. For those whose “entire vocabulary has derived from theories of signification that are still wedded to structure even across irreconcilable differences” (Massumi 6), affect offers space for new understandings of relationality and gender identity. However, it is important to note that for Massumi and many affect theorists, the power of affect lies in its autonomy from the subjective domain of emotion and consciousness. In his text, *The Autonomy of Affect*, Massumi argues for an integration of neuroscientific understandings of cognition within the realm of philosophy; citing a study which found that subjects connected to EEG machines registered “a half second lapse between the beginning of a bodily event and its completion in an outwardly directed, active expression” (Massumi 7), Massumi claims that affect resides in this temporal lag between sensation and cognition. Within this split-second lapse rests much of Massumi’s project on affect, within the barely graspable present moment which he describes as “the virtual” (9). For Massumi, affect “is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is” (14). Affect is an intensity that “is asocial, but not presocial – it includes social elements, but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning, and combines them according to different logic” (Massumi 8). Theorizing affect in this way renders them as outside of our control – affective responses happen whether we like it or not. This is possible only “if the trace of past actions including a trace of their contexts were conserved in the brain and in the flesh, but out of mind and out of body understood as qualifiable interiorities, active and passive respectively, directive spirit and dumb matter” and only “if past actions and contexts were conserved and repeated, autonomically reactivated, but not accomplished; begun, but not completed” (Massumi 9). With
this in mind, we might ask how different bodies offer resistance, openness, and enclose affective potentialities? What is the relationship of gender construction and affective structure?

3.2 Affect Theory: Critiques and Criticism

Massumi’s theory of affect’s autonomy has been critiqued by feminist theorists such as Clare Hemmings and Ruth Leys. In her 2005 article “Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn,” Hemmings takes up the diagrammatic nature of the affective feedback loop as outlined by Massumi. Hemmings complicates notions of affect’s autonomy by claiming that “extrapolating from [Deleuze’s] logic that affect is autonomous, as Massumi does, is a misreading” (564). Hemmings argues that Deleuze’s work is about the **components** of linearity in human experience rather than the linearity itself. Thus, if “judgment is always secondary to bodily response, poised above it, but crucially tied to it, the intensity of that response must also presumably be curtailed or extended by that judgment, forming an affective cycle in which each element has the capacity to affect (intensify or diminish) the other” (Hemmings 564). For Hemmings, Massumi’s understanding of affective cycles is too repetitive and simplistic. Instead she writes of affect as “as an ongoing, incrementally altering chain —body-affect-emotion-affect-body —doubling back upon the body and influencing the individual’s capacity to act in the world” (Hemmings 564). Hemmings’ diagramming of affect’s function in relation to bodies allows for a more complex understanding of both these circulating intensities and human agency compared to Massumi’s strictly *autonomous* reading.

Hemmings claims that in Deleuze’s theory, affect resides in relationality, and thus it can “be said to place the individual in a circuit of feeling and response, rather than opposition to others” (Hemmings 552). The affective feedback loop may be said to have the salutary effect of positioning “the individual as possessing a degree of control over their future, rather than as raw material responding rather passively to cognitive or learned phenomena” (Hemmings 552). Hemmings’ perspective of affect is similar to Sara Ahmed’s model of the sociality of emotions, as she suggests that:

emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are sharped by, and even take the
shape of, contact with others. In suggesting that emotions create the very effect of an inside and an outside, I am not then simply claiming that emotions are psychological and social, individual and collective. My model refuses the abbreviation of the ‘and’. Rather, I suggest that emotions are crucial to the very constitution of the psychic and the social as objects, a process which suggests that the ‘objectivity’ of the psychic and social is an effect rather than a cause. (Ahmed 10)

Similarly, affect’s autonomy has been critiqued by Professor of Humanities at Johns Hopkins University Ruth Leys in her article “The Turn to Affect: A Critique.” Here, Leys points to the manner with which affect theory has appropriated scientific approaches to emotion which are overly simplistic and re-inscribe dualistic understandings of the mind and body. Leys also provides evidence that the EEG study which I cited above, on which so much of Massumi’s philosophical project relies, has been highly contested. One point of contention regarding the EEG experiment, which was carried out by Benjamin Libet in the 1970s, was that the movement which was recorded in order to ascertain a lapse between brain and body responses was the lifting of a finger—an artificial requirement which was pre-determined and therefore, a result of conscious thought on the part of research subjects. As Leys notes, commentators on Libet’s experiment had noted in 1985 that “skilled pianists are not consciously aware of the innumerable movements their fingers must make during a performance, but this does not make those movements unintentional or negate the fact that the pianists intended to play the music” (455). Therefore, it is “a confusion on both Libet’s and Massumi’s part to think that because such actions usually go on automatically, below the threshold of consciousness, it is necessary to break with the whole idea of intentionality and to assume that they can only be explained in corporeal terms” (Leys 456). By invoking the autonomy of affect, Massumi aligns himself with neuroscientists whose understandings of emotion are explicitly anti-intentional. However, as Leys notes, these theorists are mistaken “to idealize the mind by defining it as a purely disembodied consciousness and then, when the artificial requirements of the experimental setup appear to indicate that consciousness of the willing or intention comes “too late” in the causal chain to account for the movements under study, to conclude in dualist fashion that intentionality has no place in the initiation of such movements and that therefore it must be the brain which does all the thinking and feeling and moving for us” (456). It is striking that the type of work on
emotion taken up by male theorists is so quick to align itself with the realm of science in order to divorce affect from the relationality of lived experience.

It’s important to note that affect theory has met with further critical resistance beyond its invocations of autonomy. One such critique of affect theory is that it positions itself against the epistemological past as a “way out”, ignoring academic work such as “feminist standpoint epistemology [which] might be said to constitute an established body of inquiry into the relationship between the ontological, epistemological and transformative” (Hemmings 557).

There is a danger in affect theory being read as strictly oppositional to “outdated” epistemological thought. Indeed, affect theory claims to offer a “new” framework for embodiment within thought, yet divorces itself from the realm of emotion which has long been the purview of feminist pedagogies. As Hemmings points out, affect’s project relies on a certain “authorship of history” which requires an “evacuation of...theoretical and political complexity from critical theory’s development” (559).

In the 2015 edition of her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, feminist philosopher of emotion Sara Ahmed furthers Hemming’s critique of positioning affect as something new or innovative, describing her critical allergy to the concept of *the affective turn*. Ahmed’s reluctance to use this term is a result of several factors. First, she notes explicitly that “when the affective turn is translated into a turn to affect, male authors are given the status of originators of this turn,” pointing out that “[t]his is a very familiar and very clear example of how sexism works in or as citational practice” (Ahmed 230). The pioneer mentality which has come to characterize “the affective turn” places feminist histories under erasure, such as work undertaken by theorists such as “Alison Jaggar (1996), Elizabeth Spelman (1989), Sue Campbell (1994, 1997), Marilyn Frye (1983), Arlie Hoschild (1983), bell hooks (1989), and Audre Lorde (1984)” (Ahmed 206). Importantly, “feminist and queer work are no longer positioned as part of that turn” and “even if they are acknowledged as precursors, a shift to affect signals a shift from this body of work” (Ahmed 206). This sentiment is echoed by feminist philosopher Anne Cvetkovich in her 2012 book *Depression: A Public Feeling*, claiming that one’s invocation of an affective turn “implies that there is something new about the study of affect when in fact...this work has been going on for some time’ (2012: 4)” (qtd in Ahmed 206). The appropriation of work on emotion and mind/body dualism by a group of largely male scholars is hugely important, as this invariably
signals a shift in the patriarchal relationship to emotion—one which re-inscribes emotion as something that is non-relational and empirically verifiable in the form of affect.

In this review I spent substantial time outlining how affect is theorized as distinct and separate from emotion by contemporary theorists, but drawing up these boundaries exposes the implicit assumptions grounded in this bordering practice. It is clear that patriarchal modulation to feminist movement has led to an increased cultural investment in emotion by masculine bodies. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, we can see how affect theory takes up emotion on its own terms; to acknowledge the feminist history of philosophy of emotion would leave patriarchal control of this area of inquiry on unstable ground. Sara Ahmed summarizes the danger of divorcing affect theory from its feminist genealogy:

The affective turn has thus come to privilege affect over emotion as its object, and considerable effort has been directed toward making affect into an object of study with clear boundaries, such that it now makes sense to speak of ‘affect studies’. Scholars such as Brian Massumi (2002) have even described affect as having a ‘different logic’ than that of emotion, as pertaining to a different order. These two terms are not only treated as distinct but have, at least by some, come to be defined against each other. For Massumi, if affects are pre-personal and non-intentional, emotions are personal and intentional; if affects are unmediated and escape signification, emotions are mediated and contained by signification. Feminist ears might prick up at this point. A contrast between a mobile impersonal affect and a contained personal emotion suggests that the affect/emotion distinction can operate as a gendered distinction. It might even be that the very use of this distinction performs the evacuation of certain styles of thought (we might think of these as ‘touchy feely’ styles of thought, including feminist and queer thought) from affect studies. (Ahmed 207).

As such, it is with Hemmings’ understanding of affect that I approach this paper because this position “rejects the contemporary fascination with affect as outside social meaning, as providing a break in both the social and in critics’ engagements with the social” (Hemmings 565). Thus, in conjunction with Deleuze’s notion of “affect as becoming” (Zembylas 308), I am fascinated by the relationship between sociality, affect, and bodies. However, in light of the tensions inherent to the world of affect theory, I have chosen to privilege the term “emotion” to discuss the issues
at hand. This is because the emotional realities which inflect the political landscape that I explore are subjective and are social and cultural practices. As recognized by the second wave feminists whose rallying cry was that the “personal is political,” emotions are both personal and political, to the extent that they have come to define how we navigate contemporary life, political activism, and pedagogy. It is my contention that “the turn to affect” is illustrative of patriarchal modulation to feminist movement. Now, it is possible to be a man and discuss emotion seriously in an academic setting, so long as you use the correct terminology. This is the result of men’s storied relationship to feminist movement, which I outline below.

4 Men and Feminism

4.1 Men’s Liberation

During the second wave of feminism, a group of men who identified as feminists began questioning their relationship to the patriarchy and more specifically, the sex roles which men felt pressured to perform. Betty Friedan articulated the perspective of men’s liberationists quite well in her 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*:

> How could we ever really know or love each other as long as we kept playing those roles that kept us from knowing or being ourselves? Weren’t men as well as women still locked in lonely isolation, alienation, no matter how many sexual acrobats they put their bodies through? Weren’t men dying too young, suppressing fears and tears and their own tenderness? It seemed to me that men weren’t really the enemy—they were the fellow victims, suffering from an outmoded masculine mystique that made them feel unnecessarily inadequate when there were no bears to kill. (Friedan qtd in Kimmel, *Manhood* 261)

The aim of the men’s liberation movement was not to undermine the feminist movement, but rather to work in tandem with feminists in the fight for equality. Some notable works which emerged from the era of men’s liberation include “Warren Farrell’s *The Liberated Man* (1974), Marc Feigen Fasteau’s *The Male Machine* (1975), Herb Goldberg’s *The Hazards of Being Male* (1975), and *The New Male* (1979), Jack Nichol’s *Men’s Liberation* (1975), and two anthologies, Deborah David and Robert Brannon’s *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* (1976) and Joseph Pleck and Jack Sawyer’s *Men and Masculinity* (1974)” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 280). These texts were
concerned primarily with gendered norms and behaviors, which were referred to as sex-roles. Women were questioning the sex-roles which expected them to be docile and uncritical housewives. Concurrently, men’s liberationists asked themselves why men were expected to be detached and unemotional, and were curious as to what extent the feminist concept of challenging sex roles could have a positive effect for everyone under a patriarchy. Based on the outpouring of feminist work created by men about men, the academic and cultural influence of these works is somewhat less than resonant. The men’s liberation movement dissolved, fracturing into different camps – Warren Farrell, a prominent men’s liberationist, went on to publish *The Myth of Male Power* (1993), an anti-feminist text. Meanwhile, Michael Kimmel, who was himself a men’s libber, continued researching masculinity within the academic discipline of gender studies. What happened? How do we understand the absence of popular or scholarly uptake of so much of the work undertaken by the men’s liberation movement?

The relatively unsupportive response of both the feminist movement and dominant culture to men’s liberation has been written about by theorists such as bell hooks and R.W. Connell. For those men’s liberationists who had devoted themselves to getting in touch with their emotions and challenging sex roles, the response from many feminists in their lives was far from positive. Indeed, as feminist and social activist bell hooks argues in her 2004 book *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*:

> Most women do not want to deal with male pain if it interferes with the satisfaction of female desire. When [the] feminist movement led to men’s liberation, including male exploration of ‘feelings’, some women mocked male emotional expression with the same disgust and contempt as sexist men. Despite all the expressed feminist longing for men of feeling, when men worked to get in touch with feelings, no one really wanted to reward them. In feminist circles men who wanted to change were often labeled narcissistic or needy. Individual men who expressed feelings were often seen as attention seekers, patriarchal manipulators trying to steal the stage with their drama. (7)

In 1993 Connell outlined the idea that men who attempted to resist patriarchal masculinity in the 1970’s were “likely to be met with derision from many other men, and from some women,” pointing out that it is “almost a journalistic cliché that women despise Sensitive New Age Guys” and that these men did “not necessarily get warm support from feminist women” (qtd. in hooks
Although hooks and Connell are sympathetic to the men who populated the men’s liberation movement, Kimmel resists the notion that every man’s commitment to the movement was entirely whole-hearted. He claims that when feminists moved from critiquing sex roles to critiquing the personal, specifically “men’s behaviors —by making rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence part of the gender dynamics that were under scrutiny, men’s libbers departed.” (Angry 104). Kimmel’s perspective gives us more insight into the disappearance of men’s liberation scholarship after the 1970s, and offers a glimpse into the nuanced response of patriarchy to a burgeoning feminist presence.

Although Connell, Kimmel and hooks have a tendency to collapse male feminists into a single monolithic group in order to advance the above critiques, I believe it is important to acknowledge that men undoubtedly approached feminism widely and were consequently interpreted variously as allies depending on their specific understandings and motivations. That being said, Connell’s critique of of men’s liberation scholarship’s one-dimensionality adequately explains why “men who had worked hard for sex role change in the 1970s could make no effective resistance in the 1980s to ideologues who rejected their modernity as ‘softness’, and instituted a cult of an imaginary past” (27). The ideologues referred to by Connell can be grouped into three movements. The first two may be thought of as a backlash against feminism, and include biological traditionalists and men’s rights activists. These two groups emerged most prominently in the 1980’s, though as I will illustrate, their presence continues online and is proliferating across college campuses. The third group is known as the mythopoetic men’s movement, who have been described as largely gender separatist in their politics and appeared on the scene in the early 1990’s.

4.2 The Backlash of Men’s Rights Activists and Biological Traditionalists

The mobilization of anti-feminist sentiment is what journalist and author Susan Faludi refers to as “the backlash.” However, before moving forward with a more in depth discussion of the groups which can be said to have comprised this backlash, it’s necessary to point to critiques of the concept itself. Connell describes how the backlash concept has been taken to task for what it presupposes: namely, “a univocal men’s interest in relation to gender reform” (250). With this in mind, we can think about a backlash in a plurality of terms. The backlash can be theorized as groups of men who mobilized against feminist politics, such as biological traditionalists and
men’s rights activists. However, a backlash can also be argued to have been engendered during the era of Reagan and Thatcher by people across the gender spectrum, and in the name of women’s interests:

The gender politics that unfolded then—including attacks on abortion rights and abortion providers, the demolition of affirmative action programs, the demonizing of ‘welfare mothers’, the winding back of social welfare measures, the attacks on ‘permissiveness’ and ‘homosexual lifestyles’, and glorification of ‘the traditional family’ certainly slowed the pace of gender reform. But many of these campaigns were led by women, not by men, and were presented as being in the interest of women. Around ‘permissiveness’, indeed, a remarkable alliance developed between feminist anti-pornography campaigners and right-wing authoritarians in attempts to criminalize the commercial sex industry. (Connell 250, 251).

Pointing to Connell’s critique of the notion of a univocal backlash illustrates the significant difficulties of discussing gender politics without homogenizing or making monolithic statements regarding the contributions of different groups. This particular example highlights that patriarchy implicates all of us in ways that remain contested among feminists, notably feminist viewpoints regarding pornography. However, it is my contention that whether or not we operate under the assumption that there was a univocal interest in gender reform on the part of men, any interest in gender reform on the part of men illustrates a failure of patriarchy and is worth highlighting.

I now draw attention to the first group of men who raised their collective voice against the feminist movement. This group of men can be described as biological traditionalists: these men believe that the cure for contemporary masculinity can be found in patriarchal past, and view feminism as directly oppositional to men’s biological dominance. These gender essentialist crusaders “echo the Social Darwinism of nineteenth-century antifeminists, as well as such 1970’s conservatives as George Gilder” (Kimmel, Manhood 301). Nicholas Davidson’s 1987 text The Failure of Feminism outlines such traditionalist viewpoints at length, which center on a belief that men are biologically superior to women. Biological traditionalists appeal to the patriarchal love of objectivity and scientism in order to argue that gender equality is not only a flawed concept, but biologically impossible. By attempting to justify anti-feminist sentiment under the guise of scientific facts, biological traditionalists absolve themselves of any guilt
associated with the domination of women while simultaneously utilizing the existence of patriarchal histories to bolster their claims.

4.3 The Mythopoetic Men’s Movement and Transcendental Masculinity

The early 1990’s saw the emergence of a group of men known as the mythopoetic men’s movement. The men of this group held a common desire for masculinity to be sedimented, knowable and verifiable. The hunt for stability and rootedness of gender identity harkens back to Terman and Miles’ M-F test, and can be seen as an early imbrication of neoliberal ideals onto knowledge production and personhood. As such, by the early 1990’s many chose to turn back toward the idea of transcendental masculinity, centering on the idea of an innate “Wild Man” (Bly 246) that modern masculinity had lost touch with, but was still recoverable. In his 1990 book *Iron John*, writer and icon of the mythopoetic men’s movement Robert Bly comments on the influence of feminist politics on the construction of masculinity:

There’s something wonderful about this development –I mean the practice of men welcoming their own ‘feminine’ consciousness and nurturing it –this is important –and yet I have the sense that there is something wrong. The male in the past twenty years has become more thoughtful, more gentle. But by this process he has not become more free. He’s a nice boy who pleases not only his mother but also the young woman he is living with (2)

Here we can see evidence of the specific demographic who were attracted to Bly’s work: men who felt betrayed by their investment in femininity and were in search of affirmation. Neither feminist nor specifically anti-feminist, this movement was pioneered in large part by best-selling writers such as Robert Bly, Michael Meade and Sam Keen. Most would agree that the keystone work of this movement is Robert Bly’s *Iron John*, a text which encourages men to get back in touch with the ‘deep masculine’ inside of them. Centering around a fairy tale written by the brothers Grimm, *Iron John* blends folklore with Jungian psychoanalysis and an assortment of ethnographic examples to argue for: what exactly?

Proponents of the mythopoetic men’s movement found themselves going on wilderness retreats in order to get in touch with the Wild Man within. Focused on enhancing the connections between older and younger generations of men, Bly suggests that masculine identity in North
America (read: white heteromasculinity) lacks the rituals of initiation into manhood found in many other cultures. Bly’s concept of the Wild Man has been subject to critique by feminist scholars because arguably “the notion of the Wild Man merely reinforces clichés about ‘real masculinity’ instead of trying to foster a new relationship between men and women, as well as the masculine and feminine” (James qtd in hooks 113). In spite of the fact that the idea of real masculinity had been rejected by Freud much earlier in the century, the allure of a true and legitimate gender identity was hard to deny for a large group of men who were left with more questions than answers in the wake of feminism’s second wave.

Although Bly’s work has been subjected to a host of patronizing responses from the academic left, and feminists in particular, it it worth noting that 25 years later Bly’s influence has been rather positive for the men his work guided. In his 2013 book *Angry White Men*, Michael Kimmel notes that in his research “many mythopoets had far better second marriages than their first and reconnected with their grown children in ways they never did when their children were younger” (106). As such, although the mythopoetic movement does not engage with feminist thought and can largly be read as “gender separatist” (Kimmel), this movement must be read as both distinct from the first “wave” of men’s liberation while also being a direct response to it.

### 4.4 Contemporary Men’s Rights Activism

Men’s rights activists (whom I will henceforth refer to as MRA’s) frequently represent themselves as staunch supporters of gender equality in what sociologist Michael Flood refers to as “equality with a vengeance” (342). ⁵ Indeed, much of the contemporary public persona of the MRA movement hinges on this identification because equality is a laudable ideal which many can support. However, the MRA’s road map to equality differs rather significantly from even the most liberal feminist’s approach. This is because the men’s rights movement is rooted in a belief that women have *already* succeeded in achieving equality with men, and that feminism is a destructive ideology which is making the world increasingly unfair toward men. Absolutely

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⁵ Substantial evidence of the relationship between anti-feminist activism and rhetoric of equality can be found in Mann’s “Men’s Rights and Feminist Advocacy in Canadian Domestic Violence Policy Arenas: Contexts, Dynamics, and Outcomes of Antifeminist Backlash” (2008).
central to understanding MRA ideology is an awareness that much of the MRA rhetoric centers on perceived or *felt* injustices: most of these men cannot or are unwilling to grasp that they occupy a position of systemic privilege, because they *feel* out of control or disenfranchised in their lived experience. The emphasis placed on feeling by MRA’s is one of their most insidious strategies, as subjective truth claims are so difficult to refute. This phenomenon is not new, and has been discussed in a 1999 article by Judith Roof regarding self-disclosure (or what we might refer to as the deployment of experiential knowledge). Roof argues that such self-disclosures “can transform a centrist or dominant position into a victimized, marginal, oppressed slot that competes loudly for attention against . . .more traditionally marginal and oppressed voices” (49).

The academic literature of men’s rights activism is somewhat sparse\(^6\), but has led to the publication of an international journal entitled *New Male Studies*. This journal was launched in 2012 by editor Miles Groth\(^7\) and has been publishing quarterly ever since. The rationale of the journal is in “response to a now well-documented decline in the overall well-being of males in postmodern culture” (*New Male Studies*). I should note, emphatically, that the work of *New Male Studies* is distinct from the pro-feminist work of masculinities scholarship. While academic work on masculinities emerged from critical feminist thought surrounding women and gender, *New Male Studies* finds its roots in specifically anti-feminist work. Again, I feel it’s important to resist quoting from these works directly, as citing from these works may lend to their perceived legitimacy as an academic discipline while pro-feminist masculinities scholarship has yet to receive widespread institutional recognition. Indeed, as Adams and Savran point out in *The Masculinities Studies Reader* (2002), “there are no departments, programs, or jobs created exclusively for scholars of masculinity” (1). The work of *New Male Studies* can be traced back to Playboy columnist Asa Baber’s 1990 book *Naked at the Gender Gap* (Kimmel, *Manhood* 280). This book recites the standard complaints of the MRA’s: men should have the right to

\(^6\) According to Kimmel, “male studies exists almost entirely on the Internet; they have no meetings, and their single sparsely attended ‘conference’ was beamed all over the world as a podcast that few, if any, actually watched” (*Angry* 129).

\(^7\) In 2013 Groth was the keynote speaker at an event hosted by the Canadian Association For Equality at the University of Toronto. Naturally, his talk was titled "Caring About University Men - Why We Need Campus Men’s Centres in a Time of Crisis" (Espinas).
determine whether a woman has an abortion, military enlistment should be equal parts men and women, men should receive equal custody rights in divorce proceedings (regardless of their presence in their children’s life prior to the divorce), etc.

5 On Affect’s Undeniability

Jonathon Allan’s 2016 article “Phallic Affect or, Why Men’s Rights Activists Have Feelings” offers some ideas regarding why emotion is being deployed by men’s rights groups. Allan does “not believe it is an accident that White men are turning to affective utterances to mark their claims; indeed, there is something remarkably political about these claims” because “[t]hese claims become indisputable precisely because affects cannot be read, one can only experience them” and therefore “even if quantitative, qualitative, and factual research demonstrates that the apparent cause of these affects is incorrect, wrong, misguided, we can still not deny the veracity of the affect” (Alan 28). Rather than to critique men’s rights activism’s contradictory and incoherent narrative, Alan suggests that we should focus instead on how their ideas are being expressed. Most would agree that the “ideas and claims of the men’s rights movement are already widely dismissed,” however this might be precisely why “men’s rights activists have turned explicitly to questions of emotion, feeling, and affect” (Alan 36). Indeed, the consequences of privileging emotional truth claims which are rooted in the lived experience of the dominant members of society is that these claims are largely self-legitimizing. Not unlike the populist and contradictory rhetoric of Donald Trump’s campaign, the content and verifiability of the claims were largely irrelevant because what was being said resonated with voters on an emotional level.

We need to recognize the political significance of emotion in the construction of masculinities in order to establish theories that are nuanced enough to account for contemporary subjectivities. This necessitates engaging with theories of masculinity “with a concern for the effects of this [subject] on the female subject and with an awareness of how frequently male subjectivity works to appropriate ‘femininity’ while oppressing women” (Modleski qtd in Traister 299). Under patriarchy, male deployment of emotion can function as an appropriation of qualities that are culturally coded as feminine in order to maintain a patriarchal status quo.

In contrast to many feminist viewpoints regarding masculinity and emotion, I don’t advocate for or encourage men to “get back in touch” with their emotions. Many men navigate the world with
a lucid understanding of what they want and how they feel. Indeed, it is more often the overwhelming significance being placed on one’s own emotional landscape at the expense of others that has become problematic. Abuse counselor and writer Lundy Bancroft writes of the centrality of this phenomenon in patterns of spousal abuse, citing 14 years of experience in the field. Bancroft explains:

*Most of my clients are not unusually repressed.* In fact, many of them express their feelings more than some non-abusive men. Rather than trapping everything inside, they actually tend to do the opposite: They have an exaggerated idea of how important their feelings are, and they talk about their feelings—and act them out—all the time, until their partners and children are exhausted from hearing about it all. . .It is not his feelings the abuser is too distant from; it is his partner’s feelings and his children’s feelings. Those are the emotions that he knows so little about and that he needs to “get in touch with.” My job as an abuse counselor often involves steering the discussion *away* from how my clients feel and toward how they *think* (including their attitudes toward their partners’ feelings). My clients keep trying to drive the ball back into the court that is familiar and comfortable to them, where their inner world is the only thing that matters. (30)

This description isn’t surprising in the slightest when one takes into account two of the central tenets of patriarchy: male-centeredness and obsession with control. Johnson asserts that when it comes to interpersonal relationships, “in order to feel normally alive, patriarchal men must be reflected as larger than life” and this can make it “difficult to develop an acceptable sense of self as an ordinary human being with a relatively stable center from which to relate to other people” (12). The unfortunate result for men in a male-centered society is that “feeling themselves the focus of a one-way flow of attention is the closest that patriarchal training allows many men to come to authentic personal relationships” (Johnson 12). If patriarchal training obscures one’s ability to connect emotionally with others, what role does emotion play in for masculine bodies? More specifically: how does masculinity *use* emotion? And further, what is the political significance of emotion and straight male identity?

Gender and women’s studies scholar Liz Kinnamon offers a compelling corrective to the dominant narrative about men and emotion in a 2016 article entitled “The Male Sentimental”, 
wherein they claim that patriarchy operates in more nuanced ways as a result of the feminist movement:

Ultimately I am suggesting that a better way of thinking about patriarchy is as emotional manipulation. Characterizing it as misogyny, or ‘hatred of women,’ increasingly misses the mark because it fails at descriptive precision. Hatred seems vague, outlandish, or unrelatable and this makes the accusation easy to dismiss. With the rise of feminism’s influence, patriarchy has sought different techniques, echoing Foucault’s belief that politics use a ‘sort of silent war to reinscribe that relationship of force.’ The Male Sentimental can ultimately be seen as the result of a bargain with feminism: one can be a man with feelings, pass the feminist test, and still keep power. Patriarchy operates at the register of emotion where it can’t afford to operate through violence or coercion. (Kinnamon 1)

The implications are large and resonate on both macro and micro levels. Emotional repression under late capitalism emerges as emotional management, and its effects are insidious. Suddenly a world of “unemotional men” has given way to a political public which has been overwhelmingly subsumed by emotion. Indeed, it would be difficult to write this paper without pointing to the most recent United States federal election, wherein Donald Trump ran a winning campaign by deploying xenophobic, racist and anti-feminist sentiment. As such, on the macro level, negative affect is deployed as emotional firepower — populist rhetoric stokes the flames of anxiety and insecurity, legitimizing the subjective truth claims of white men across America.

I contend that men’s emotional lives are still subject to tropes of masculinity that rely on an outdated binary which marks their lived experience as emotionally detached. Life imitates art, and badly. The cultural standard of patriarchal masculinity most often meets with men’s lived experience at an oblique angle. Feminist, critical race theorist and activist scholar bell hooks points to the statistics facing men in her 2005 book The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love:

Men aren’t surviving very well! We send them to war to kill and be killed. They’re lying down in the middle of highways to prove their manhood in imitation of a scene in a recent movie about college football. They’re dying of heart attacks in early middle age, killing themselves with liver and lung disease via the manly pursuits of drinking and
smoking, committing suicide at roughly four times the rate of women, becoming victims of homicide (generally at the hands of other men) three times as often as women, and therefore living about eight years less than women. (119)

Many would point to these statistics as examples of a crisis in masculinity. However, I argue that we should look beyond the masculine/feminine binary in order to ascertain the heart of the matter—namely, a crisis in patriarchy. Patriarchal masculinity can be challenged by all members of a society, regardless of gender. The issue with challenging patriarchal masculinity is that this project has been and continues to be undertaken by more women than men as a part of the feminist project. As a result, feminism is often blamed as the cause of men’s problems, such as the ones faced by boys in schools alongside the myriad issues outlined above by hooks. To a certain extent this is true, but not for the reasons most cited by anti-feminist activists. Johnson explains that “by exposing the illusion of male superiority, feminism has increased the level of tension and anxiety in boys and men by making it more difficult to avoid the glaring contradiction between the cultural ideal of manhood and control and the reality of life as men and boys actually live it” (217). In other words, although feminism has shattered the idea that there could be any truth behind claims of male superiority, this assumption remains “a powerful cultural standard against which boys and men continue to measure themselves” (Johnson 217). Men’s lived experience continues to collide against expectations of patriarchy.
Chapter 3
Jordan Peterson: Post-Truth Politics and Gaslighting

In chapter 1, I offered an historical analysis of masculinity studies in order to clarify the relationship between masculine gender expressions and negative affect. Specifically, I pointed to the notion of masculinity in crisis as a perspective informed by anxiety, fear and anger rooted in nostalgia for a patriarchal past. Chapter 2 explored how patriarchy has modulated in response to feminist activism, using the scholarly world of affect theory and its erasure of feminist philosophy of emotion as a case study to illustrate the deeply embedded patriarchal roots of scholarship. Patriarchy’s modulation in the face of feminist activism is a central point in this work; armed with the knowledge that emotional truth claims can be used as a self-legitimating and difficult to refute expression of power, how can we approach public pedagogy in the name of anti-sexist, anti-oppressive, anti-fascist activism? Building on the concepts of crisis masculinity and the shifting relationship between masculinities, emotion and patriarchy, this chapter contains analyses of two contemporary case studies of white male bodies whose emotionally inflected truth claims have resulted in very real political consequences. Central to my argument is the concept of post-truth politics, which have come to define the contemporary political sphere. As I will illustrate, post-truth politics emanate from a highly gendered sphere, and have implications far beyond the realm of governmental policy. In particular, I am interested in exploring the relationship between post-truth politics and a form of emotional manipulation known as gaslighting. As I will show, post-truth politics are themselves a form of emotional manipulation—gaslighting is an integral component in the maintenance of the post-truth political moment.

Feminist activism is rooted in educating about social change, and therefore is contingent on one’s ability to name, diagnose, and discuss the problems facing our society. Establishing these skills requires attentiveness to the media landscape which serves as an informal education platform for dominant patriarchal culture. The examples offered in this chapter serve to underscore a critical approach to media literacy in the era of post-truth politics—namely, one which recognizes the patriarchal underpinnings at the heart of both old and new media which re-center discussions of human rights into discussions of white male hetero-masculinity. Two prominent examples serve as limited case studies which highlight the concepts of crisis masculinity, gaslighting and post-truth politics. The first of these examples is that of Dr. Jordan
Peterson, a University of Toronto professor who has recently become an international figure in light of his public refusal to acknowledge students by non-binary gender pronouns such as they/them. The second example is President Donald Trump’s recent series of tweets which aim to bar transgender individuals from enlisting in the military. As I will show, both Jordan Peterson and Donald Trump use appeals to emotion to generate political change. Understanding how the notion of “masculinity in crisis” emerged from patriarchal feelings of anxiety provides a framework for understanding how hateful ideologies are legitimated via emotional expressions of victimhood. Specifically, both men use gaslighting as a mechanism with which to deflect the issues being discussed and re-center focus on the white male body. Gaslighting is defined as a verb which involves “[m]anipulat[ing] (someone) by psychological means into doubting their own sanity” (Oxford English Dictionary). Gaslighting serves to directly undermine the lived experiences of marginalized groups through deliberate acts of misrecognition, pathologizing and belittling — acts which are bolstered and re-affirmed by other members of dominant groups. The concept of post-truth politics is defined as “[r]elating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford English Dictionary). In light of the emotional implications of post-truth politics, to what extent are gaslighting and post-truth politics engaged in a reciprocal relationship?

When discussing what it means to educate about social justice issues across ideological borders, it’s important not to deny or overlook the significance of emotional expression in the construction of identities and values. There lies a very real danger in the critique of patriarchal emotional expression, in that we stand to re-inhabit retrograde perspectives of truth and reason. As such, rather than to call for a return to Enlightenment era ideals of rationalism and objectivity, I argue that we should privilege emotional expression while simultaneously remaining critical of its potential for derailing dialogue and undermining the experiential ways of knowing held by marginalized groups. I also must acknowledge the somewhat paradoxical nature of this work: my aim is to destabilize and make explicit the way that human rights debates are consistently reframed into spectacle that is centered on white male subjectivities. However, in order to make this critique, I am forced to focus my attention on exactly these white masculine bodies which, to some extent, succeeds in re-centering them in the discussion. Thus, I urge readers to approach this text with an attentiveness to the patriarchal dynamic which plays itself out in the media landscape and de facto in scholarly writings about the media. When writing about the Jordan
Peterson debate which took place at University of Toronto on November 19th 2016, I write in solidarity with the protesters who boycotted and staged a teach-in during the debate, mobilizing under the hashtag #NotUpForDebate. As Brenda Cossman affirms during this debate, refusal is its own form of speech, and a “a very important form of speech” (“JB Peterson Debate”). At this critical moment in history, refusal to grant hateful ideology a platform is a real way to destabilize the balance of power. It is often no longer acceptable simply to agree to disagree.

6 Jordan Peterson

There is a surplus of media available online surrounding Peterson. Between the dates of August 26 2016 and August 26 2017, 494 videos have been uploaded to YouTube whose titles contain the words “Jordan Peterson.” At the time of this writing, Peterson’s personal YouTube channel has 433,550 subscribers. This analysis focuses on three key pieces of media to bolster my argument: the first is a video entitled “2016/09/27: Part 1: Fear and the Law.” This video is the first of a three-part series regarding political correctness, and according to Peterson’s caption, it “deals with the fear that PC types are producing, and the profound legal ramifications of their continual activism.” I’ve chosen to focus on this video since it is by far the most widely circulated of the series, and has served as a catalyst to propel Peterson’s opinions into the focal point of a media spectacle. The next piece analyzed is a video entitled “JB Peterson Debate on Bill C-16 19th Nov 2016”, which contains footage of a debate arranged by the University of Toronto Arts and Sciences faculty that took place at the University of Toronto on the 19th of November 2016. This debate between Jordan Peterson, Brenda Cossman and Mary Bryson was ostensibly surrounding a ‘controversy’ regarding a piece of government legislation Bill C-16 and its relationship to free speech, and offers several succinct examples of how post-truth politics (and implicitly, the deployment of emotion) have inflected political debate. Finally, I look at a video titled “2017/05/17: Senate hearing on Bill C16.” This offers viewers footage of the Bill C-16 Senate hearing which took place on May 16 2017 in Ottawa. Peterson served as a witness to the Senate hearing, and his statement serves as a prime example of his perspective.

On Sept 27, 2016, Jordan Peterson, a Professor of Psychology at University of Toronto, posted the first of a series of three videos on YouTube speaking out against political correctness and Bill C-16. According to the published bill, C-16 is an enactment which “amends the Canadian Human Rights Act to add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of
discrimination” (OpenParliament). Additionally, the enactment “also amends the Criminal Code to extend the protection against hate propaganda set out in that Act to any section of the public that is distinguished by gender identity or expression and to clearly set out that evidence that an offence was motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on gender identity or expression constitutes an aggravating circumstance that a court must take into consideration when it imposes a sentence” (OpenParliament). Peterson uses the content of this pending legislation to point to what he views as a growing cultural acceptance of political correctness — which he believes governs not only what language one is able to use, but what language one is compelled to use. Peterson fears that the implications of Bill C-16 are dark and Orwellian, compelling all of us to use governmentally prescribed language for fear of being thrown in jail. This is the launchpad with which Peterson begins his campaign against “political correctness.” Curiously, Peterson views this enactment, intended to enshrine in law the human rights of non-gender conforming individuals, as a threat to his own personal freedom of speech. As I will illustrate, Peterson’s perspective rests on precisely the negative affects which I discussed as central to the construction of patriarchal masculinity in chapter 1. Further, Peterson’s deployment of truth claims rooted in emotion depends on gaslighting in order to render the lives of non-gender conforming individuals illegitimate.

Peterson’s campaign for free speech is not a new strategy for dominant groups to spread hateful ideology. As trans journalist Sophia Banks notes, “[i]t’s always about free speech to these men” but they “see no hypocrisy when they can use their free speech to organize and speak out and oppose human rights legislation” (“I Was in the Room While Jordan Peterson and Senators Debated My Human Rights”). Freedom of speech is consistently invoked by hate groups in the United States, who hold the First Amendment close to their heart as a safeguard for any and all invective which might escape their lips. However, although hate groups are quick to invoke free speech as a sacred right, Megan Boler, Professor in Social Justice Education at University of Toronto notes:

All speech is not free. Power inequities institutionalized through economies, gender roles, social class, and corporate owned media ensure that all voices do not carry the same weight. Within Western democracies, different voices pay different prices for the words they choose to utter. Some speech will result in the speaker being assaulted or even killed. Other speech is not free in the sense that it is foreclosed: Our social and political
culture predetermines certain voices and articulations as unrecognizable, illegitimate, unspeakable ("All Speech" 4)

In this case, it is the voices of trans and non-gender conforming people which are rendered illegitimate by Jordan Peterson and his supporters. The fact that Peterson has been able to celebrate such financial success and widespread media attention for his expressions of hostility illustrates Boler’s assertion that “...not all expressions of hostility are equal” and that “[s]ome hostile voices are penalized while others are tolerated” ("All Speech" 3). In light of this, freedom of speech must be recognized as contextual, relational—not neutral or free from critique. Certain utterances may need to be silenced if it makes room for oppressed and marginalized groups to be heard.

In “2016/09/27: Part 1: Fear and the Law”, Peterson expounds on his fear regarding shifting cultural understandings of gender and changing campus attitudes, wherein he claims: “The new laws scare me. The doctrines behind the new laws scare me. The buy in by organizational administrators scares me. The people behind the doctrines scare me.” The fact that Jordan Peterson is scared is what foregrounds his claims, planting them firmly within the realm of patriarchal anxiety on which crisis masculinity finds its footing. But what is he really afraid of? In an open letter to the university from the Queer Caucus of CUPE 3902, they claim that “Professor Peterson is attempting to cloak his fear of transgender people under the guise of scholarly expertise, protected under the aegis of academic freedom, yet his academic work is not the study of gender”. My analysis of Peterson’s ideological viewpoint will further expand upon the significance of negative affects within these discussions.

In this video, Peterson goes on to explain what he takes issue with regarding the then-pending legislation of Bill C-16, specifically attacking the concept of non-binary gender as an idea which is not supported by scientific evidence. He points to an imagined history of the gender binary claiming that “[t]here’s an idea that there’s a gender spectrum but I don’t think that that’s a valid idea, I don’t think there’s any evidence for it, biological sexuality is ancient, it’s hundreds of millions of years old, and it’s binary because there’s two forms of biological sex” (“2016/09/27”). The Eurocentrism of this argument is obvious, as any scholar attentive to Indigenous teachings recognizes that third and fourth gender roles, often referred to contemporarily as Two-Spirit, have a longstanding history among the First Peoples. However, as
noted in Chapter 1, invoking biological essentialism in order to deny the lived experience of trans and non-gender conforming people is nothing new. Peterson continues his tirade against non-gender conforming individuals by claiming that “[Bill C-16] is predicated on the idea that your gender is somehow independent from your biological sex, but that’s a proposition, not a fact” going further to assert that at most, claiming an identity which is not consistent with the gender binary is a “politically motivated and ill-informed opinion” (“2016/09/27”). This point is one of the most troubling—that gender identity and expression is a means to achieve certain political ends. Peterson’s understanding of gender is eerily reminiscent of the early 1990’s Christian right’s understanding of sexuality—specifically, the circulation of “the gay agenda,” which was a term used in an attempt to undermine the legal advocacy of LGBTQ+ groups. By ascribing a monolithic and totalizing political aspiration to the hundreds of thousands of LGBTQ+ people in North America, the Christian Right aimed to transform these groups into one large political bogeyman. If comparing this strategy to Peterson’s stance reads as a stretch, it is wholly confirmed by Peterson’s refusal to “recognize another person’s right to determine what pronouns [he uses] to address them” because “those gender neutral pronouns are politically motivated” and are “connected to an entire underground apparatus of political motivations — radical left political motivations” (“2016/09/27”). Clearly such conspiratorial notions stem from a deep fear of change; by aligning non-gender conforming individuals with “an entire underground apparatus of political motivations,” Peterson homogenizes the “PC crowd” into a coterie with a grand political scheme. Furthermore, by claiming that “gender neutral pronouns are politically motivated,” Peterson implicitly argues that adhering strictly to a binary system of gender is a politically neutral stance. This radicalization of non-gender conforming gender expression is part and parcel in Peterson’s gaslighting project. As I explain further in section 7, gaslighting is a form of emotional manipulation wherein the gaslighting party manipulates other(s) in order to make them feel like they are losing their grip on reality. By rendering his own perspective as neutral, normal and healthy, Peterson simultaneously attempts to mark non-gender conforming individuals as abnormal and unhinged. Peterson’s authority as a psychologist lends credence to his perspective and supports its uptake as “normal.” The appeal to a binary system of gender’s inherent normality opens up space for his supporters to re-iterate and re-enforce such

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oppressive ideas regarding gender identity and expression. Peterson thus uses gender expression as a vehicle with which to render the relationship between left and right wing political camps into one that is insidious and oppositional.

In response to Peterson’s first video regarding Bill C-16, on October 5th 2016 activists held a “Teach-In and Rally” on University of Toronto campus to raise awareness about non-binary and trans issues. The following week saw a “U of T Rally for Free Speech” take place on October 11th, and on this day campus police reported threats against trans and non-binary students. Campus administration at the University of Toronto chose to follow up these events by sending Peterson a letter —according to U of T’s student newspaper The Varsity, “Arts and Science Dean David Cameron and Vice-Provost, Faculty and Academic Life Sioban Nelson [sent] Peterson a letter, requesting that he respect non-binary pronouns and refrain from making public statements” (Simpson, “The Explainer: Timeline of the Jordan Peterson Controversy”) on October 18th. A week later, Jordan Peterson posted a tweet confirming that the university would hold a debate on Bill C-16 and free speech facilitated by the Arts and Sciences Faculty. The event took place the following month on the 19th of November on U of T campus. Involved in the debate were Dr. Mary Bryson, a professor of education and senior associate dean, administration, faculty affairs & innovation, Faculty of Education at University of British Columbia; Dr. Brenda Cossman a professor of law and director of the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies at U of T; Dr. Jordan Peterson, professor of psychology at U of T and finally, Dr. Mayo Moran, a professor of law and provost at Trinity College, U of T.

The format of the debate provoked the ire of people across political camps, with Peterson supporters decrying a configuration which would have three “social justice warriors” against one anti-PC advocate. Although the audience of the debate itself were well behaved things were much different online. For example, on the website 4chan’s “pol” subgroup “hundreds of posters were commenting on a live feed of the event, [and] a stream of misogynist and dehumanizing invective was directed at all three women” (Chiose, “Jordan Peterson and the trolls in the ivory tower”). Meanwhile, there was a substantial group of protesters who chose to boycott the event itself; the protest was organized via an online campaign under the hashtag #NotUpForDebate. This phrase was introduced to the discussion in an open letter released by U of T’s Queer Caucus of CUPE 3902. Portions of the letter were then integrated into a letter released by U of T’s
Students for Barrier-Free Access, who articulate a very cohesive counterargument to Peterson’s appeal to freedom of speech:

As a direct result of the anti-black, racist, and transphobic public comments made by Peterson and his supporters, and the violence at the protests held in support of so-called ‘free speech’, students at U of T are concerned for their safety when attending classes. The University of Toronto administration, despite requiring that Peterson respect pronouns, have actively contributed to this unsafe environment by hosting a public forum which will allow for hate speech to continue under the guise of a debate on “free speech” and Bill C-16. As stated in the Open Letter released by the Queer Caucus of CUPE 3902, “We object to the basic premise of this event. Human rights are not up for debate.”

As outlined in this letter, students who refused to attend the debate did so out of acknowledgement that to attend would enable Peterson to have a platform with which to spout hateful rhetoric. The fact that Peterson was allowed to debate implicitly serves to re-center white-cis-hetero-masculinity in a discussion that was only ever supposed to be about marginalized gender identities and expressions. This phenomenon is discussed by Megan Boler in her article “All Speech is Not Free: The Ethics of ‘Affirmative Action Pedagogy’” wherein she explains that “[w]hen we reconfigure the conversation to foreground the experiences of marginalized groups, those who have traditionally been at the center develop creative ways to reassert their centrality” (11).

The tension inherent to recognizing Peterson’s claims is also vocalized and made visible by Brenda Cossman and Mary Bryson at the start of the debate — both express their distaste at finding themselves in a position of having to respond intelligibly, in an academic setting, to claims Jordan Peterson set out in a series of inane YouTube videos. This dynamic is compelling because it illustrates what is at the heart of the issue — namely, that dominant groups can make claims which are rooted in anxiety about shifting cultural attitudes about gender, and have their opinions become the centerpiece of a discussion which wasn’t about them to begin with.

Post-truth politics come to bear in a real way during the November 19th debate. Specifically, I am interested in the way Brenda Cossman chose to bring up the concept of post-truth politics during the debate itself. Upon introducing herself, Brenda Cossman notes what had, at that time, just been announced as the Oxford English Dictionary’s word of the year: post-truth. Cossman
expresses worry about “the ways that post truth claims have been affecting public discussions around Bill C-16, around the OHRC, and around freedom of expression” and outlines her intention to correct some of the “profound misunderstandings circulating about the law” (“JB Peterson Debate”). Cossman proceeds to offer a concise rebuttal to the anxieties that Peterson expressed in his YouTube video. Notably, she confirms that Bill C-16 would not make misgendering someone an act of hate speech — however, it does make it possible to commit an act of hate speech against non-gender conforming groups, which allows these groups legal protections against hate crimes. By claiming that C-16 would make misgendering a criminal offense which could land him in prison, Peterson was either ignorant of the hate speech provision of the Criminal Code or simply attempting to fan the flames of anti-PC sentiment. Although Cossman argued her points with the lucidity of a well versed lawyer, Peterson responded by invoking shadowy narratives about human rights tribunals in Canada where, ostensibly, “there are no rules of evidence and the judges are unaccountable” and claiming that “a legal doctrine is something like a virus, and it has a life. . .and if you let it go into a living system it propagates” (“JB Peterson Debate”). Cossman discredits Peterson’s attempts at denying her outline of the precise legal ramifications of Bill C-16 with the following statement:

“It disturbs me profoundly that Professor Peterson, without arguments or support, has done effectively a post-truth claim, on me. He has basically said, you’re wrong. There’s no arguments, there’s no evidence, there’s no support, that my description of what the law is, as a 30 year expert in this field, is simply wrong. (“JB Peterson Debate”)”

In spite of the fact that Peterson was taken to task by some very shrewd feminist thinkers at this debate, there remained a plethora of people standing by to offer their unending support of his claims and ideas. Indeed, online support for Peterson has continued to climb steadily since his first video post about Bill C-16 in September of 2017. Curiously, Peterson has spoken out against the dangers of ideologically inflected discourse. He claims that his work is an attempt to soothe the political divide between the left and the right, although his dogmatic adherence to individualism and positivism belies the falsity of any such political neutrality. At the time of

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9 In the YouTube video titled “Dr. Jordan Peterson gives up trying to reason with SJW’s”, Peterson claims “I’ve studied Nazism for a very long time, it’s been four decades, and I understand it very well, and I can tell you that there’s some awful people lurking in the corners and they’re ready to come out, and if the radical left keeps pushing
this writing, Peterson receives over $64,000 in donations every month in order to further his cause, which he claims is to “take the humanities back from the corrupt postmodernists” (Peterson Patreon).

Although the donors on Peterson’s Patreon website are anonymous, he has also received a massive amount of public support for his research due to a web campaign led by Rebel Media, a news organization which many consider Canada’s answer to Breitbart News. The website, which launched in 2015, is known for its sensationalist and far-right coverage — some recent headlines include “White Genocide in Canada?” (May 31) and “There’s nothing wrong with the patriarchy: Men, women & Google” (August 10). This news organization felt it necessary to lend a helping hand to Peterson when his most recent Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funding application was denied, a first for Peterson in a decades-long career. This sequence of events was covered by U of T’s Varsity newspaper, who ran an article entitled “Jordan Peterson’s federal funding denied, Rebel Media picks up the tab” (Savva). Perhaps the grant application was denied because Peterson intended to encode political-correctness as a distinct personality type through his academic research.

Although grant applications are routinely denied by the SSHRC, Peterson’s failed grant application was spun by Rebel Media as a form of academic injustice, who claimed that Peterson had “had his scholarly funding cut off” (Indiegogo). Further, according to the National Post, Peterson himself is “certain that the rejection from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada...is linked to the controversy surrounding his stand on gender-neutral pronouns” (Blatchford, ‘An opportunity to make their displeasure known’: Pronoun professor denied government grant”). In light of this apparent link, Ezra Levant, founder of Rebel Media, “spearheaded an Indiegogo campaign to raise the first year’s worth of funding, $73,325, for Peterson’s research team within a 30-day period,” a campaign that “reached its goal in one day” (Savva). After reaching this goal, the campaign pledged to raise $82,325 to support Peterson’s second year of research, a goal which

the way they’re pushing, they’re going to come out.” It is striking that someone ostensibly so well educated about Nazism would assign blame for the preponderance of such hateful ideological viewpoints onto the political camp who has been historically resistant to anti-Semitism.

10 The Indiegogo website created by Rebel Media outlines Peterson’s intention to investigate “the relationship between personality and political belief (liberal, conservative and, for the first time, politically correct).” It also includes a copy of Peterson’s original SSHRC proposal.
was far exceeded. In total, Rebel Media helped Jordan Peterson accrue $195,230 CAD toward academic work (Indiegogo).

In addition to the support he has received from far-right news organizations and anonymous online donors, Peterson was actually granted the opportunity to give the opening remarks at the Senate hearing for Bill C-16 on May 16 2017. He was invited to speak at the Senate hearing by Senator Don Plett, who was vocal in his opposition of the bill.11 In an interview with Xtra magazine, Plett claimed that Peterson was invited to speak at the Senate hearing because he “clearly brought to light the issue of compelled speech with the pronouns” (Robertson, “Jordan Peterson invited to testify on trans-rights bill”). In Sophia Banks’ news article regarding the Senate hearing, they assert that many people “considered it an insult that Peterson was invited to testify at all” and that this insult was compounded by the fact that “well-known trans advocates and allies such as DiNovo, who introduced Toby’s Act and Susan Gapka, founder of the Trans Lobby Group, were not invited to speak.” That these prominent trans advocates and allies were not invited to speak at such a critical moment while Peterson was given center stage is illustrative of the dynamic of crisis masculinity, which so often positions hetero-masculine bodies as victims in the face of social change.

In this forum, Peterson asserted that “the idea that identity is something that you define purely subjectively, is an ideal without status” and moved further toward arguing that “it’s unbelievably dangerous for us to move towards representing a social constructionist view of identity in our legal system—the social constructionist view insists that human identity is nothing but a consequence of socialization and there’s an inordinate amount of scientific evidence suggesting that that happens to not be the case” (“2017/05/17”). This view is one that I’m somewhat sympathetic with—as I discussed in chapter 1, gender artifactualist theories have been used both to advance the feminist movement, by liberating identities from gender determinism, but have

11 According to the CBC, “Plett has routinely sought to push off a vote that would send the bill to committee for further review” and was even accused “of using bigoted language when he referred to transgender Canadians as ‘these people.’” (Tasker)
likewise been used to further homophobic and sexist understandings of human sexuality and
gender expression. However, Peterson loses traction when he argues that “the reason [Bill C-16]
is being instantiated into law. . .is that the people who are promoting that perspective. . .know
perfectly well that they’ve lost the battle completely on scientific grounds” (“2017/05/17”). For
Peterson, science represents the apex of knowledge —his stance is informed seemingly entirely
by empirical verifiability/scientism of gendered experience. He uses his scientific background to
refute social constructionist viewpoints, citing “an inordinate amount of scientific evidence”
(“2017/05/17”). As a psychologist, empirical ways of knowing are paramount to the production
of knowledge. However, scientific research has proven to be far too reductive a lens to
understand gender and sexuality —as Serano notes “[when] gender and sexuality are imagined to
arise in a straightforward, overly simplistic manner (i.e., from biology, from culture), it enables
people to falsely conclude that there must be right ways and wrong ways, good ways and bad
ways, to be gendered and sexual” and these “misconceptions deny sexual and gender diversity,
and thus ultimately lead to gender policing and sexism” (146). Mary Bryson furthers this claim,
adding that “bad science is deadly” (“JB Peterson Debate”). Peterson’s refusal to recognize the
need for non-gender conforming individuals to have legal protection against hate crimes is
masked by his authority as a psychologist and tenured academic. Although his viewpoints
receive uptake because of his ability to deploy the language of science, Peterson is unwilling to
acknowledge that gender and sexuality might be a result of a complex collection of factors and
influences which include (but are not limited to) biology and socialization. This appeal to science
masks the affective manipulation taking place because Peterson’s claims are ostensibly
verifiable, linked to a scientific practice which prides itself on its objectivity. However, it’s
important to note that the neutrality of science has been called into question by feminists who
“have identified the sciences as both a source and a locus of gender inequalities: the institutions
of science have a long tradition of excluding women as practitioners; feminist critics of science
find that women and gender (or, more broadly, issues of concern to women and sex/gender
minorities) are routinely marginalized as subjects of scientific inquiry, or are treated in ways that
reproduce gender-normative stereotypes; and, closing the circle, scientific authority has
frequently served to rationalize the kinds of social roles and institutions that feminists call into
question” (Crasnow, Wylie, Bauchspies, Potter). In light of the legacy of scientific knowledge
production and its link to the maintenance of patriarchy, Peterson’s appeal to science is hardly
unprecedented. It strikes me that Peterson is more preoccupied with control than with attempting
to understand other people’s lived experience; one is reminded of the centrality of social control in the historical emergence of behavioral psychology outlined in Chapter 1. It appears that not much has changed since the days of Terman and Miles M-F test—psychologists such as Peterson still use their research as a way of quelling anxieties marked by the instability of masculine gender expression.

In Allan Johnson’s 2014 book *The Gender Knot*, patriarchy’s organizing principles of “male dominance, a masculine obsession with control, male centeredness, and male identification” (212) are outlined as central components which offer violence as the path of least resistance for men to engage or to remain complicit with. The first two principles coalesce in men’s desire to be or appear to be in control at all times, which requires a resistance to being controlled by others. As such, because “violence is the most extreme instrument of control, then the capacity for violence—whether or not individual men actually make use of it—is central to the cultural definition of manhood” (Johnson 212). The expectation of men’s capacity for violence is highlighted by the dominant cultural code I outlined in chapter two, which places empathy and communication at odds with the privileged qualities of self-sufficiency, autonomy, control, invulnerability, etc. Johnson argues that “[m]en’s violence is facilitated by a lack of empathy that might otherwise interfere with asserting control by reminding them of the pain and suffering that may result” (214). Peterson’s refusal to acknowledge others by their preferred pronoun is itself a form of violence which stems from a lack of empathy and an obsession with control. Johnson’s assertion that violence results from a cultural de-valuing of empathy points to the importance of highlighting relationality in educational projects aimed at de-centering patriarchal perspectives.

As I have discussed, when patriarchy cannot deploy violence to maintain control, it operates at the level of emotion—hence the rise of post-truth politics in tandem with growing cultural awareness of gendered forms of emotional manipulation such as gaslighting in recent years. Indeed, this concept is illustrated clearly by Brenda Cossman’s arguments during the Bill C-16 debate at U of T wherein she claims that alongside post-truth politics, we have moved into a realm of “post-empathy politics, where we no longer seem to care about people, and this at the end of the day [Bill C-16] is about people—it’s about trans and gender non-binary people” (“JB Peterson Debate”). Peterson refuses to use the pronouns that other people prefer. This claim is rooted in the idea that his perspective of reality is *objective* and should not be influenced by
other’s subjective identity expressions.

7  Gaslighting

In recent years, gaslighting has emerged from the realm of psychotherapy and entered into more common usage. The term originated from a 1938 play entitled *Gaslight*, which was adapted as a feature film by Alfred Hitchcock in 1944. The plot of *Gaslight* centers around the tactics of manipulation employed by a man against his spouse in order to make her feel as though she is losing touch with reality. Of the various schemes he employs to this end, one of them includes turning on and off the gaslights in the home from a secret location, an act designed to make his wife question her sanity, which is where the story gets its name. In a 1981 academic article written by psychologist Edward Weinshel entitled “Some clinical consequences of introjection: gaslighting,” Weinshel outlines the concept of introjection. Introjection is described as “a name for the process by which a single player absorbs all the fault, irrationality, and madness in a relationship” (Waldman). For Weinshel, gaslighting is highlighted as a means to the end result of introjection. More recently, gaslighting has come to be understood as an end to itself, as its pervasiveness as both an interpersonal and cultural phenomenon has become difficult to ignore.

In her 2014 article “Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting,” Kate Abramson describes gaslighting as “a form of emotional manipulation in which the gaslighter tries (consciously or not) to induce in someone the sense that her reactions, perceptions, memories and/or beliefs are not just mistaken, but utterly without grounds—paradigmatically, so unfounded as to qualify as crazy” (2). Abramson continues, noting that gaslighting is far different from dismissal because “dismissal simply fails to take another seriously as an interlocutor, whereas gaslighting is aimed at getting another not to take herself seriously as an interlocutor” (2). Further, it is important to note that gaslighting can be characterized by “multiple incidents that take place over long stretches of time; it frequently involves multiple parties playing the role of gaslighter, or cooperating with a gaslighter; it frequently involves isolating the target in various ways” (Abramson 2). As such, gaslighting can be understood as a systematic and institutionalized process. Although gaslighting is a tactic of emotional manipulation which is not necessarily sexist, it has emerged as a decidedly gendered phenomenon. Abramson bolsters this claim with six justifications as follows:
(1) women are more frequently the targets of gaslighting than men, and (2) men more often engage in gaslighting. More importantly, gaslighting is frequently, though again, not necessarily, sexist in the following ways: (3) it frequently takes place in the context of, and in response to, a woman’s protestation against sexist (or otherwise discriminatory) conduct; (4) some of the forms of emotional manipulation that are employed in gaslighting frequently rely on the target’s internalization of sexist norms, (5) when gaslighting is successful—when it actually undermines the target in the ways it is designed to do—it can reinforce the very sexist norms which the target was trying to resist and/or those on which the gaslighter relies in his/her manipulation of the target, and (6) sometimes it is some subset of those very sexist norms which the gaslighter seeks to preserve through his/her gaslighting conduct. (3).

Gaslighting is indicative of patriarchy’s modulation in response to feminist movement. However, there is an increasing amount of scholarship being devoted to this phenomenon, which offers hope that these manipulation tactics are not so invisible anymore. Gaslighting as a concept is useful to frame how patriarchal masculinity operates structurally at the level of emotion, which was recognized by feminist critics in the 1970’s who collectively recognized the power of emotion. Furthermore, gaslighting functions as a central component in maintaining a post-truth political era. Feminist theorist Shea Emma Fett suggests that “gaslighting is happening culturally and interpersonally. . .[as a] result of a societal framework where we pretend everyone is equal while trying simultaneously to preserve inequality” (Medium). This dynamic plays out in any discussion that invokes concepts such as post-feminism and post-racism –when dominant, patriarchal culture disseminates media that preserves hegemonic ideals, it often does so in a way that casts voices speaking from the margins as radical, over-sensitive, or just plain crazy. Even the myth of the American Dream can be read as gaslighting, given the structural injustices that are entirely glossed over in theories espousing the United States as a pure meritocracy. However, gaslighting can function in ways that are somewhat less overt. For example, when Jordan Peterson claims “[t]here’s an idea that there’s a gender spectrum but I don’t think that that’s a valid idea, I don’t think there’s any evidence for it” (“2016/09/27”), he is gaslighting an entire group. By claiming there is no evidence for gender expressions that don’t fit within a binary gender system, Peterson questions the reality of trans and non-gender conforming individuals’ experiences. He bolsters his position using an appeal to science, and rallies support from online
communities who trivialize or dismiss trans and non-gender conforming bodies with slurs such as “trendgender.” To make matters worse, Peterson is himself a clinical psychologist — so, by aiming to deny trans and gender neutral people legal protections against hate, he forces these groups to fight for legal recognition of personhood while simultaneously being pathologized by a mental health professional.

Along a similar line, Peterson’s denial of Brenda Cossman’s reading of Bill C-16, which is informed by thirty years of practice in law, based on grounds which are rooted in emotion rather than fact may be seen as gaslighting taking place in front of our very eyes. Under patriarchy, a cis-white-hetero-man with no legal training is able to use baseless assertions/emotive propositions rather than facts to argue his own interpretation of pending legislation and find support from myriad corners of the internet — meanwhile, Cossman must still back up her claim to legal authority by citing her accreditation and expertise. This illustrates that MRA deployment of crisis and victimhood has succeeded in enlisting followers who feel disenfranchised; Peterson takes on a figure of messianic proportions, evidenced by comments on his videos from followers who view him as a hero standing up against “social justice warriors” (referred to by the acronym SJW). YouTube user Paul Matheson admits, in a comment under the “2017/05/17: Senate hearing on Bill C16” video:

I am a 57 year old man who has always embraced the notion of a hero but has never had one; until now. You sir are my hero. You are a force for good and wisdom in society in ways that much of society simply cannot grasp. We need more like you to intelligently stand up to the foolishness that we are being bombarded with.

Further examples of comments like this abound, such as user 1140Cecile’s suggestion that “Jordan Peterson is a Canadian hero for standing up against SJWs who are trying to legislate and force Canadians to adopt PC language.” A quick scan of the comment section of the Bill C-16 debate video brings up the following comment from user “Anon” with 50 likes: “The overwhelming bulk of the comments are in Peterson's favour. Hardly anyone buys this SJW bullshit.” It is clear that there is a link between post-truth politics and gaslighting — each concept is reinforced by the other. Post-truth politics rely heavily on appeals to emotion rather than empirical evidence or facts. The aim of post-truth politics is to produce confusion and apathy on the part of the populace — deploying terms such as “fake news” to undermine the legitimacy of
fact-based reporting is one tactic, which functions to reinforce negative affect among supporters. Under a post-truth regime, the nature of reality becomes tenuous; the media landscape and information economy are implicated in the post-truth emphasis on emotion, and are shaped by it significantly. Gaslighting is similarly deployed as a tactic to maintain influence over public opinion and beliefs—it is a mechanism which forces the populace to question their sanity, and as outlined above, is a gendered form of emotional manipulation. Post-truth is thus a gendered form of politics—the new face of patriarchal power, which operates on the level of emotion.

8 Feeling Rules

It’s necessary to point out an obvious tension in this discussion which is that, of course, most discussion of mainstream politics has been and continues to be an implicit discussion of men’s politics. What interests me is the explicit mobilization of the white cis-gendered heterosexual male identity in the name of a political cause. One wonders where exactly to locate the disjunct that offers men a view of the world wherein they are able to truly believe that they are the victims? At least part of this phenomenon can be attributed to the influence of Rush Limbaugh, a conservative radio talk-show host whose program boasts the largest audience in all of talk radio, with a cumulative weekly listenership of between 13 and 15 million listeners (Wheeler, “Can Limbaugh survive advertiser boycott?”). In Kimmel’s 2013 exploration of the angry white male identity, he asserts that the “genius of Rush Limbaugh” is that he has “appropriated a more commonly ‘feminine’ trope of perpetual victimhood and successfully masculinized it” (Kimmel, Angry 40). Indeed, part of Limbaugh’s appeal lies in his spirit of opposition—his rhetoric depends heavily on an ‘us versus them’ mentality, wherein listeners can feel that their ideological blinders are being lifted, exposing the mainstream media’s pervasive liberal bias.

Another voice which has aimed to bolster the legitimacy of anti-feminist rhetoric is writer and ex-men’s liberationist Warren Farrell. Farrell’s 1993 book *The Myth of Male Power* encourages readers to interrogate how power is theorized. Rather than understanding power systemically, bound up in relations and social structures, Farrell theorizes power as the power we feel over our own lives. Although I am reluctant to quote from Farrell’s work extensively, as the act of citation serves to legitimate the cited works, I maintain that one of the most pernicious ideas in this book (among many) regards a re-theorizing of power on the level of the individual. Farrell suggests that “if power means having control over one's own life, then perhaps there is no better ranking
of the impact of sex roles. . .on power over our own lives than life expectancy" (30). By bolstering his argument with the statistical life expectancies of men and women under patriarchy, Farrell suggests that on an individual basis, men suffer more than women. Ignoring the feminist history of critiquing oppression relationally, based on a nuanced understanding of systems, Farrell situates suffering as an entirely subjective experience. This implies a universalizing perspective of human experience which is rooted in a male-centered, patriarchal perspective.

The centrality of Farrell’s individualizing and subjective theory of power to the ideology of groups such as MRA’s and Tea Party voters is remarkably transparent. Its universalizing undertones are highly reminiscent of the ideals of pure meritocracy so often espoused by right-wing voters whose perspective is informed by their own lived experience as white, cis-gendered, straight, able-bodied men.

Farrell’s privileging of an individualizing, subjective understanding of power, however indirectly, comes to bear heavily on mainstream politics in the United States, where the relationship between emotion and political allegiance is central to the ever-widening gulf between political camps. The ideological distance between right and left wing voters in the United States seems further than ever before, and voters seem increasingly unable to converse with one another intelligibly or even attempt to empathize with each other’s political perspective. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hoschild argues that much of what characterizes the political divide in the United States can be attributed to the left and right wing’s emotional understanding of the world. Hoschild suggests that right-wing voters view the liberal media as emotional propaganda, imposing ‘feeling rules’ that they do not and will not subscribe to. Hoschild explains her project:

What, I wanted to know, do people want to feel, what do they think they should or shouldn’t feel, and what do they feel about a range of issues? When we listen to a political leader, we don’t simply hear words; we listen predisposed to want to feel certain things. . .At play are ‘feeling rules,’ left and right ones. The right seeks release from liberal notions of what they should feel — happy for the gay newlywed, sad at the plight of the Syrian refugee, unresentful about paying taxes. The left sees prejudice. Such rules challenge the emotional core of right wing belief. And it is this core that a free-wheeling candidate such as the billionaire entrepreneur Donald Trump, Republican candidate for president in 2016, can appeal, saying, as he gazes upon throngs of supporters, ‘See all the
Hoschild’s work exposes the underlying emotional attachments that are central to ideological formations. Specifically, it locates within the right-wing a sense of entitlement which is increasingly aggrieved—an idea about the way things ought to be. Hoschild locates this longing in her description of the political right’s ‘deep story’, wherein the American dream is to be found at the end of a line-up of citizens, each working hard to make their way to the end. The queue is interrupted by people ‘cutting ahead,’ all with the approval of government bodies—a metaphor for the advancement of women and minority rights. Significantly, the ‘deep story’ of right wing voters is informed by a feeling of injustice which is at odds with what actually takes place in the structure of American society. This is where the effectiveness of Donald Trump’s emotional appeal has resonance: the truth about America is irrelevant in the face of emotional confirmation. Whether Trump told bold faced lies along the campaign trail, or contradicted his own statements with impunity, seemed to have no impact on the impact he made on voters. Kimmel notes that “[p]opulisms are always contradictory, because populism is more an emotion than it is an ideology” (Angry 7). The emotion which was deployed by Trump on the campaign trail was, of course, anger—the prescribed feeling of choice for masculine bodies, and that’s no coincidence.

In Michael Kimmel’s 2013 book Angry White Men, the relationship between white men and their relationship to economic and social privilege is examined. He notes that whether “[r]ural or small town, urban or suburban, the extreme Right is populated by downwardly mobile, lower-middle-class white men” emphasizing that “[a]ll of the men [he] interviewed—all—fitted this class profile” in concurrence with the profile of “other ethnographies and other surveys (Angry 244). In opposition to President Barack Obama’s campaigns of hope for the future, Trump’s campaign centered on a promise of restoring the country to the greatness of the past. In promising to Make America Great Again therefore, Trump implicitly “promised to make men ‘great again’ too” and for “white, native-born, heterosexual men, he offered a solution to the dilemma they had long faced as the ‘left-behinds’ of the 1960s and 1970s celebration of other identities,” becoming the de-facto “identity politics candidate for white men” (Hoschild 230). Building a campaign on the emotional lives of straight white men functions to establish a voter base whose perspectives are extremely difficult to deny. The relationship between crisis masculinity, negative affect and the current post-truth political scene come into focus when we
consider Hoschild’s claims. Trump’s appeal to a transcendent concept of masculinity feeds into the belief that masculinity is indeed in crisis. However, Trump’s appeal to masculinity is indirect, routed through an appeal to the American Dream. Hoschild points to what is implied by Trump’s invocation of the American Dream –namely, white hetero-masculinity. One could say that the American Dream is itself a gaslighting tactic. If one believes wholeheartedly in the ideals of a pure meritocracy, on which the American Dream is founded, and works hard to achieve their economic ideal but it never transpires, how might this affect one’s mental health?

Indeed, one needs only to type the words “Donald Trump gaslight” into Google to be met with over 200,000 results, many of which are opinion pieces regarding Trump’s position as gaslighter-in-chief at the Oval office. The most prominent example of Trump gaslighting America took place after he faced scrutiny for mocking a disabled reporter on the campaign trail. Footage confirming that the event did, indeed, take place is widely available online. However, Trump has publicly denied that this event ever occurred. What’s to be believed –Trump’s version of the truth, or our own lying eyes? Although this may sound like a dubious example of what exactly gaslighting entails, I re-iterate that gaslighting “frequently involves multiple parties playing the role of gaslighter, or cooperating with a gaslighter” (Abramson 2). In this case, Trump’s supporters have taken to defending him with attempts to “debunk” the accusations, accusing the left of lying to smear Trump’s good name.¹² A more recent example of the collision between post-truth politics and crisis masculinity, with striking parallels to the Jordan Peterson tale, is a series of three tweets posted by President Trump on July 26, 2017:

After consultation with my Generals and Military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow…Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military. Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming…victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and

¹² In an article titled “Fake News: Trump Did Not Mock Disabled Reporter and Other Lies From The Left”, Kerry Jackson claims that the “truth is, Trump has often used those same convulsive gestures to mimic the mannerisms of people, including himself, who are rattled and exasperated. . .[but] the media are too lazy and those suffering from Trump Derangement Syndrome are too nasty and small-minded to look deeper.” Pathologizing those who disagree with the gaslighter by invoking “Trump Derangement Syndrome” to refute their claims is a pretty clear cut example of the gaslighting apparatus in motion.
disruption that transgender in the military would entail. Thank you (@realDonaldTrump Twitter).

According to New York Times reporting on the tweets, Trump blindsided “his defense secretary and Republican congressional leaders with a snap decision that reversed a year-old policy reviled by social conservatives” (Davis and Cooper). Furthermore, this series of Tweets was delivered with “such haste that the White House could not answer basic inquiries about how it would be carried out, including what would happen to openly transgender people on active duty” (Davis and Cooper). The fact that Trump “blindsided” his own party with this series of tweets is indicative of its content, as the claims contained therein were not verifiable or defensible, and came under scrutiny from several high-ranking members of the military industrial complex. President Trump “elected to announce the ban in order to resolve a quietly brewing fight on Capitol Hill over whether taxpayer money should pay for gender transition and hormone therapy for transgender service members” because this “dispute had threatened to kill a $790 billion defense and security spending package scheduled for a vote [that] week” (Davis and Cooper). Trump’s main concern was that the “transgender medical care issue could imperil the security spending measure, which also contains $1.6 billion for the border wall that he has championed” (Davis and Cooper). It strikes me that this ostensible denial serves to re-inscribe military support from within the trans community, a marginalized population. By forcing non-gender conforming individuals to defend their right to enlist in the military, the military itself is simultaneously depoliticized or rendered “normal”. In Wendy Brown’s “Wounded Attachments”, we find “an exploration of the ways in which certain troubling aspects of the specific genealogy of politicized identity are carried in its political demands, ways in which certain emancipatory aims of politicized identity are subverted not only by the constraints of the political discourses in which its operations transpire but by its own wounded attachments” (391). The “emancipatory aims of politicized identity” are subverted in this case “by the constraints of the political discourse”, wherein the military industrial complex holds the power of recognition and membership. Let us not forget that the military occupies a position of extreme symbolic and material power, being that it is (next to perhaps, the church), the most entrenched patriarchal institution in our contemporary society. Thus, the patriarchal symbol of the military becomes the centerpiece of a “debate” set in motion as a side effect of a decision made by a middle-aged, cis-gendered white male who is wholly invested in building a material structure which represents his xenophobia
and power. Like the Jordan Peterson case, the political impetus behind Trump’s hateful ideology is rooted in negative affect.

What ought to be a political debate about personhood and the politics of recognition becomes a tacitly pro-military discussion, deflating the potent capabilities of resistance available to non-gender conforming individuals as members of marginalized communities by marking a desire for acceptance into the patriarchal realm of military as simply a given. Through framing the discussion in this way, the media make it appear as though trans and non-binary individuals are clamoring to enlist.

9 Conclusion

Many have recognized that emotional truth claims foreground the scene of post-truth politics. However, the gendered nature of these affective deployments bears further analysis. Feminist and gender theorist Allan Johnson points out an important aspect of a male-identified culture: namely, that the cultural understanding of masculinity is practically synonymous with the values of the society itself. Johnson describes such masculine and societal values as “control, strength, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, forcefulness, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and control over any emotion that interferes with other core values (such as invulnerability)” and contrasts these with qualities “such as cooperation, mutuality, equality, sharing, empathy, compassion, caring, vulnerability, a readiness to negotiate and compromise, emotional expressiveness, and intuitive and other nonlinear ways of thinking [which] are all devalued and culturally associated with women and femininity” (Johnson 7). As such, Brenda Cossman’s point during the Bill C-16 debate regarding the emergence of a “post-empathy politics” (“JB Peterson Debate”) should come as no surprise. For those privileged under patriarchy to use emotion does not require these agents to develop, understand and respect the devalued qualities such as the ones outlined above. Instead, emotional truth claims are frequently utilized as rhetorical strategies which include appeals to bankrupt concepts such as crisis masculinity which re-center patriarchal masculinity and legitimate acts of violence.

In order to resist hateful ideology that relies on gaslighting as a form of emotional manipulation, feminist thinkers must remain attentive of the fact that “[e]motions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices” (Ahmed 9). This quotation is re-iterated throughout my thesis because Ahmed’s emphasis on the social aspect of emotion brings forth the
significance of relationality in challenging patriarchy. Relationality is explored in Donna J. Haraway’s 2016 book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* through her concept of sympioesis. Here, Haraway advocates for “sympioesis” or “making-with” (5) because “bounded individualism in its many flavors in science, politics, and philosophy has finally become unavailable to think with, truly no longer thinkable, technically or any other way” (5).

Haraway’s disavowal of individualism is crucial to a feminist critique of patriarchal deployment of emotional truth claims –by undermining individualist ideology, many patriarchal ideals (such as autonomy, control, stoicism) begin to fray. The myth of the American Dream comes under scrutiny when one considers the extent to which it is contingent on a belief in pure meritocracy and individualism. Further, claims which may be legitimated by an appeal to one discipline, such as science, might fall to pieces in the face of anthropological critique. Sympioesis thus offers theorists a tool that is rooted in relationality but goes beyond this in order to celebrate creation and togetherness –two concepts which are of significant import when analyzing affective truth claims. Amid the confusion and complexity that typifies the post-truth political era, sympioesis offers hope.
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