

Perceptions of Healthy and Respectful Relationships and Friend Zone Phenomena

by

Cherish Krista Michael

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts

Approved June 2015 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

C. Alejandra Elenes, Chair
Deborah Hall
Julie Murphy Erfani

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2015

ABSTRACT

The term “friend zone” has been used in various areas of social media and pop culture to define a situation where one individual covets a relationship with a close friend that never evolves; typically the situation includes a male seeking a potential romantic partner with a female. Although friendship is often viewed in a positive format and sometimes the foundation of a healthy relationship, this term has been stigmatized as an unfortunate situation and counterproductive to obtaining a fulfilling relationship.

To approach the multi-faceted concern of friend zone phenomena and the many areas damaging messages that occur, my thesis starts with the history of friend zone phenomena, establishing a definition of friend zone phenomena for future scholars. Next literature on friendship and love, and Galician’s work used for both the methodology and theoretical framework is introduced leading to the analysis. The methodology and theoretical framework for the analysis uses Mary-Lou Galician’s 7-Step-Reality-Check-Up, twelve Myths social media promoted as the preferred reading and the *Twelve Prescriptions (Rxs) for Getting Real About Romance*. Resources on the discourses of gender performativity, psychology, and sociology are also included in the theoretical framework.

I start with an introduction to retrograde misogyny, The Manosphere (including The Red Pill [TRP]), the Elliot Rodger case and rape culture. This initial segment is analyzed differently from the other texts to describe the crux of social justice issues within friend zone phenomena. I then analyze 10 online memes related to friend zone phenomena. Lastly, I analyze Jet and Star’s new book, *How to Get out of the Friend Zone*—their book is a textual version of the advice they give on their YouTube channel.

Throughout all the texts Myths 5 (Physical Attraction), 6 (Man = Stronger), and 13 (No Cross-Sexual Friends) were all proposed as the preferred reading. Myth 14 (Men Want Sex/Women Want Money) was prevalent across the memes and TRP/Rational Male. All four myths are laden with gender performativity with damaging perceptions of healthy and respectful relationships. Additional research on friend zone phenomena in the form of interviews and surveys is recommended as research is still sparse.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My work would not be possible without the resources given to me through the many great faculty members and staff at Arizona State University's West campus' New College and Masters in Social Justice and Human Rights. From Academic Success Coordinator, Jan Lacey to the many diverse faculty members that have encouraged my work, brought resources forward and became the village I needed when I felt no one else believed in my work – it would take pages to thank everyone.

I would like to especially thank my committee chair, Dr. C. Alejandra Elenes – you have encouraged my work with extreme enthusiasm since I was an undergrad and introduced me to the great Master's program that extended my interdisciplinary skills and pushed me to fearlessly discuss the many social justice issues that need attention. Discussing topics that affect many with sparse research can be difficult and often requires a strong committee chair who believes in the work as much as the researcher – you have been that and more.

I extend my gratitude to Dr. Julie Murphy Erfani and Dr. Deborah Hall. Both have provided me great feedback on my work and heightened the quality of my research through knowledge of their respective fields. Research on friend zone phenomena is multi-faceted and requires the authority and guidance of outstanding committee members from different fields. Thank you both for your stability and support – for being a part of my small village that helped me achieve greatness.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents. Special thanks to my mother, Theresa Michael for remaining as the only supportive rock I have in our entire family. For fighting for my rights that I take granted of and showing me a true example of what a

healthy and respectful relationship is – your contribution to my work is endless through these features. Special thanks also to my late father, Kraig Michael for always believing in me, and providing the love and encouragement I needed when my college education seemed stressful and emotionally taxing. I feel your eternal support for my graduate education even though you are now gone.

Lastly, my thesis is dedicated to the women and men who support equality, fight against the forces of retrograde misogyny daily and pave the way for me to pursue a graduate education in an esteemed field that would not exist without any of you. All the survivors of the horrible events that took place in the past as well as the present, this research is for you as well. There are people who still care about these issues – hegemonic forces in the media that encourage damaging messages that escalate into real issues are not enough to keep us silent.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Overview.....	1
Why the Friend Zone?.....	1
Problem Statement.....	6
Research Goals.....	6
2 FRIEND ZONE.....	9
History in Media.....	9
3 BACKGROUND LITERATURE & FRAMEWORK.....	13
Review of Literature.....	13
Theoretical Framework.....	18
Methodology.....	21
4 ANALYSIS.....	29
Retrograde Misogyny, Elliot Rodger and Rape Culture	29
Red Pill and The Rational Male.....	35
Online Memes.....	52
Wing Girls.....	82
5 DISCUSSION.....	99
Recommendations for Future Research.....	101

CHAPTER	Page
6 CONCLUSION.....	102
Damaging Messages in Data.....	102
What to Do About These Damaging Messages.....	103
REFERENCES.....	105
APPENDIX	
A CLARIFIATION OF FIGURE 2.....	110

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Physical/Mental Attractiveness.....	56
2. Flowchart.....	57
3. Man Up.....	66
4. Getting Some.....	69
5. Friend Zone/Relationship Barrier.....	70
6. Friend Zone/Alcohol Substituting for Rape Zone Meme.....	70
7. Rape Zone.....	71
8. Money + Power = Relationship.....	79
9. Nice Guy Card.....	80
10. Both in Friend Zone.....	84

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The term “friend zone” has been used in various areas of social media and pop culture to define a situation where one individual covets a romantic relationship with a close friend that never evolves; typically the situation includes a male seeking a potential sexual partner with a female. Although friendship is often viewed in a positive way and sometimes the foundation of a healthy relationship, this term has been stigmatized as an unfortunate situation and counterproductive to obtaining a fulfilling romantic or sexual relationship. Various online memes, pop culture references, such as *Friends*, MTV’s *Friend Zone* and Chris Rock’s “bring the pain” skit and other social media have contributed to this phenomena and responded to this term. However, there has been no formal research investigating the many facets of this multi-layered phenomena. It is important to understand what the friend zone means, how it shapes one’s perception of themselves, others, and romantic relationships as well as the assumptions and expectations of romantic relationships.

Why the Friend Zone?

For years, I have personally been interested in how the media, Western cultural norms and other aspects of society influence one’s values and perceptions of romance, yet have found little solution for when these notions become damaging and dangerous. In the mid-2000s, I came across a post on a social media network written by a friend of mine. It is now out of syndication; however, the main focus is still vivid in my memory. It described a friendship between a man and a woman – the man has a desire to enter a

romantic relationship with his friend, however, the feelings are not reciprocated by the woman. Throughout the narrative, the man describes the many favors and acts of kindness performed by him throughout their friendship. A few examples include holding her hair back as she vomits at parties, listening to her about boyfriend issues and comforting her after breakups where she cries “where are all the nice guys.” The story concludes where the man is tired of her dating the wrong men and never considering him as a romantic partner – accusations of pushing him around and taking advantage of his kindness are inferred and the overall frustrated tone was obvious.

Although I understood the unfortunate situation of unrequited feelings, I felt the narrative was unacceptable. Just because somebody – man or woman is kind to their friend does not mean that sexual/romantic favors are owed. I was raised to value and respect my friends – whether they are male or female. I was also consistently told that close friends often become romantic relationships as friendship is the prime foundation for a long-lasting successful relationship.

After viewing the aforementioned post, I started to notice that many others also have negative perspectives of cross-sexual friendships – many of which either consider the man inferior or conceptualize the woman as an evil, manipulative person. I started to hear the word “friend zone” come up in conversations as the internet exploded with a culture that devalues friendship between potential romantic partners – namely heterosexual romantic partners. As my female friends continued to tell me stories of being called “manipulative,” “fickle,” and other derogatory names for not wishing to pursue a sexual/romantic relationship with a male friend, I concluded that there may be

social justice issues in this concept. As I pondered the idea, I decided to discuss this reflection with a younger colleague of mine to gain more insight.

My colleague had been exposed to friend zone phenomena and social media much more than I had. She enlightened me of her own experiences with friend zone phenomena and the dangers she anticipated. These experiences included watching men have meltdowns because women would not reciprocate their good deeds with romantic and/or sexual relationships, hearing constant misogynistic comments about women owing men sexual favors in exchange for these benefactions, and later discovering The Red Pill (TRP) – a sub forum of the popular social network, Reddit. TRP is part of a larger conglomerate known as the Manosphere. Platonic friendships between men and women are consistently discouraged on this forum.

On TRP, many men claim that women are manipulative, controlling and exploitive to “good men” – they also claim that the current Western society is a feminist society. According to TRP this “feminist society” is the source of blame for the destruction of positive male models. Their handbook claims that

the feminist movement is now about the most trivial ‘rights’ being awarded to women and continuing to uphold the image that women are ‘oppressed’, when this could not be further from the truth. Women are more privileged and get more pussy passes than in any point in history. Yet the sob story continues (The Red Pill Handbook, 2015 pp. 257-258).

One must question what these “trivial” rights are – equal pay? Are TRP participants referring to laws that protect women from rape, domestic violence and unsafe abortions? What privileges are women given over men? What evidence do these structures in the

Manosphere provide to defend their claims? A great amount of misogynistic comments are made on this forum as the advice given is claimed to have scientific merit despite a scarcity of credible resources. Ironically, gender studies is often criticized by Red Pill (RP) followers for lacking scientific credibility¹.

Our conversation occurred a few months after the Santa Barbara Massacre, an incident in May, 2014 when Elliot Rodger, a 22 year old man killed six people plus himself. My colleague felt the entitlement men feel to access a woman's body in exchange for favors, the negative connotations placed on platonic friendships between men and women and insistent claims that men and women have major differences create the social justice issues in friend zone phenomena while provoking hostility similar to Rodger's irrationality. Prior to the event, Rodger posted several videos on YouTube claiming that he sought out vengeance for the "injustice" of others obtaining sex with attractive women that he felt entitled to due to his good looks, expensive style and car. He also wrote a 140 page manifesto titled *My Twisted World* where he utilizes terminology and philosophies similar to those used on TRP forum and admits to participating in PUAHate – an anti-Pick-Up Artistry forum that is now closed due to the Santa Barbara Massacre. Red Pillers (RPers) claim that Rodger's participation in PUAHate is proof that he does not share the mentality of TRP as many Red Pill (RP) terms and ideologies are

¹ It is assumed that Gender Studies ignores evidence of studies through scientific research – this is not true as many studies using the scientific method have shown evidence of behavior and biases influenced through gendered norms. Also, qualitative methodologies offer backed-up arguments. Often, women and gender studies research is required to include evidence from a plethora of other fields like psychology, sociology, biology, neuropsychology, business, and marketing due to the constant allegation that issues regarding women and gender studies are inconsequential. Ironically, TRP and Tomassi often fail to include their own credible resources to back up their claims – many simply repost blogs on the forum and Tomassi's book lacks a reference section.

drawn from Pick-Up Artistry (PUA). PUA refers to one's ability to utilize "Game" in order to attract sex partners – namely a man's ability to attract women. One should note that the theme of PUAHate was anger and frustration that tips from the PUA community did not work. Their resentment did not stem from a desire to deconstruct PUA and the gender performativity it promotes. Their dislike for the PUA community was mere regret for investing time and money in a system that did not deliver the rewards they sought – this did not discourage participants from harboring a negative outlook on women as Rodger's manifesto demonstrates.

Despite RP forum participants and moderators claiming distance to the mentality and hostility Rodger exhibited, too many similarities exist. Rodger and TRP both affirm that women are the root of many social injustice issues regarding masculinity, discuss the "Alpha/Beta" philosophy where one type is more dominant and "masculine" than the other as the core of both encourage constant sexual intercourse with attractive women as a priority.

Many of the topics and concepts discussed on the Red Pill forum overlap with Men's Rights and Pick up Artistry – although the forum claims to be different from these subjects, a lot of the vocabulary and concepts are borrowed from these structures. Joel Rose hosted a segment on NPR's *All Things Considered* discussing Men's Rights groups. Men's Rights groups claim "feminism is more concerned with promoting the interests of women – often at the expense of men" (Rose, 2014). Examples given are rape cases perceived as "buyer's remorse for promiscuous behavior" (Rose, 2014), custody rights for fathers and an absence of men's studies courses. Pick up Artistry relates to "Game"

tactics that give men tips on flirting, attracting women and heavily indulge in sexual commodification and gender performativity.

Currently, women and gender studies programs are cut and under constant scrutiny, laws are not passed to ensure equal pay and rape culture at universities is a topic of concern. There is a need to address facets of social media that may invigorate unhealthy notions of men, women, respectful sexual relationships and friendships as these issues are still existent.

Problem Statement

Research on the friend zone is necessary because many different facets of inequality and social injustice derive out of this phenomenon. Online memes are duplicated with vulgar connotations implying rape culture, books on the friend zone are written discouraging friendship between potential romantic partners, other forms of media reinforce sex as the only important facet of an ideal romantic relationship and many negative connotations of both women and men are encouraged. There are also various layers to the phenomena that do not directly propagate their mentality as friend zone phenomena. These layers are relevant as they contribute to the social justice issues in friend zone phenomena by propagating archaic and sexist beliefs, violence against women and rape culture.

Research Goals

To approach the multi-faceted concern of friend zone phenomena and the many areas damaging messages that occur, my thesis starts with the history of friend zone phenomena in Chapter 2 establishing a definition of friend zone phenomena for future scholars. Chapter 3 reviews the literature on friendship and love, elaborates on Galician's

work used for both the methodology and theoretical framework and introduces other literature used for the theoretical framework. Chapter 4 is the analysis – I start with an introduction to retrograde misogyny, The Manosphere, the Elliot Rodger case and rape culture. This initial segment is analyzed differently from the other texts to describe the crux of social justice issues within friend zone phenomena. Although misogyny and rape have gained the attention of scholars, research on the Elliot Rodger case relating to these two are scarce. The Red Pill forum (TRP) and Rollo Tomassi's *The Rational Male* are next analyzed as many philosophies within these monstrosities are present in the other texts and need to be introduced. Finally, online memes that discuss friend zone phenomena/rape culture and an advice book, *How to Get out of the Friend Zone* are analyzed. The methodology and theoretical framework for the analysis uses Mary-Lou Galician's 7-Step-Reality-Check-Up, twelve Myths social media promotes as the preferred reading and the *Twelve Prescriptions (Rxs) for Getting Real About Romance*. Resources on the discourses of gender performativity, psychology, and sociology are also included in the theoretical framework.

For the Elliot Rodger case I analyze Rodger's 140 page manifesto, *My Twisted World*, news articles, and his YouTube videos. For TRP, I analyze the theory readings on the sidebar, *The Red Pill Handbook*, various websites connected to theory readings and forum posts. TRP alone consists of enough information to justify a thesis or dissertation due to the "theory readings" that members are obligated to read before posting, the many websites these theory readings redirect members to, their various back-up forums and

additional sub forums. Although the additional websites² are part of the research, my analysis specifically addresses the theory readings, forum posts, *The Red Pill Handbook* and Tomassi's *The Rational Male*. This decision was made due to the amount of time needed to adequately analyze all features of TRP – most of the analysis of TRP comes from *The Red Pill Handbook* due to a lack of outside resources with succinct definitions. I chose a total of ten memes to represent common, reoccurring Myths and harmful messages in the sample of over 120 memes I observed. Two memes represent physical attractiveness, one exhibits gender performativity, two to represent negative connotations of friendship, two expose rape culture in online social media and two represent negative connotations of men and women in friend zone phenomena. The final meme was selected to encourage progress in online social media. Lastly, I analyzed Jet and Star's new book, *How to Get out of the Friend Zone* –their book is a textual version of the advice they give on their YouTube channel.

² <http://puerarchy.com/>, <http://redpillgame.com/>, <http://illimitablemen.com/>, <https://dalrock.wordpress.com/>, <http://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/>, <https://heartiste.wordpress.com/>, <http://theredpillroom.blogspot.com/>, <http://www.avoiceformen.com/>, <http://shrink4men.com/>, www.sosuave.com, www.therationalmale.com, and eight additional sub forums on reddit.

Chapter 2

FRIEND ZONE

History in Media

The first known media reference of the term “friend zone” dates back to 1994 during *Friends*, a popular television sitcom about a group of six young adults who are all friends living in Manhattan. As the show’s theme song “I’ll be there for you” implies the mixed group of men and women support each other through life’s struggles including relationships, jobs, financial struggles and family issues. This sitcom lasted ten years from 1994-2004 and contained six main characters: Rachel, Monica, Phoebe, Joey, Chandler and Ross. Although several of the friends do end up in romantic relationships with each other, the main themes of the television show embraced strong platonic friendships – both same sex and cross sex friendships.

The term “friend zone” occurred in an episode titled “The one with the blackout.” In this episode it is implied that Ross likes Rachel and wishes to pursue a romantic relationship with her, however, he is not sure if she likes him back. During a discussion about sex and relationships, Rachel discusses her desire for passion and finding the right romantic partner to Ross and he replies that passion is not as important as trust and security. After Rachel ruffles Ross’ hair and walks away, their mutual friend, Joey, states that their relationship is never going to happen because he waited too long to make his move and is now stuck in the friend zone (Bright & Crane, 1994). When Ross insists that he is not in the friend zone, Joey responds “no, you’re *mayor* of the zone” (Bright & Crane, 1994) suggesting that he is doomed to never obtain a relationship, much less one

with Rachel. Contrary to Joey's assessment, Ross and Rachel enter a romantic relationship in the later seasons including a marriage, child and divorce.

Stand-up comedian and performer, Chris Rock also mentions the term "friend zone" in his 1996 "Bring the Pain" skit. He states that women have platonic friends as men have women they "haven't f---ed yet" (Rock, 1996). Rock claims that men have platonic friends "on accident" and end up in the friend zone because they "made a wrong turn somewhere" (Rock, 1996). He refers to women's male platonic friends as emergency sex for them to go to if they are desperate (Rock, 1996) and states that men with girlfriends who have male platonic friends should watch out because she will go to him if they mess up. Rock follows up this joke maintaining that women lie about how many men they have been with and only count their past boyfriends without "all the miscellaneous" sex in between. Although Rock's work is not always considered the most respectful or enjoyed by all, many still agree with his perception and indulge in supporting these notions.

The 2005 film *Just Friends* discusses friend zone as a situation when a girl decides a guy is her friend and no longer a dating option. Chris, the main character rejected by his friend, Jamie years ago explains the situation as becoming "a complete non-sexual entity...like her brother or a lamp" (Kumble, 2005). In the film, Chris eventually tells Jamie how he feels – that he truly wants to date her yet also values their friendship. They share a kiss in the end showing that progression into a romantic relationship is possible, but does not offer 100% promise. Similar to many of the other prototypes of friend zone phenomena, the man claims to be friendzoned by the woman and is unsatisfied with a failed heteronormative romantic relationship. It was also

assumed that Chris was rejected in the past because he was overweight and physically unattractive. When Chris and Jamie meet each other again, he is no longer heavy and has a successful job working with celebrities. These details may respond to the culture of Game or “loosely based set of behaviors specifically designed to increase attraction” (The Red Pill Handbook, 2015 p. 409) that individuals frequenting The Red Pill forum endorse. RPer believe men must acquire wealth, physical attractiveness and success to obtain a successful relationship. A strong foundation of a long-term friendship, Chris apologizing for his callousness toward Jamie during the reunion and his courage to be honest and open about his feelings may be ignored due to a persistent culture that encourages performing gender roles and physical attractiveness.

In 2011, MTV came out with a reality television dating series titled *Friend Zone* that follows individuals’ stories with platonic friends they wish to pursue a romantic relationship with. The spectator is given the history of the individuals’ friendship and introduced to both people. The one pursuing a romantic relationship asks his/her friend for advice on an upcoming date, which may include how to act, what to say and how to dress. At the end of each scenario, the truth about the show’s intention is exposed and the friend may choose to go on the date that was set up for the couple or refuse the offer. The results of these situations have included mutual attraction, either party becoming angry about the outcome, initial date refusals with attraction happening later and terminated friendships. I personally believe that those wishing to terminate a long-standing, close friendship based on one’s refusal to engage in a romantic relationship are compromising an important relationship in the name of temporary awkwardness. Friendship is an important relationship that is underestimated in Western culture and should be embraced

and appreciated. Strong friendships with long histories should be supportive enough to grow from these experiences. Unfortunately, I have found from observing friend zone phenomena online and listening to others' stories that my perception is not popular. Many agree that those refusing a date are mean and do not deserve good friendships. This television show and the responses it provokes is representative of how others feel about the friend zone and what social justice issues are existent.

Chapter 3

BACKGROUND LITERATURE AND FRAMEWORK

Review of Literature

Through the years, scholars have discussed the meanings of love, relationships and how different forms vary from one another. Robert Sternberg's Triangular theory of love proposes that love is composed of Intimacy, Passion and Commitment as the three components to describe eight different kinds of love depending on the combination of these three components (liking, infatuation, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love, consummate love, empty love and nonlove). Scholars typically embrace Consummate love as the deepest and most satisfying relationship as all three components are represented and it is "the kind of love we dream about" (Strong, Yarber, Sayad & DeVault, 2008 p. 230). This type of relationship takes time, commitment, patience and work on all parties to sustain. One would assume that all parties must be complete and responsible individuals willing to compromise and dedicate substantial effort to accommodate each component and build a lasting relationship. In regards to the topic of friend zone liking, infatuation, romantic love and possibly consummate are the kinds of love to consider in interest. Liking love "represents the intimacy component alone" (Strong, Yarber, Sayad & DeVault, 2008 p. 230) and best describes friendships. There are no official commitments in the relationship and passion is not expressed. One vying to engage in a deeper relationship with a platonic friend might become dissatisfied with Liking and wish for Romantic love with the individual in mind. Romantic love includes intimacy and passion and might evolve from a friendship (Liking) or start with passion (Infatuation). Romantic love might include more emotional or physical affection than

Liking and can gradually become Consummate love with the promise of commitment and decision.

Although Sternberg's theory identifies how the three components of love relate to each other and provides a framework for describing the difference between romantic relationships and platonic friendships, it does not provide enough to describe the phenomenon of becoming "friendzoned." The triangular theory of love does not necessarily consider one kind of love to be an evolution of another or rate them in a hierarchy, rather it discusses how the three components work together to form different kinds of love that may represent different meanings. John R. Scudder Jr. and Anne H. Bishop's work provides dialogical love as a concept of "love that grows out of personal interaction that is initiated by the presence of the other and responds directly to that presence" (Scudder & Bishop, 2001 p. 1).

Scudder and Bishop's research is unique from earlier scholars because they did not initially define dialogical love and use their resources to affirm their perceptions. Instead, they investigated relationships between men and women that were not romantic, but required a deeper term than "friend." Individuals in their study were invited to define what their bonds and experiences meant to them, how they differed from the term "friend" and what dilemmas came from these concepts. Several participants expressed frustration with justifying strong friendships with the opposite sex that do not include traditional romance or fit the "friends" category. Some felt forced to terminate friendships with ex-lovers due to others feeling they were unfaithful to their own romantic partner or spouse. One stated that she felt awkward having coffee with an ex-boyfriend after she married and ran into several classmates; she was led to terminate

“what could have become a valued friendship” (Scudder & Bishop, p. 20) due to her marital status and perceived boundaries on close friendships between males and females. These invisible boundaries cause a need for many to defend their friendships with the opposite gender by couching them as “just friends.” Issues occur from couching the relationship as “just friends” because these relationships are stronger than casual relationships, however, they do not represent romance. The friendship a man and woman have working together on a project at work may differ significantly from one where both parties feel a secure trust in each other where they share confidential information. Calling a relationship a “just friend” relationship may also devalue a potentially strong friendship and damage one’s perception of non-romantic relationships.

Lilian Rubin’s analysis of this damage from a book titled *Just Friends* (Rubin, 1985) is also discussed. Rubin’s notion draws from personal experiences she encountered with the term placing her friendships “below other relationships” (Scudder & Bishop, 2001 p. 21). This suggests that friendships cannot be close with a unique type of love unless romance or familial relations are involved. Adding the word ‘just’ to the term states that a friendship between male and females are inferior to romantic relationships because “There is an assumption in our society that men and women have to choose between friendship and lover relationships and that a lover relationship is a preferable one” (Scudder & Bishop, 2001 p. 22). This assumption nurtures the concept society has placed on expectations for relationships as Rubin adds to this statement by implying that adding the word “just” to the term “just friends” devalues the relationship and casts the situation as inferior and unfortunate for potential lovers to place themselves in.

Societal boundaries on strong friendships between males and females may help one understand how the term friend zone shapes perceptions on relationships; because the word “zone” is part of the concept, there is a perceived boundary within the concept. One may feel the friend zone is an unfortunate place to be placed in because it is limited as opposed to a romantic relationship. Although Scudder & Bishop’s research provides a new form of love that cannot be described as “just friends” or romantic relationships through dialogical love, they do not provide all the components necessary to understanding the friend zone. Dialogical love includes two individuals who both mutually feel the same type of affection and are generally satisfied with their relationship despite social boundaries. The friend zone, on the other hand is used in regards to feeling unfulfilled in a non-romantic relationship. In contrast to the reasons some of the participants in Scudder & Bishop’s study about the need to terminate friendships due to social expectations; those who believe they are “friendzoned” may feel the need to terminate friendships for a different reason. K.J. Werking’s findings on cross-sex friendship have referenced a trend similar to friend zone phenomena.

Werking found that reasons for 48% termination of cross-sex friendships were typically the result of unsuccessful romantic heteronormative relationships, their friends becoming romantically involved with other individuals or a desire for a romantic relationship that was not met. These cross-sex friendships were ended through gradual fading out (38%), cutting off contact with their friend (23%) or intentionally avoiding them (17%) (Werking, 1997, p. 396). Werking continues to investigate how others view cross-sex friendships how those involved in these friendships interpret their situations. Participants in both Werking’s and Scudder & Bishop’s research both consider social

norms of friendship and romance between males and females as frustrating and feel obligated to defend their positions. Because Werking's research does not address the term friend zone and how it shapes one's perception of a fulfilling relationship, there is still a need to formulate research specifically on friend zone phenomena.

Although Scudder & Bishop, Rubin, and Werking have concluded that strong friendships fail due to social norms, devaluation of the term "friend" and unmet romantic desires, these conclusions cannot be drawn in regard to the term friend zone. Despite the fact that love, relationships, friendships and barriers between these areas have been heavily researched, there is need to introduce the term "friend zone" to scholars. It is especially important to incorporate resources that incorporate media literacy, a tool that "raises critical questions about the impact of media and technology" (Galician, 2004, p. 101). It is necessary to stay actively critical of the subtext within media messages and become aware of how they influence actions, beliefs and values.

For this thesis specifically, I will use resources encouraging media literacy as much of the friend zone phenomena is included in mass media and social media (e.g. internet memes, discussion boards). Galician asserts that "we might become more influenced by messages that are basically entertaining" (2004 p. 81); although many forms of mass media harbors an entertaining component, participants and consumers are likely to internalize the messages and accept them as true representations of reality. It is important to consider the possible dangers of accepting these messages as facts. Although Galician has done extensive research on how films, television shows and songs have influenced many to believe in the twelve Myths, her research has not yet covered friend

zone phenomena or meme culture as a social media. My research fills this gap and presents a good foundation for further investigation.

Theoretical Framework

Mary-Lou Galician, professional journalist, ASU professor and webmaster of *realisticromance.com* has created a system for dis-illusioning ourselves from the Myths we perceive as truths from the media. Her research includes stories from students, personal stories, theories and studies in psychology and many other resources that have responded to the issues with the media influencing perceptions and expectations of romantic relationships. Galician's work is motivated to encourage media literacy or becoming "wise, aware consumers of the mass media" (Galician, 2004 p. 3) without compromising the enjoyment many obtain from these forms of entertainment. She has created a system expressed as "Dr. Fun's Mass Media Love Quiz" (Galician, 2004 p. ix) for anyone to complete either in her book, *Sex, Love and Romance in the Mass Media* or on her website. This quiz has helped many identify which of the twelve Myths from the mass media one has believed to be true and the solution in the form of a prescription (Rx). Galician's 12 Myths/Rxs, desire to stimulate media literacy and promote intelligible solutions to embracing these damaging concepts is the main lens and methodology used in my paper.

Jackson Katz is concerned with Western culture's media equating "masculinity with violence, power, and control – and femininity with passivity" (Katz, 2011 p. 262). This is a concern for both men and women as it encourages violent behavior and feeds unhealthy stereotypes that men must act with aggression and hostility to earn the title of a "real man." Women's fear of rape and distrust of other people "especially men" (Rozee,

2008 p. 326) also contribute to this issue as it reinforces a culture that expects men to be violent thus creating a harmful stereotype that “nice guys” are non-existent.

The issues in equating masculinity with violence and submission with femininity contribute to current rape culture and might explain the issues within friend zone phenomena. Women may be reluctant to pursue romantic relationships with male friends, as men feel frustrated that their female friends keep choosing the same abusive romantic partners. Gender performativity influenced by these stereotypes as outlined by Butler and Lorber respectively are also part of the theoretical framework – part of the illusion in friend zone phenomena is propagating gender performativity as biological rather than socially constructed.

Social construction is a term used by social scientists to describe social norms presumed “‘natural’ rather than ‘social’ – a given part of ‘reality’ rather than a human creation” (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011 p. 21). Through taken for granted reality, individuals accept these social constructions as indisputable norms rather than arbitrary customs that may change with society. Too often in friend zone phenomena, gender performativity is couched as “reality” through social construction – one is likely to state these differences are “natural” and look to biology to support their claims when the behaviors are demonstrations of gender performativity.

Judith Butler asserts that “gender is always a doing” (Butler, 1990 p. 25) – gender is not innate or even a noun – it is a performance of social norms prescribed through culture and reinforced based on one’s adherence to gender performativity. Philip Zimbardo asserts that from a young age girls and boys are praised and rewarded for obeying gendered norms and discouraged when defiance to these norms occur (American

Psychological Association, 1989). Individuals adjusting their gender performativity based on reinforcement from authorities and continuing this performance into adulthood is an example of participation of socialized norms, not expressions of innate characteristics. Gender performativity is important to explore in friend zone phenomena as a lot of the facets engage traditional gender roles and presume consequences for failing to comply.

Some disagreeing with social constructions of gender often use evolutionary research of animals to justify claims that men and women are significantly different. Judith Lorber negates this inference through her research as “animals’ dominance hierarchies are not the equivalent of human stratification systems – animals group on sex and age, relational categories that are physiologically, not socially different” (Lorber, 1994 p. 15). Therefore, gender is socially constructed, not innately self-evident – some cultures do not even have a gendered dichotomy like Western culture (Lorber, 1994). Presenting gender performativity as a taken for granted reality based on biological formation omits relevant structures in society that reinforce certain behaviors of gender performativity and stigmatize others. These axioms beget gender inequality – men and women are chastened for not following strict gender performativity. Consequences from these experiences vary from exclusion (e.g. in the workforce, dating community), fabrications of one’s morality (e.g. “uncivilized,” “indecent”) and stigmatization. Eventually, one may believe these assumptions are true and later participate in prejudice projected onto oneself.

Methodology

My research consists of a textual analysis of relevant social mediums that encourage stigmatization of the friend zone utilizing Dr. Galician's 12 Myths and prescriptions as outlined in *Sex, Love and Romance in the Mass Media*. Although friend zone phenomena is not limited to heteronormative relationships or even the implication that only men get friend zoned, that was the common narrative throughout the texts I analyzed. I examine the implications within these texts and how they relate to the foundations of a healthy relationship (or lack thereof). Galician has done extensive research on love, sex and romance in the mass media and offers her twelve Myths/prescriptions as part of a "self-help book to show people how to de-Mythify mass media stereotypes that cultivate unrealistic expectations...as well as how to become romantically realistic and realistically romantic" (Galician, 2004 p.xxii). This method has been useful for helping me deconstruct my own beliefs in the twelve harmful Myths through her 7-Step-Reality-Check-Up.

Galician's aforementioned procedure includes "Detection, Description, Deconstruction, Diagnosis, Design, Debriefing, and Dissemination" (Galician, 2004 p. 30). Dissemination, the seventh step was left out of my analysis as my entire thesis is a form of dissemination. Through this step, one is encouraged to "act constructively as a media consumer or creator to share (your) insight with others" (Galician, 2004 p. 110) which may consist of raising awareness, resisting the preferred read of Myths and/or publishing discoveries. I encourage all readers to follow along with the steps outlined in the thesis and participate to discover one's own internalized Myths, especially Step 6 "debriefing." Personal stories are important for to get in touch with and could save time,

money and peace of mind. Galician's tools as presented in *Sex, Love and Romance in the Mass Media* are excellent resources that I am proud to have had the opportunity to utilize in my analysis. Galician's twelve Myths and their respective Rxs are listed on pages 23 and 24.

- Myth # 1 – *Your perfect partner is cosmically predestined, so nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you*
- Myth # 2 – *There’s a such thing as “love at first sight”*
- Myth #3 – *Your true soul mate should KNOW what you’re thinking or feeling without your having to tell*
- Myth #4 – *If your partner is truly meant for you, sex is easy and wonderful*
- Myth #5 – *To attract and keep a man, a woman should look like a model or a centerfold³*
- Myth # 6 – *The man should NOT be shorter, weaker, younger, poorer, or less successful than the woman*
- Myth #7 – *The love of a good and faithful true woman can change a man from a “beast” into a “prince”*
- Myth # 8 *Bickering and fighting a lot mean that a man and woman really love each other passionately*
- Myth #9 – *All you really need is love, so it doesn’t matter if you and your lover have very different values*
- Myth #10 – *The right mate “completes you” – filling your needs and making your dreams come true*
- Myth #11 – *In real life, actors and actresses are often very much like the romantic characters they portray*
- Myth #12 – *Since mass media portrayals of romance aren’t “real,” they don’t really affect you.*

³ In friend zone phenomena, Myth #5 was reinforced for both men and women. Either a failed relationship was blamed on one’s lack of physical attraction (whether male or female) or attractive individuals were considered the only types worth pursuing. (Galician, 2004 p. 225)

- Rx # 1 – CONSIDER COUNTLESS CANDIDATES
- Rx # 2 – CONSULT your CALENDER and COUNT CAREFULLY
- Rx # 3 – COMMUNICATE COURAGEOUSLY
- Rx #4 – CONCENTRATE on COMMITMENT and CONSTANCY
- Rx #5 – CHERISH COMPLETENESS in COMPANIONS (not just the COVER)
- Rx #6 – CREATE COEQUALITY; COOPERATE
- Rx #7 – CEASE CORRECTING and CONTROLLING; you CAN'T CHANGE others (only yourself!)
- Rx #8 – COURTESY COUNTS; CONSTANT CONFLICTS CREATE CHAOS
- Rx #9 – CRAVE COMMON CORE VALUES
- Rx #10 – CULTIVATE your own COMPLETENESS
- Rx #11 – (DE)CONSTRUCT CELEBRITIES
- Rx#12 – CALCULATE the very real CONSEQUENCES of unreal media

In friend zone phenomena specifically, two extra Myths are required to adequately address all the issues. I developed the following Myths with their respective Rxs.

- Myth #13 – *Friendship between a man and a woman (or potential romantic partners) is a consolation prize that should be avoided at all costs*
- Myth #14 – *All men are after in a romantic relationship is sex and power/All women are after in a romantic relationship is financial stability or to be spoiled*

These two additional Myths are important as they portray two stereotypes I have constantly come across in observing friend zone phenomena or tensions between romantic partners as expressed in the media and real life. Myth #13 responds to Western culture's fixation on romantic relationships rather than friendships. Jan Yager a sociologist who has numerous publications on love, friendship and relationships asserts that friendship is "something many people take for granted; they are unaware of how powerful and positive friendship can be or they would take it more seriously" (Yager, 1997 p. 5). Further, it is important for one to realize that a friendship *is* a relationship – it is not often acknowledged as such due to an absence of romantic desire or sexual intercourse. This absence segregates friendship from other relationships and couches its status as lower than others' the hierarchy of relationships. I have observed that certain level of "maturity" seems to be referenced in the transition from friendship to romance and this romance is associated with sexual intercourse.

One example from the media that defies this Myth is Amy Farrah Fowler and Sheldon Cooper from the television show, *The Big Bang Theory*. The couple starts out as

platonic friends and become an official romantic couple in “The Flaming Spittoon Acquisition.” Their physical attraction and affection has been minimal as their first official kiss initiated by Sheldon did not occur until the seventh season in the episode “The Locomotion Manipulation” – they still have not engaged in sexual intercourse. Throughout the course of their relationship in the show, many of their mutual friends have regarded their attraction as “cute” and appear to condescend to their relationship. This is expressed in “The Love Spell Potential” when the couple’s friends imply that because intercourse will never happen in real life, their dungeons and dragons characters should engage in this activity.

Although spectators may regard Amy and Sheldon’s relationship as “boring,” “dull” or “unrealistic,” the fictional couple expresses a great amount of Galician’s prescriptions. Amy and Sheldon have followed Rxs 1-5 as well as Rx 9 and Rx 10. Amy considered another potential candidate in Stuart before she and Sheldon became a romantic couple, they both waited before they considered their relationship official, they both realize that consensual sex does not come easy, Amy is not fixated on looking attractive, both have outlined their core values and expectations in a “relationship agreement,” and they both hold separate jobs and lives apart from each other.

Myth #14 responds to Western culture’s segregation of core values in a relationship through gender; it is commonly believed that all men only value sex and/or power in a relationship as women are all looking to exploit a man’s resources. I use the term “segregation” to emphasize the gender performativity that separates sex and consumer indulgence as predominantly masculine or feminine. As expressed through Rodger’s vanity, men enjoy stylish clothing and are liable to greed just as much as a

woman is. The same is true about sex – there are women who enjoy intercourse more than some men and are liable to basing an entire relationship on sex and passion. Neither of these stereotypes/Myths are productive for either party nor are they true.

The Rx's to reciprocate Myths #13 and #14 are:

- Rx # 13 –COMPRISE cross-gendered platonic COMPANIONSHIPS as they are UNIQUE and CONSTRUCTIVE
- Rx # 14, UNDERSTAND every INDIVIDUAL has their own STANDARDS and EXPECTATIONS for a HEALTHY, romantic relationship – ALL MEN ARE NOT OUT TO HARM WOMEN as ALL WOMEN ARE NOT OUT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WELL ESTABLISHED MEN

My research worked to keep bias to a minimum by exposing both the Myths *and* prescriptions presented by the texts analyzed. Understanding friend zone phenomena and other components that might contribute to the issue presents the solution – sometimes the solution exists within the texts that are part of the issue. It is important to acknowledge the parts in these texts that include fragments of truth because media (especially social media) tends to respond to culture and attempt to make sense out of its damaging messages. Through utilizing Galician's "Seven-Step Dis-illusioning Directions" (Galician, 2004 p. 30), both tasks (finding the issue and presenting the solution) were successfully accomplished. Between gathering information, performing open coding, focused coding and utilizing Galician's 7-Step Reality Check-Up. The analysis took a total of 6 months. This amount of time included analyzing texts, media and online phenomena related to the proposed topic including the online memes, media and texts related to the friend zone. Additionally, The Red Pill forum and associated texts (i.e. *The*

Rational Male), and the Elliot Rodgers case were also analyzed as their relevance to the overall issue of defying the key ingredients for a healthy, respectful romantic relationship were apparent.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS

Retrograde Misogyny, Elliot Rodger, TRP and Rape Culture

Despite the progress of women's liberation and feminism, there is a culture of regression that vilifies gender equality, encourages men to dominate women and denies rape culture. In response to my observation of this phenomena, I have coined the term **Retrograde Misogyny** to describe the issue. Misogyny specifically refers to "women-hating" (Tiefer, 2004 p. 178) and expands beyond the mere hatred of women. Gerald Burgess refers to misogyny as a "dislike of the feminine and the intermingling of sex and violence" (2007, p. 976). Sadly, many forms of misogyny are hidden within hegemonic structures of Western society and often repackaged as "new." As mentioned earlier, Katz has also observed unhealthy portrayals of masculinity in the media, including associating violence and degrading behavior towards women as something "new" and "real" when these prototypes are nothing more than recycled, old, unproductive stereotypes (Katz, 2007). This action is best described as a retrograde or a "decline to a worse condition" (Retrograde 3, 2012). A nostalgic look to the past without consideration of the issues that emerged during this presumably idealistic era should be deconstructed as this utopian perception is far from reality or progress. A major example of a culture that nurtures retrograde misogyny is the Manosphere – a behemoth conglomerate.

Participants of the Manosphere couch their philosophy as a safe haven for men to discuss masculinity without the alleged "scrutiny" of feminism and other proactive campaigns pushing for equality. Throughout my research, I found it near impossible to track down academic resources that distinctly refer to the Manosphere and succinctly

define it - this is one of the culture's defining tactics. The Manosphere benefits from a vacillating definition – without distinct definition scholars may have issues researching the topic and exposing the truth. The Red Pill Handbook defines this Manosphere as “the collective online discussion of men's issues” (2015, p. 410). These behemoth online structures contribute to a perception that encourages men to fortify their control to gain a romantic relationship, maintain power in all sexual relationships and shamelessly condescend women they supposedly love. Scholars looking to continue this research should not be misled – this conviction existed before the internet as Mariah Blake, senior reporter of *MotherJones* traces the Men's Rights movement back to the 1980s led by Warren Farrell. Blake explains that Farrell has “made the case that the primary victims of gender-based discrimination are men” (Blake, 2015 p. 1). Blake also warns that the Manosphere has “spawned a network of activists and sites that take Farrell's ideology in a disturbing direction” (Blake, 2015 p. 2). Blake mentions Reddit as one of her examples.

Pk_atheist, a moderator for TRP states “it's too easy to blame feminism for our troubles...men, our happiness is our responsibility...equal rights are something I am strongly in support of” (2 years ago) as part of the welcoming message back when TRP forum initially started with less than 100 subscribers.⁴ This philosophy sounds inviting and fair, however, the overall mentality of TRP does not reflect this part of Pk_atheist's statement. The main page says “Read the following threads and the Theory Reading below; if you've read the rules above, then you know this is required before posting anyway” (The Red Pill). This ultimatum forces new arrivals to read a plethora of forums

⁴ It is important to notate that this message was moved around the toolbar and sometimes missing as one of the initial theory readings.

and websites that condescend women, portray feminism negatively and provide archaic beliefs about women such as

“The difference between men and women in maturity, [however], is that while females mature earlier in life, they also *stop* maturing at around the age of eighteen, as Schopenhauer aptly observes. And while men don’t catch up to women’s maturity until they reach around age twenty-eight, after that the men keep maturing - often throughout their entire lives.” (Woman, the most responsible teenager in the house, 2014).

This blog proceeds to compare a woman to one’s bratty younger sister needing protection and guidance from a man. Most importantly, The Red Pill Handbook defines Red Pill as “the recognition and awareness of the way that feminism, feminists, and their white-knight enablers affect society - seeing the world for what it is, seeking truth no matter how painful or inconvenient the truth may be” (2015, p. 441). Clearly, feminism and equal rights for women are not welcome in TRP and the Manosphere is anything but a safe place for men to discuss the issues of masculinity. Most of the theory reading is from blogs with little credibility. The only resource found on the theory reading side toolbar with a proper reference page is *Sexual Utopia in Power* - an article written for a white nationalist periodical, The Occidental Quarterly. Southern Poverty Law (as cited in Holthouse, 2006) lists the Occidental Quarterly, supported by the Charles Martel Society as one of the four hate groups leading the “academic racism” world (Holthouse, 2006). TRP’s claims that their website is distant to the racism, misogyny and violence displayed in Rodger’s manifesto are false. Although Rodger is a rare case, similar mentalities

described in his manifesto are present throughout TRP's forum, websites and related materials.

The Red Pill takes their name from a popular film *The Matrix* where one is given a choice to take the blue pill and stay uninformed about society or take a red pill and become exposed to the truth. The philosophy of this forum claims that the current Western culture is a feminist culture and certain aspects of this feminist culture are wrong. These wrong aspects include but are not limited to manipulative women, misandry, women controlling the sexual marketplace (including exploiting "good men" while dating bad boys), false rape cases and perceived advantages women have over men. Although the Red Pill does align with some Rxs– the culture of the forum trivializes issues that affect women daily, promotes outdated gendered precepts, construes gender performativity as biological fact, reinforces Myths and discredits friendships between potential partners. Forums like the Red Pill are important to research because they are easily accessible – they couch their philosophies as forbidden "truths" that are not discussed anywhere else. Such forums could potentially encourage counter-productive activities.

Cult indoctrination utilizes a "foot-in-the-door" (Myers, 2009 p. 176) phenomenon to obtain followers – the pattern is described as initially presenting an inviting community then gradually pushing "for the activities to become gradually more arduous, culminating" (Myers, 2009 p. 177). This is demonstrated in TRP with Pk_atheist's initial post claiming to be for equal rights two years ago then eventually developing into an anti-feminist culture that eliminates posts that do not follow their fascist agenda. As of 2015, TRP has over 100,000 subscribers after only two years online.

As these cult-like beliefs rise in popularity, decades of progress for human rights, particularly women's, may cease to exist.

Elliot Rodger, a 22-year old man responsible for the Santa Barbara Massacre harbored a mentality similar to TRP and Tomassi. Prior to his suicide, he assassinated six people and injured 13 more (Blake, 2015 p. 1) after writing a 140 page manifesto that declared all women as evil. Rodger's initial intent was to murder an entire sorority of "hot blondes" for denying him sex – this plan fell through when he could not get into the sorority house. Prior to this incident, Rodger participated in a forum similar to TRP called PUAHate – this website is no longer available. Although Rodger is a unique case and has been debated to be a result of mental illness, one cannot ignore the fact that he participated on a forum similar to TRP – one that nurtures hostility towards women who refuse to reciprocate a man's sexual desires. Many men on TRP may not set out to erratically murder women, yet, many on TRP may feel encouraged to force sex onto a woman – especially if they are told women like it and that many claims of rape are false.

Tomassi and TRP claim distance to Rodger's mentality because they propagate their work as tools for men to learn life skills and build confidence. The Red Pill, Tomassi and Roger are all examples of misogyny and rape culture. In his manifesto *My Twisted World*, Elliot Rodger expresses this mentality by stating "I concluded that women are flawed – there is something mentally wrong with the way their brains are wired, as if they have not evolved from animal-like thinking" (2014, p. 117). Rodger continues to describe his favorite forum, PUAHate.com as "a forum full of men who are starved of sex, just like me" and states that "reading the posts on that website only confirmed many of the theories about how wicked and degenerate women are" (Rodger,

2014 pp. 117-118). Rodger continues to elucidate that women should not be given equal rights or choose their romantic partners. This mindset is also seen in TRP as demonstrated in the blog that refers to women as a mature teenager that must be treated like a child by her male lover – this is where rape culture comes into play.

A study of rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs in college men found that self-reported sexual aggression in male college students correlated to one's view that women "may deserve or enjoy being forced to have sex" (Burgess, 2007 pp. 987-988). A blog on one of TRP's other websites claims "you've gotta learn how to bang your girl hard" and provides tips on how to choke a girl with a belt during sex (Farvela, 2014). Farvela's defense for this statement is that he received an email from a woman who liked rough sex and complained that her boyfriend was too soft. As there is no evidence to prove this scenario actually happened, I doubt this exchange truly happened. Even if it did – she should have courageously communicated with her boyfriend rather than sending an email to a stranger that posts blogs about choking women with belts. Also, RPer's should know that one case study cannot generalize all women – especially if they claim to heavily endorse scientific research. Porn often portrays violence and increases "men's acceptance of rape myths such as 'all women secretly want to be raped'" (Scott, 2008 p. 341). Sexual violence is not something to take lightly or emulate as a satisfying experience – I am afraid to know what could happen if these women started to associate violence with love.

Red Pill and The Rational Male

Myth #4 - *If your partner is truly meant for you, sex is easy and wonderful*

AND⁵

Myth #6 - *The man should NOT be shorter, weaker, younger, poorer, or less successful than the woman*

Step 1: Detection

A great amount of this Myth is expressed on the forum. Sexual Market Value (SMV) is calculated with women's peak ages calculated early as men's peak ages are calculated later – this overlaps with Myth #14 as well. The main priority for men to obtain optimal relationships are ones that give them the best sex ever – it is actually implied that “rewards” should be given when women engage in these actions.

Manipulation is also encouraged to obtain ideal sexual relationships with women.

Step 2: Description

Sexual favors or “sex on demand” is couched as a goal for all men to obtain in an ideal romantic relationship with a woman. Two terms that consistently turn up in defining men are “Alpha” and “Beta” – Alpha male traits are encouraged and Beta male traits are discouraged. An Alpha male is described as “Somebody who displays high value, or traits that are sexually attractive to women” (Acronym and Glossary Thread, 2013).

Tomassi describes Alpha as “a mindset, not a demographic” and gives examples of men with these mindsets. These examples include Corey Worthington, a young man in Melbourne who displayed no shame after hosting a party while his parents were away

⁵ Given that many stereotypes combine sexual strategy and defined masculine characteristics, both Myths are relevant with the same parts.

that included \$20,000 worth of damage and neighborhood disruption (Tomassi, 2013 p. 25), James Hooker, a 41-year-old man who left his family for an 18-year-old student (Tomassi, 2013 p. 33) and many men in prison who “channeled their drive toward destructive and anti-social endeavors” (Tomassi, 2013 p. 26). Tomassi claims that women always go out of their way to engage in intercourse with these types due to their Alpha mindsets; he insinuates that because these men do what they please without shame, are unapologetic about their manliness, and only seek their own agenda that they are irresistible to women. Beta men, on the other hand are described as “either providing resources or validation to others” that “display low value to women if put on too strong or too early in meeting” (Acronym and Glossary Thread, 2013). These men are usually sensitive to the struggles women face, patient if they wish to only pursue a friends only relationship, and are not heavily motivated by sexual appetite or pursuing their own interests – often considered traits women claim to desire despite their actions that always cater to Alpha traits.

Various threads on TRP claim that there needs to be a “balance” of Alpha and Beta traits and sometimes discourage using Beta as an insult. However, there is a constant push towards Alpha behavior and discouragement of Beta traits – Beta traits are actually couched as natural behaviors gained through a feminized culture that caters to feminist agenda that need to be rewired. Reddit’s TRP forum also gives links to other websites with Red Pill (RP) mentality including a “sex education” slideshow for teenagers that insists on dominating the sexual relationship, “unplugging” from feminist culture that encourages Beta traits and seeking out only highly attractive partners within their SMV.

Step 3: Deconstruction

Promoting gendered norms of masculinity that could possibly border on sexual aggression as described by Fahs and Katz respectively, hinders gender equality and promotes negative stereotypes of all. Women are presented as young children who never grew up that men should treat accordingly. Examples given include but are not limited to desiring to have the same opportunities as men (depicted as the younger child wanting to be like the “big kids”), becoming bored easily and calling the cops with false cases of domestic abuse⁶. Encouraging a man to become condescending to the woman he is involved with is unhealthy for both parties – it encourages a parent-child relationship, discourages a man from obtaining a relationship with someone on his maturity level and compromises equality between potential partners.

Step 4: Diagnosis

Slut shaming or stigmatizing a woman for being sexually expressive (Poole, 2014) is encouraged through the term “Anti-Slut Defense” (ASD) (Acronym and Glossary Thread, 2013) that describes a woman’s denial of their sexuality to avoid consequences for her decisions and to avoid the reputation of a slut. ASD is a form of slut shaming as it is often used to describe rape victims as individuals who regret their decisions and falsely accuse men of rape. This mentality is dangerous because women

⁶ A PSA to raise awareness on domestic violence aired during Super Bowl XLIX. While observing comments posted for the YouTube video of this PSA, I noticed a male commenter expressing his support of the cause and the PSA. Another commenter accuses him of being a “white knight” believing the “lies” that domestic violence only happens to women. “White Knight” is a term used by Tomassi and TRP to describe a man who participates in women’s rights and jumps to the woman’s side without considering the situation. Such assumptions hinder solutions to domestic violence as they represent real situations that happen to women daily as fabrications. This mentality is consistent throughout TRP and Tomassi’s work.

who are exposed to a culture “where rape victims are shamed” are likely to silence victims “from disclosing sexual assaults” (Poole, 2014 p. 242). Given these issues, sex does not come easy and wonderfully for women – attempting to sleep with a woman with past traumas about sex are not likely to be enjoyable for men either. Such issues require communication and possible self-help work. Tomassi disputes the idea that a sexual relationship takes work – he declares that obtaining sex from a woman is as easy as “covertly, tactfully, demonstrably implying that other women find you desirable” (Tomassi, 2013 p. 15) or acting arrogant to show that he is not worried about winning her approval. This gives the false impression that good sex is easily handed to men with the correct manipulative tactics. Although many may claim that manipulative tactics may help heteronormative men obtain sex easily, the quality is not guaranteed – especially if the woman is uncomfortable, has past traumas with sexual encounters and feels obligated to exchange her body despite her discomfort.

Step 5: Design

Rather than encouraging teenage boys to adopt Alpha traits over Beta traits, becoming dominant in a sexual relationship and only seeking out the hottest female within their SMV – healthy sex talk should be encouraged. The one key to ending slut-shaming and embarrassment women feel about their sexuality is educating young boys and girls about “the importance of treating everyone equally and with respect” (Poole, 2014 p. 223). This progresses into respecting the bodies of others, healthy communication on mutual boundaries and appreciation.⁷

⁷ Tomassi claims that women often lack appreciation for the work men put into satisfying their partners. If such statements are true, communicating concerns about feeling

Ideally, SMV should not be utilized at all as commodified sexuality is never helpful. It may appear to provide temporary satisfaction that imitates the impossible standards advertisements and mass media have portrayed as “normal,” however, it does not lead to long-lasting satisfaction. Instead, one’s value of their character, maturity and responsibility should be considered.

Although I may not agree with their overall mentality, I feel their goal of self-improvement and desire to find healthy examples of masculinity are commendable. TRP can also use the same structure women and gender studies programs have used to discuss masculinity. In fact, men’s studies is a growing field that asserts “not all men are sexist in their attitudes and beliefs” and acknowledges the fact that men are affected by gender as well as women (Andersen, 2009 p. 15).

Myth #5 – To attract and keep a man, a woman should look like a model or a centerfold

Step 1: Detection

Unattractive individuals, whether they are men or women are considered low through SMV, therefore are encouraged to stay out of the dating world until they improve their physical attractiveness. The Red Pill Handbook states that a man should abandon his girlfriend if she is “ugly, sexually ungenerous, lazy or just an entitled bitch” (The Red Pill Handbook, 2015 p. 169). There is also a constant bashing of the Fat Acceptance (FA) movement that claims these women want “the world to accept her how she is without striving for any self-improvement at all” (The Red Pill Handbook, 2015 p. 256). It is also

unappreciated could easily solve the problem rather than the manipulating tactics that encourage controlling women through sex and jealousy. One main idea I have found that TRP and Tomassi fail to understand is the fact that women and gender studies are concerned with the stereotypical roles projected onto men as well as women.

implied that the reason a woman gains weight is because the man allowed it – therefore suggesting that the man controls the woman’s body and is entitled to shaping her life the way he sees fit.

Step 2: Description

TRP and Tomassi both suggest heavily that physical attractiveness is one of the most important factors in maintaining a romantic relationship and sexual intercourse. This is implied for both men and women – although physical attractiveness of women is emphasized at a much higher level. Stating that physically unattractive (specifically overweight) individuals should refrain from dating until changes are made advocates one’s exterior as the main component to attracting and maintaining a romantic relationship. Frequent members of TRP would disagree with my statement that personality and character are not emphasized as much as physical attraction because TRP includes multiple forums on maintaining one’s Alpha/Beta traits, obtaining goals and time management. Although these parts of TRP do exist, a great amount of TRP and Tomassi’s work illustrates physical attraction and sex – muscles, working out, advancing one’s SMV and having multiple sex partners are constantly referenced.

Step 3: Deconstruction

The most damaging message within these views is the idea that men should dominate the woman’s body. Although TRP is talking about her figure – that is still an act of control. Christine Smith affirms that health at any size is possible; she also states that “cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession of female beauty but an obsession of about female obedience” (Smith, 2008 p. 120). I know this from my experience; everybody believes they have the right to dictate how I live my life, what I

feel about myself and whether I should be proud of myself. Saying that full-figured women lack motivation and self-discipline is a fallacy. I am ambitious and a perfectionist.

Step 4: Diagnosis

Promoting physical attractiveness as a high priority and implying that gaining multiple sexual partners is the ultimate goal for men includes Myth #4 because it implies that one's sex life is easy, flawless and full of bliss when the ideal physique is obtained. This is untrue because there are individuals who have become less satisfied with their bodies even after participating in activities to increase one's health. As I will discuss later with my analysis on the Wing Girls' documentary on sex and love – there is a need for frank conversations about sex between romantic partners. Enjoying intimacy includes comfort with one's sexual partner, trust, and “developing a positive relationship” with one's body (Our Bodies, Ourselves p. 111). These objectives can be obtained without looking like a model.

Step 5: Design

A similar design like the one mentioned for Myth #4 is needed to redirect the excessive emphasis that is constantly placed on one's physical attractiveness. These new calculations should be required reading to emphasize the importance of maturity, respect for others and consideration – not only as characteristics for self-improvement, but as standards for their potential romantic partners as well. Many RP men seeking support from this forum may need reminders of basic skills that are assumed to be “common knowledge” – developing respectful friendships/relationships with others, curtailing irrational behaviors, coping methods for stress. Anybody feeling inadequate due to a

breakup, consistent rejection or frustration with recent events is susceptible to forgetting useful skills or helpful advice. Sometimes these situations cause individuals to become more receptive to good advice they may have rejected previously.

As previously notated, men are also held to standards that promote physical attraction as a prime requirement to obtaining a quality romantic relationship. TRP indulges this by stating that overweight or unattractive men should go “into monk mode” (The Red Pill Handbook, 2015 p. 134) – where the man refrains from pursuing women until one’s SMV increases to an “average” rate. Rather than stating that one should refrain from pursuing romantic relationships if overweight or weak, healthy lifestyle choices should be encouraged with less emphasis on appearance.

Step 6: Debriefing

I am personally disgusted with this Alpha/Beta mentality. That idea is not even worth a short joke. Although Tomassi claims that the main point of the Alpha is the man doing his own thing, the examples he gave are horrendous. If a man truly did not care about what others thought of him, he would not be subscribing to hard gender performativity in the name of obtaining women, sex and status. Claiming that obtaining sexual partners is as easy as manipulating others encourages romantic and sexual relationships based on lies, deceit and possible violence. These characteristics are far from the components to a healthy and respectful romantic relationship and are not ones I desire in any romantic or sexual partner.

Myth #13 – Friendship between a man and a woman (or potential romantic partners) is a consolation prize that should be avoided at all costs

Step 1: Detection

Much discouragement of cross-sexual friendships occurs throughout TRP and Tomassi's work.

Step 2: Description

TRP describes the friend zone as “mental frame used primarily by women to disqualify certain men as sexual prospects – the main reason most men allow themselves to be friend-zoned is because they are biding their time hoping they still have a shot to have sex with her” (The Red Pill Handbook, 2015 p. 409). Tomassi relates “were I to entertain a deep friendship with another female...my interest in this woman automatically becomes suspect of infidelity” (Tomassi, 2013 p. 76). Chris Rock's Bring The Pain skit (mentioned earlier in the history) is endorsed by karneadou as RP humor.

Step 3: Deconstruction

TRP's definition of friend zone also relates to Myth # 14 as it contends that the main focus of a man's interest in maintaining a platonic friendship is prospective sex. For Myth #13, karneadou's endorsement of Rock's skit and the 164 points awarded by 90% viewers affirms the belief that men on TRP are unsatisfied with female platonic friends. Although it is understandable that Tomassi as a married man might feel uncomfortable engaging in a strong cross-sexual relationship like one described by Scudder & Bishop's dialogical love, a trusting relationship with a strong foundation of core values and open communication should negotiate these issues. My mother has a saying that “you cannot lose something you never had,” – in other words, if somebody is going to engage in

infidelity, nobody can truly stop him or her. No amount of ultimatums, accusations or questioning will change this intent – I have seen it demonstrated in my own life as well as others. Loved ones with long term marriages all display a similar mentality – they do not have anything to hide from their spouse and vice versa. These couples have a core circle of strong platonic friends, both of the same and opposite sex. If Tomassi truly has a healthy, successful relationship built on trust – strong platonic cross-sexual friendships should not be a problem. TRP’s heavy endorsement of Rock’s skit mentioned in the Chapter two affirms that his allegation that women lie about their past relationships and hold onto platonic friends as emergency sex is a common belief endorsed by TRP.

Step 4: Diagnosis

Believing that cross-sexual platonic friendships are damaging to marriages and endorsing a skit that clearly states “men have women they haven’t f—ked yet” in relation to cross-sexual platonic friendships is damaging to one’s perceptions of romantic relationships and friendships. I find it wonderful that many of my loved ones can have strong cross-sexual platonic friendships – I even have a few examples of these. One in particular is a friend I had known since elementary school – we share advice, look to each other as close friends, yet we both agreed that we would never desire a romantic relationship with each other. This friend actually has a successful romantic relationship that has been thriving for years. By omitting the possibilities of strong platonic cross-sexual friendships – many are missing out on great opportunities to become a better friend and obtain different perspectives. Tomassi also affirms in his work that “the degree or quality you can experience with a woman (as a man) in comparison to same sex friendships will always be limited due to sexual differences” (2013, p. 77). Rubin

discusses this by expounding “for as long as the word has been written, men’s friendships have been taken to be the model of what friendship is and how it ought to be” (1985, p. 59). She explains that “women were considered to be too childlike, too given to instability, to petty jealousies and trivial concerns, to be able to maintain friendships” (1985, p. 59). This statement sounds strangely similar to the affirmations quoted earlier in this chapter – clearly cross-sexual friendship is not only considered inferior by TRP and Tomassi’s standards, but, women are also considered inferior individuals to engage in strong friendships with.

Step 5: Design

There are many opportunities for TRP and Tomassi to rethink their perceptions of cross-sexual friendships. Rather than taking Rock’s skit at face value – discussion on his accusations could occur. Utilizing Galician’s 7-Step-Reality-Check-Up, TRP and Tomassi can trace back where these perceptions came from, how they are damaging to their perceptions of men and women and what kind of actions can be taken to change these ideas. It is my hope that the Rx I created for this Myth is helpful as it is important for all – feminist scholars, Manosphere participants and others in between to challenge the socialized implications of cross-sexual friendships and understand that each friendship is different – no two are exactly the same. This is advice that even I need to take as I have adopted a lot of concerns with cross-sexual friendships turning into awkward situations. I find that Galician’s 7-Step-Reality-Check-Up is a great exercise for looking at one’s beliefs in the Myths as objectively as possible – writing it all out on paper gives clarity and allows one to improve their relationships (and friendships).

Step 6: Debriefing

I do not want to continue to feel uncomfortable around possible male platonic friendships – I should not be afraid of awkward situations and understand that any negative feedback about my decisions not to date only give transparency to the friendships I have. A friend does not spread rumors, make accusations or express heated anger for unreciprocated desires. This exercise has given me insight into my own participation in believing Myth #13. I look forward to continuing these exercises.

Myth #14 – All men are after in a romantic relationship is sex and power/All women are after in a romantic relationship is financial stability or to be spoiled

Step 1: Detection

A plethora of conversations throughout TRP and Tomassi’s book discuss women looking to obtain financial stability from well-established men.

Step 2: Description

Tomassi’s fifth iron rule states that there are professional mommies or women who look to fabricate unplanned pregnancies as “every law and social expectation weighs in her favor” (2013, p. 221). Tomassi discusses a trend in 2002 when NBA players were encouraged to flush their condom to prevent women from taking used condoms out of the trash and “self-impregnating with the players semen” to obtain financial support (2013, p. 221). TRP also has a mentality of “Alpha F—ks/Beta Bucks” (AF/BB) to describe “the idea that alpha males succeed in the sexual marketplaces while betas are relegated to a sexless provider role” (The Red Pill Handbook, 2015 p. 407).

Step 3: Deconstruction

Claiming that women exploit men for financial resources heavily supports Myth #14 as the preferred reading. Tomassi's accusation of professional mommies is defended by the claim that "Even without any birth control at all and timing my wife's ovulation cycles for our sex it took us 4 months to conceive our daughter" (2013, p. 223). Apparently, accidental pregnancies rarely happen as Tomassi claims "there are no accidental mothers" (2013, p. 223). These statements omit the issues single mothers face daily when they are left without child support – which is not a hefty amount to begin with. I know so many women in a similar situation and none of them tried manipulative techniques to get pregnant – some of them were married while others were left. It is ludicrous to believe that women stealing condoms to get pregnant and exploit resources is the norm for women – I have never even heard of such an idea. Often, I hear that women are afraid of unplanned pregnancies and take pro-active steps to prevent them. As for the AF/BB statement, many women today enjoy their independence and are thrilled to make their own money.

Step 4: Diagnosis

This idea is damaging to men as much as it is to women. Specifically from the examples drawn, not only is the woman seen as a greedy, materialistic exploiter – she is also couched as a manipulative person looking to get money by any means possible. Tomassi's example is convenient for the Manosphere as it gives the community another stereotype to couch women as psychologically unstable citizens who do not deserve equal rights. What is most frightening is Tomassi's claim that one should "never allow a woman to be in control of the birth" (2013, p. 221). Any attempt for a man to control a

woman's body is dangerous – all personal stories I heard from others about rape started with a subtle control of a woman's body and her right to reproduce children.

Step 5: Design

Rather than promoting ridiculous claims that women intentionally get pregnant to exploit resources, Tomassi would benefit more by learning what he can do about ensuring that women get equal pay for their work and better conditions at places of employment.

Diane Hall asserts that “many families need a mother's income because of higher standards of living, higher costs of living and because many families are headed by single mothers” (Hall D., 2008 p. 65). Promoting equal pay and accommodations for single mothers is helpful to everyone as better living standards are given to the leaders of tomorrow and a higher pay decreases the need for benefits. This should especially concern Tomassi as he has a teenage daughter who will become a young woman and face the same inequality as other women.

Rather than making snide remarks about women refusing to take birth control, encouragement of discussing these issues is much more helpful. On the issue of AF/BB, there needs to be a strong representation of the unique characteristics each person desires in a relationship rather than the dichotomy of Alpha men getting sex and Beta men becoming monetarily exploited. So many women are reluctant to take from men and the sexist comments made about women do not help the exchange – I personally had to get used to allowing my ex to pay for dates. If I were to be told that I was just looking to exploit a Beta man to sleep with an Alpha man, I would have been more reluctant to accept his contribution as I do not want to indulge in a culture that breeds entitlement to my body.

Step 6: Debriefing

I am shocked and disgusted by the ideas Tomassi and TRP create about women – we are not all out to exploit resources or do something rash like impregnate ourselves with used condoms. I am also uncomfortable with statements that imply men should be in control of births – the fact that Tomassi and his wife took 4 months to conceive a child does not mean unintentional pregnancies do not happen. Tomassi’s wife is one case study – her experience alone does not account for the many single mothers struggling daily.

***Rx #1* CONSIDER COUNTLESS CANDIDATES**

Despite the grand plethora of beliefs I disagree with, Tomassi describes Myth #1 as “ONEitis – *an unhealthy romantic obsession with a single person. Usually accompanied by unreciprocated affection and completely unrealistic idealization of the said person*” (2013, p. 1). Although Galician probably would not necessarily agree with a lot of his other ideas, understanding that an unhealthy obsession with potential romantic partners is never a good idea should be acknowledged. If RPer and Tomassi could introduce themselves to Galician’s work – other improvements to their perceptions may happen. Unfortunately, I feel this would be wishful thinking as Tomassi presents “spinning plates” or “gaming multiple women simultaneously to boost ones sexual market value” (The Red Pill Handbook, 2015 p. 412) as the solution. There are many issues with referring to women as a plate especially the fact that objectifying woman is the first step to promoting violence against women (Media Education Foundation & Jhally, 2010). Anybody reading this should understand that considering countless candidates does not mean objectifying them or dating them all at once to gain a higher

SMV. Rx #1 is meant to prevent unhealthy obsession with a potential candidate or remaining in an unhealthy relationship.

Rx #10 CULTIVATE COMPLETENESS

The most laudable and frankly, the only comprehensively good part of TRP is the advice given to become a complete individual. Lots of advice in the handbook and sometimes on the forum focuses on goal setting, looking out for one's health, establishing hobbies, taking risks and dealing with rejection. One of the few good examples is

talk to strangers all the. All the f—king time. Are you in line somewhere? A coffee shop? The Student Union of your University? Are you on a street or in a building, or at the gym or anywhere else where other people exist and aren't busy working? Just chat with strangers. You're not trying to make a new best friend or get a date. You're just chatting with people, both men and women, 30-60 seconds tops, maybe 10 people a day. Most of this will go nowhere and be super-awkward, but maybe you meet someone you can add to your network and contact later. More importantly, however, you get over the inherent fear we all have of rejection. (The Red Pill Handbook, 2015 p. 148)

Rejection indeed is a very hard fear to overcome – this advice is beneficial as one will become comfortable with risk taking and develop positive social skills. I have related to this advice as I adopted a similar mechanism to overcome my social anxiety in my teenage years – I asked questions in stores, introduced myself, told jokes to classmates I never interacted with before and became confident.

My wish is for these topics to be main focal point of discussion rather than blogs, biased writings and constant jokes that degrade women and denounce equality.

Unfortunately, this does not often happen on TRP – in fact, it is safe to say that these bits of sound advice were merely used to lure members in and gradually corrupt their thinking. If there is any hope for TRP to become a lot more involved in self-improvement and less on retrograde misogyny, the forum must stop encouraging outdated gender performativity, refrain from slut-shaming and understand that true progression invites older ideas into the future rather than complete regression.

If RPer's are concerned that many cohorts of the younger generation lack skills in cooking, mending clothing, simple car maintenance and simple repairs – the answer is not in reverting back to traditional gender performativity, but building communities that teach everyone these helpful skills. I imagine that many would be thrilled if schools could host a one-day or two-day event where anyone can learn the basics to cooking, sewing, household repairs or car maintenance. Progression works with the evolution of society, not against it.

Online Memes

Online memes or “piece[s] of culture, typically joke[s], which gain influence through online transmission” (Marwick 2013, p. 12) have been a popular expression of one’s thoughts, feelings and dilemmas with life. Although the term “meme” usually refers a picture with captions (image macros), the idiom is also used arbitrarily in reference to popular online videos that have gone viral, popular stories shared on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), and recapped news briefs. Miller & Cupchik’s research on online memes state that “individuals are able to affect massive online social change through the viral sharing of memes,” therefore online memes are highly influential in online social media (Miller & Cupchik, 2006 p. 1). Online memes are numerous, constantly shared and often-considered innocuous forms of entertainment – much like advertisements and other forms of mass media. Jean Kilbourne, states in her expose film *Killing us Softly* that advertisements “sell more than products, they sell morals” and provide “quick, cumulative and subconscious” messages that damage our perceptions of ourselves and others (Media Education Foundation & Jhally, 2010). Online memes share a similar procedure as Miller & Cupchik have found that many of these images gain popularity due to the observer’s ability to relate to the meme’s message and the humor associated with its message (Miller & Cupchik, 2006). Consumers of online memes may believe them to only exist for entertainment unaware of the effect they may have on one’s perception of friendship, romantic relationships or prescribed gender roles.

My research with online memes focused primarily on image macros because they “are more difficult to alter during the sharing process” (Miller & Cupchik, 2006 p. 1), thus have a greater probability of maintaining a consistent overall message when shared.

Image macros are also the most widely available memes for many to access, take a small amount of time to view/share and given popularity scores on various webpages. Widely available macros that take the least amount of time have a probability of affecting a greater amount of individuals than memes that demand watching a full video for several minutes or reading responses to popular stories. Image macros were also the most widely available memes in relation to friend zone phenomena.

Similar to Miller & Cupchik's research, the constant themes in friend zone related memes are representative of what the online community (that varies in age, race, class, gender and culture) believes about the friend zone, finds humorous about the issue, and how one relates to the phenomena. Many images reiterate a negative connotation of platonic friendships between men and women, insist on one's need to participate in gender performativity and emphasize a great need to maintain an attractive appearance to gain a healthy relationship. Over 120 different memes were observed and broken into categories in relation to messages and Myths many believe that hinder their ability to engage in healthy, romantic relationships. Due to the amount of time and effort analyzing over 120 memes would take, I chose ten representative memes carefully based on reoccurring themes and importance. I encourage those reading this thesis to engage in a similar analysis with their favorite friend zone meme and consider the hidden messages within each image.

One dominant recurring message in the vast majority of these memes was in alliance with both Myth #5 and Myth #6. Myth #5 states that "to attract and keep a man, a woman should look like a model or a centerfold" (Galician, 2004 p. 153), as notated, it was also assumed that the man should also look like a model or a centerfold. Such beliefs

reinforce what social psychology calls the “physical-attractiveness stereotype” which portrays a belief that “what is beautiful, is good” (Myers, 2009 p. 306). This starts in childhood and continues throughout the lifespan. Job offers, respect, portrayals of good character and implied intelligence are all influenced by this stereotype and harm society more than the hindrance of obtaining romantic relationships. Many are blind to one’s prejudice of others because one tends to believe in Galician’s final Myth that “mass media portrayals of romance aren’t ‘real’” and therefore, do not affect us. Western society is surrounded by mass media portrayals of similar images constantly; these same trends are found in morals, beliefs and values that are socially constructed as “normal” in Western society.

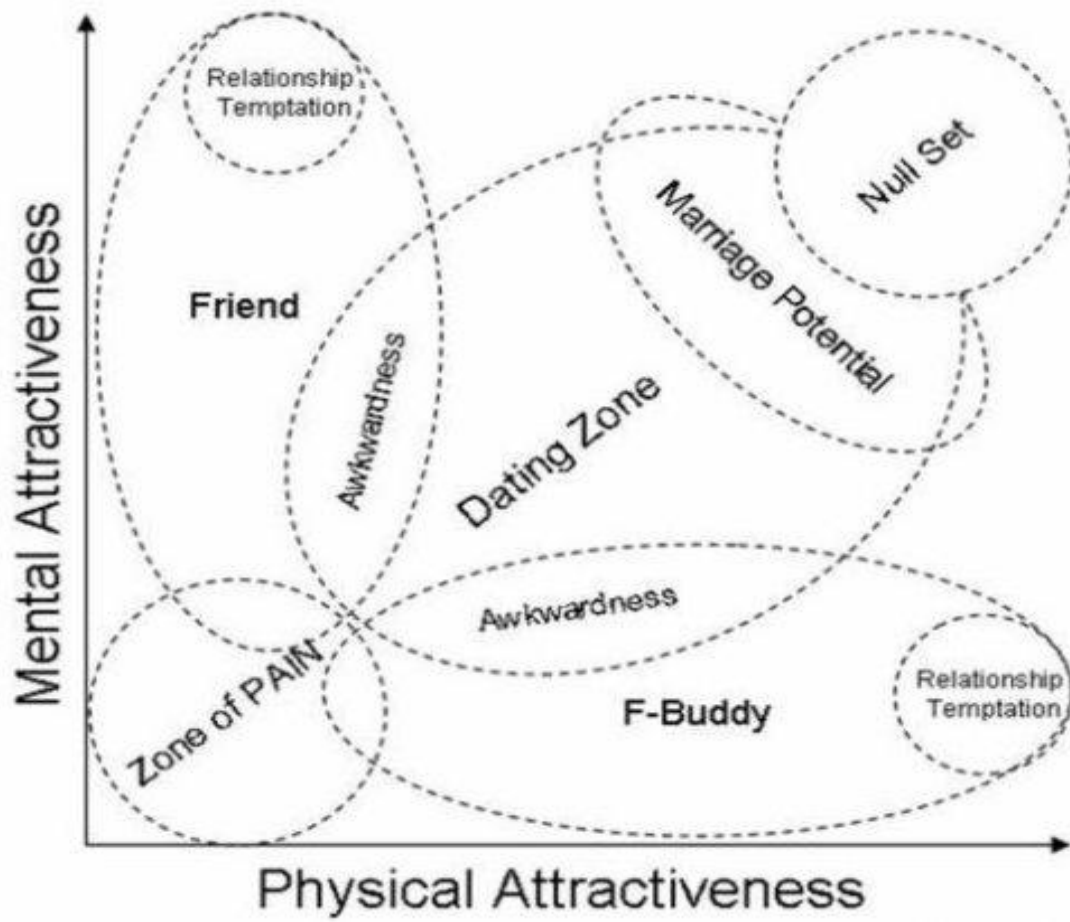


Figure 1

Step 1: Detection

I chose two memes in particular to represent Myth #5, “Physical/Mental Attractiveness” (Figure 1), and “Flowchart” (Figure 2).

Step 2: Description

Figure 1 consists of a very real looking line graph depicting the belief that the greater one’s mental attractiveness, the more one is labeled as a “Friend” is likely to happen. An individual with the highest score on mental attractiveness (without any physical attractiveness) is “relationship temptation”- the same label given for one with the highest score of physical attractiveness (without any mental attractiveness). It is also assumed that the greater one’s physical attractiveness, the greater one’s chance of being a “f-buddy” (implying casual sex) with the highest physical attractiveness (without any mental attractiveness) is “relationship temptation.” Relationship temptation illustrates an individual with either the highest intelligence or physical attractiveness possible – too good to be real and too good for anyone. The area with a balance between the two, where a straight line would lie has the caption “dating zone” with the areas overlapping between “friend” an “f-buddy” labeled as “awkward.” “Marriage Potential” is placed near the tip of the imaginary straight line with the very tip labeled as “null set” (implying non-existence). One last area labeled “zone of pain” presides in the corner area of the x and y axis implying the lowest mental attractiveness and physical attractiveness.

Figure 2 asks the observer if they are in the friend zone and uses a flowchart based on “yes/no” answers to prompts with the end result of “End Zone,” “Friend Zone,” or “Danger Zone.” On one website, this meme has had 1233 “likes,” 309 Facebook shares, and 5 Tweets (Twitter uploads); more could have been influenced by this meme

as every individual viewing the image macro might not have “liked” it. Only one scenario ends in the “End Zone” that uses faceless cartoon illustrations to imply a man embracing a woman with fireworks in the background as others cheer and a football scores points behind them. This very scenario asks if both the observer (assumed to be male) and female in question are hot with “yes” as the answer to both questions. The seven scenarios ending with friend zone include the presumption that the female in question is ugly despite implied inner beauty, the male is not physically attractive (although the girl is), he used Emoticons while texting her, he asked her out a few times already, she compared him to a brother, she told him about a boy she likes and the assumption that there is a boy she likes even if she never told him.

Step 3: Deconstruction

Underlying Myths/Stereotypes

The two memes selected and many others imply that unless the individual seeking a romantic relationship is physically attractive, their chances of obtaining a sustainable romantic relationship are minimal. Although facial attractiveness has been backed by evolutionary psychology as “a cross-culturally recurrent feature” (Sugiyama, 2005 p. 294), Sugiyama’s research also states “an individual would prefer good health, vigor, intelligence, generosity, reliability and loyalty” (Sugiyama, 2005 p. 293). These latter qualities can be expressed in any individual, whether they are considered physically attractive by evolutionary standards or the standards set culturally by mass media.

Further investigation of Sugiyama’s research revealed flaws in the aforementioned assumption that facial attractiveness is recurrent cross-culturally. The study mentioned as evidence to this claim used “thirty two photographs of Caucasian

female undergraduates” (Rubenstein, Kalakanis & Langois., 1999 p. 849) to create averaged faces that 6-month-old “predominantly Caucasian” (Rubenstein, Kalakanis & Langois., 1999 p. 850) infants observed. Because all faces observed were Caucasian and with a “predominantly Caucasian” (Rubenstein, Kalakanis & Langois., 1999 p. 850) participant sample, the study failed to measure cross-cultural preferences.

Possibly, these infants could be attracted to faces they are used to viewing in their environment as the “what is beautiful is good” (Meyers, 2009) prototype is reinforced in children’s books, television shows, magazines and other media 6-month-old infants may have been exposed to. The study also used averaged faces made up of 32 different photographs – a mechanism identical to those used by advertisers to create unobtainable physical attractiveness to sell items (Media Education Foundation & Jhally, 2010). Seeing as the mass media also shows a preference for Caucasians, it is plausible that the 6 month old infants merely responded to stimuli familiar to their environment.

Physical attractiveness has been exploited through mass media as a main important factor in maintaining a successful relationship. Figure 1 shows that an individual with high physical attractiveness is unlikely to exhibit mental competence, thus should be considered nothing more than sexual tool, or as more frankly notated by the meme an “f-buddy.” This also reinforces a commodified sexuality that is reoccurring in many advertisements, television shows, movies, and other forms of mass media. Commoditized sexuality measures one’s romantic value and compatibility based on physical aesthetics.

Step 4 Diagnosis:

Potential Consequences of Indulging Myth's Preferred Reading

Constant exposure to Myth #5 in Western culture affects one's perceptions of others based on looks rather than personality, integrity, or character. One might assume that all aesthetically pleasing individuals are honorable and base his or her human value on physical appearance. Although many claim immunity to this concept and may pride themselves against its influence, Western culture is immersed with this preferred reading. Seeing that this philosophy is constantly reinforced in children's books, television, movies, religious portrayals of good and evil and advertisements, it is near impossible to remain completely immune to this Myth's influence. There are also very few alternatives offered to this precept that are as relentless as the Myth's preferred reading. This insistence extends beyond physical-attractiveness theory, prejudice and shallow beliefs. Western culture also uses physical attractiveness to guide what one believes to be moral, pure and correct.

As well as promoting physical attractiveness as an important factor to obtaining a healthy relationship, Figure 1 presents that highly aesthetic individuals are unlikely to be smart, funny or of good character. Labelling individuals high on "physical" attractiveness as "f-buddies" presents said individuals as simple sex toys to be exploited and tossed aside after use. Nobody truly wins with this model as it contributes to the belief that women are objects (as depicted in countless mediums); this is also in danger of increasing violence against women as objectifying women creates a dehumanizing mechanism. Dehumanizing women allows society to depict rape, domestic violence against women and derogatory terms as 'normal' aspects of life that should not be considered a problem.

It is not acceptable to encourage rape, abusive relationships or vile terms to refer to a woman's body parts.

Step 5: Design

Possible changes to models

Figure 1 does a great job in portraying a simple line graph to quickly outline different aspects of the friend zone as the preferred reading of Myth #5. This model could very well be duplicated to represent the respected Rx #5 and other important facets to obtaining a healthy relationship. Rather than placing “physical attractiveness” and “mental attractiveness” on the X and Y axis, “completeness” and “respectful personality” could be portrayed; to make it more user-friendly, one can also utilize “confidence and maturity” in place of completeness. One with a great amount of “completeness,” yet lacking in “respectful personality” could be given advice or an adage to obtain respect for others; this could include signing up for a community service project or thinking twice about their actions. One with plenty of “respectful personality” that lacks in completeness could be given advice on how to become a whole individual with confidence; this may include finding one's talent and indulging them constructively or engaging in a healthy activity.

As many individuals creating these memes seem to enjoy developing plenty of definitions and sound advice, color codes could be used to portray the levels to becoming a confident individual that is appropriate for engaging in a healthy relationship. Many would respond to this model positively and could inspire other memes that focus on different aspects the author finds are missing in previous image macros.

Figure 2 also has plenty of potential for influencing a positive outlook on realistic romance. Rather than initially asking the observer if s/he is “hot,” the first initial question could be “have you established a healthy outlook on yourself?” with a legend that explains what it means at the bottom. If the answer is “no,” the observer could be given advice similar to the advice offered in the design for Figure 1 in how to become a whole person. If the answer is “yes,” the next question could be “do you two have any common interests or core values?” The next options could be “perhaps you should consider a different candidate” or “great, have you two talked?” A yes would next lead to “have you tried telling her/him how you feel?” If the answer is “no,” the answer could be an encouragement to try and if the answer is “yes,” the individual could later be asked what the outcome was. If the answer was a mutual liking, the answer could be “sounds like the beginning of something good,” if the answer was a non-mutual liking, the individual could be encouraged to keep the friendship as such relationships are also “something good.” This model acts as a “win-win” situation by encouraging both friendships and healthy relationships while also helping others focus on one’s other attributes that are not based on physical attractiveness.

Step 6: Debriefing

In the past, I have found myself feeling like I needed to obtain a certain physique in order to be considered a valuable romantic partner; this mentality was not easy for me to become aware of because I was raised to be my own person and dedicated a great amount of my life to fighting against the preferred reading of Myth #5. As a full-figured teenager and adult, I found myself judged by my body during dance class, with peers that discussed potential romantic partners and indirectly through constant advertising that

reinforced the preferred reading. Figure 1 relates to the formula I was given through society and the media to consider my potential romantic future. As I do not harbor an ideal body, I believed that I had to be perfect in other ways leading me to believe that any setbacks meant that I deserved less than top quality in a friendship or a relationship. I remember thinking to myself that I was lucky that my ex liked the way I looked and saw me as desirable “despite” my appearance – from a perspective outside of a relationship, I know that this is not the mentality to keep for myself inside or outside of a relationship.

I have found that my surrounding culture does not support a full-figured woman who is unapologetic about her body; a family member of mine expressed her empathy for a woman she knows who does not like to wear short sleeves because she is insecure about her arms. This same family member tenaciously insists that I desire to look like the prototype promoted by the media and considers my self-esteem low based on what she believes I should feel – I have been called delusional on behalf of my refusal to accept this Myth as a truth. I have come to accept my body as it is, enjoy my personality and work towards becoming the best and most fulfilled individual I can. I am not lacking in self-confidence, I have gained an exponential amount of experience through hard work and being at the service of others and I believe in respectful companionship. Through Galician’s Rx #5, I would be considered a quality potential romantic candidate. I choose not to pursue romantic relationships currently because I have other priorities and do not feel ready to engage in a new relationship.



Figure 3

Myth #6 – The man should NOT be shorter, weaker, younger, poorer, or less successful than the woman

Step 1: Detection

As expressed through figure 3, there are many Memes that imply men in the friend zone have not acted “manly” enough and should do so to pursue a relationship. Although it is important to encourage one to pursue something and risk rejection, implying that it is purely the man’s job and using terms like “man up” reproduce the ideology that the man should be stronger than the woman and that it is unacceptable for the woman to seek a relationship.

Step 2: Description

Hyper masculinity, which is argued as “Alpha” traits by Red Pill and Tomassi’s *Rational Male* (discussed later) encourages stereotypical gender roles, presupposes a need for men to dominate women and misdirects from the advice expressed through Galician’s Rx #4 (communicate courageously). Gendered roles are socially constructed at an early age and continue to affect environments and cultures throughout life. Boys and

men are socially constructed to be a lot more aggressive, take risks, hide emotional expression and participate in physical activity. Girls and women, on the other hand are socially constructed to be passive, careful, emotionally expressive and avoid aggression. Philip Zimbardo, a leader in social psychology affirms that children are rewarded by adults and others in for exhibiting behavior matching these social norms, therefore encouraging further participation (American Psychological Association, 1989).

Step 3: Deconstruction

Gender performativity is emphasized in Figure 3 as it states that the man should choose the woman rather than the woman choosing the man. Figure 3 also assumes that a man who remains friends with a woman for an extended amount of time is unlikely to obtain a romantic and/or sexual relationship. This is untrue as friendships are the foundation to successful relationships. I remember hearing “watch out best friends become partners” from my mother whenever a family member or loved one expressed their close friendship with a potential romantic partner and made it clear that the friendship was strictly platonic. Most of these scenarios I witnessed did manifest into romantic and/or sexual relationships. This meme is also in alignment with Myth #2’s preferred reading as “love at first sight” is emphasized over getting to know someone.

Step 4: Diagnosis

Encouraging hyper masculine performativity encourages inequality in romantic relationships, especially because males are frequently couched as the individuals meant to make all the decisions. This can become harmful if the belief manifests into an assumption that men are to make all the decisions in a sexual relationship as well. It could be even more harmful if the observer frequents Manosphere forums – especially

since the only concept of masculinity indulges in violent, stereotypical misogyny. It is also discouraging to women who feel confident to seek out their own romantic partner and do not wish to wait for the man to make the first move.

Step 5: Design

Rather than stating “man up and get her” this meme could say “if you like someone, take a risk and ask him/her – your friend will not desert you.” I personally become apprehensive about rejection and always find myself feeling a lot better after taking the risk even if I do not get the answer I wanted. Taking small risks like this are excellent confidence boosters and help us cope with failure. As the world evolves exponentially and the risks one must take become more difficult, getting experience with small failures are beneficial.

Step 6: Debriefing

I disagree with the term “man up” as there are strong women as much as there are strong men. I also do not agree with the sentiment that long friendships made relationship potential less possible. Even when I was younger, I always dreamed of strong friendships rather than sexual relationships. The concept of a supportive friend that listens to you, shares stories, and takes an interest in your life sounds like the most fulfilling relationship ever. I do not need gifts or expensive trinkets – I enjoy discovering new experiences with my loved ones. These types of experiences come from long standing friendships, not quick relationships of passion.

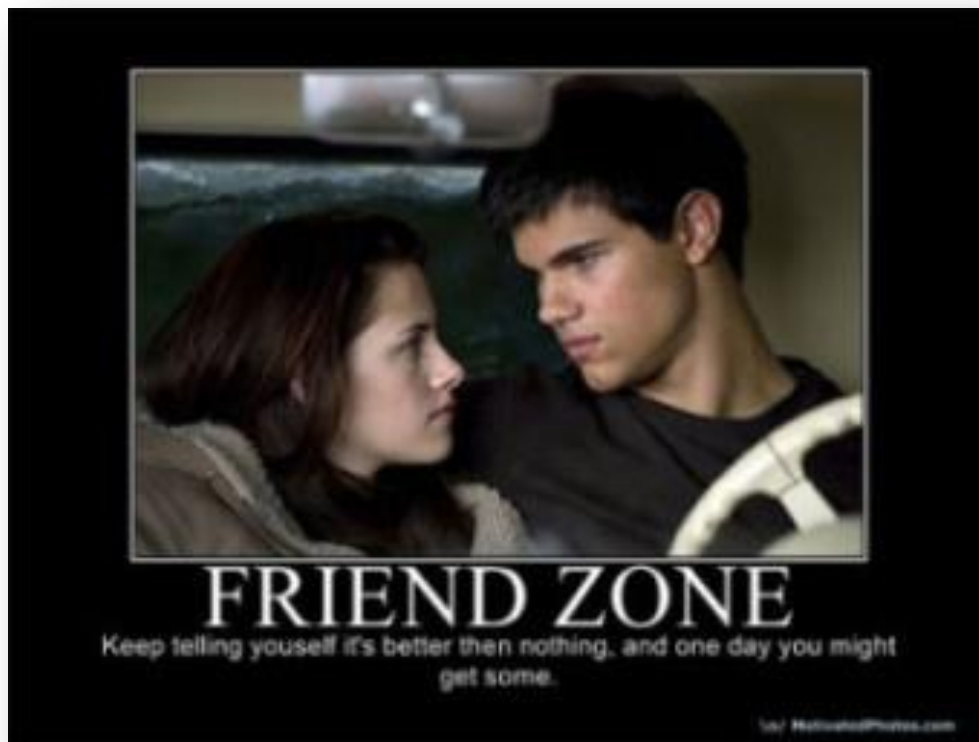


Figure 4

Myth #13 – Friendship between a man and a woman (or potential romantic partners) is a consolation prize that should be avoided at all costs

Step 1: Detection

Figures 4, 5, 8 and 9 express platonic friendships between potential mates in a negative manner – Figure 4 assumes that men are foolish for accepting the friendship and assume sexual intercourse as the only goal; figures 5, 6, 8 and 9 are part of a series of Super Mario Brothers memes titled *The Friend Zone*. There was another short lived meme similar to Figure 5 with a koopa troopa (a turtle-like enemy with wings) shown between the two walls labeled “rape zone” implying rape as an appropriate tool to use to obtain a romantic relationship with a platonic friend. One meme still standing on the

internet is nearly a replica of the “rape zone” meme with the word “alcohol” rather than “rape zone” expressed as Figure 6.

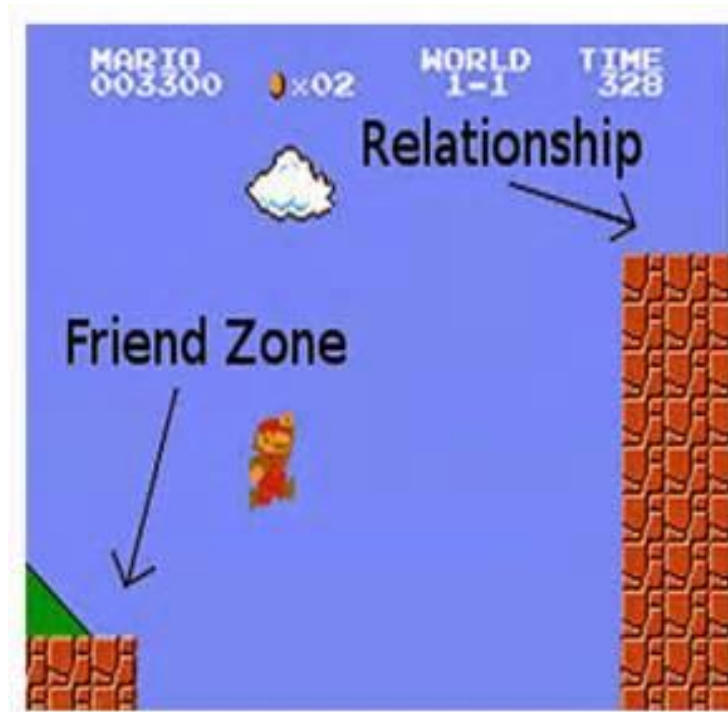


Figure 5



Figure 6 – representing missing “rape zone” meme

Unfortunately, many memes depicting the “rape zone” are still available on the internet and the number of similar memes continues to grow. One popular slogan states “she put you in the friend zone – put her in the rape zone” similar to the style of Figure 7.



Figure 7

Step 2: Description

Figure 4 shows that men enjoying platonic friendships with women are in denial—whether this denial is being happy with a platonic friendship or denial that there is no hope for the platonic friendship to manifest into a romantic relationship. Super Mario Brothers is a classic video game where Mario and Luigi complete levels and attempt to save Princess Peach Toadstool from Bowser’s castle. Super Mario Brothers’ video games have always depicted a possible romantic relationship between Mario and the Princess – sometimes Mario is rewarded with a kiss from Princess Toadstool for saving her. Using Super Mario Brothers to express these memes argues that men do a lot for women in order to obtain a sexual relationship and should be adequately compensated for being a humanitarian to their friend. Women are often expressed as fickle and mean when they do not give in to the romantic relationship or to the sex the man feels entitled to.

Step 3: Deconstruction

Figure 4 asserts that a man indulging in a platonic relationship with a woman is useless because only sexual relationships with females are valuable. This aligns with Myth #13 as “getting some” refers to sex – the only valuable asset that a woman can provide a man. Contrary to what Tomassi, TRP and forms of social media propagate; this sentiment is fallacious and has been demystified by many scholars. Sternberg’s (1998) work in *Cupid’s Arrow* describes a case study of Sam and Sara – a married couple that no longer engages in sex. This is described as Companionate Love or “intimacy plus commitment” (p. 20) – a description of close friendship. Although the couple no longer engages in passion (the component missing to complete Consummate Love), they have what is described as “a long-term committed friendship – the kind that frequently occurs in marriages” (Sternberg, 1998 p. 21). Sternberg (1998) describes intimacy as “desiring to promote the welfare of [the] loved one...experiencing happiness with the loved one...[and] holding the loved one in high regard” (p. 20-21). Commitment is defined as “the decision to love a certain other” in the short-term and “the commitment to maintain that love” in the long-term (Sternberg, 1998 p. 11). Companionate Love does not include intimacy, therefore, a strong friendship similar to the love Sara and Sam share is just as good as a sexual relationship.

Yager’s work includes a survey of 46 college students asking what factors are necessary for a close friendship; trust and honesty were affirmed by nearly all participants, faithfulness, loyalty and a good listener came next followed by having ideas in common and love (Yager, 1997 p. 5). These expectations are similar to the components favored in a romantic relationship or, as Sternberg asserts, a marriage.

Cross-sexual friendships are beneficial to both genders as they can give advice to each other, provide insight into the perceptions of living as the opposite gender and provide a strong bond defined by Scudder & Bishop (2001) as dialogical love – one that cannot simply be defined as a friendship or a romantic relationship. Issues men and women have encountered in past romantic relationships can also be discussed in these friendships and solutions may be offered. Women can become comfortable and learn to trust men after abusive relationships as men can practice becoming comfortable and confident in talking to women. Each can supply good advice to each other and introduce them to potential romantic partners.

Figure 5 and 6 imply that it is impossible to obtain a romantic relationship without manipulating the situation with alcohol or coercive sex– this type of arrangement is portrayed as an exchange of sex removed from a true romantic relationship that usually ends in regrets. The “rape zone” memes also portrays rape as a casual solution to an unsuccessful manifestation of one’s friendship to a romantic relationship. More, the statement that implied engaging in sexual intercourse with a woman who is incoherently drunk was acceptable if a condom was used gained the most endorsements in the study (Burgess, 2007 p. 984). Therefore, Miller and Cupchik’s perception that memes reinforce statements known to the observer as truth might be endorsed through Figure 6. The dangers of this are expressed by the large amount of rapes happening to victims and statements popularly shared by Red Pill’s philosophy that these rapes are not real. Bureau of Justice Statistics states that “among student victims, 20% of rape and sexual assault victimizations were reported to police, compared to 32% nonstudent victims” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014 p. 1). These statistics translate into 1 in every 5-college

student or 1 in every 3 nonstudent of the same age. Such a high amount of rape victims should not be taken lightly or considered false. Insisting that coercive sex obtained while the victim is impaired because of alcohol is a result of the victim's bad judgment is despicable. Creating memes like figures 6 and 7 for pleasure is horrendous – the savages behind these images are just as bad as the victims' predators. Too many rape victims are found in similar situations and feel eternally violated from the experience – to laugh at their trauma is inhumane.

Step 4: Diagnosis

Figure 5 expresses friendship as something less valuable than a romantic relationship and suggests that manifestation from one to the other is impossible. Figure 6 encourages the use of alcohol to obtain sex from a platonic friend. Replacing “relationship” with the word “sex” and including an “ocean of regrets” affirms that sex obtained through alcoholic influence always includes consent from both parties and adds to the stereotype that many rape cases that include alcohol are merely lies told to cover up one's regrets.

Step 5: Design

Rather than stating, “keep saying it's better than nothing and someday you may get some” with the image in figure 4, the caption could state “friendship, a fantastic relationship to always treasure” or “cross-sexual friendships, much more powerful than you think.” This would be a much more empowering message because it is important to emphasize the good qualities of a friendship – especially a cross-sexual friendship. It has become trendy to be different – this idea could be utilized to present a “new” way of looking at friendship. One example is saying “friendship – all the cool kids are into it

why not you?” with a picture of someone wearing sunglasses or showing a thumbs up while expressing a cross-sexual friendship. In order to decrease tension between the sexes, promote equality and encourage healthy relationships – it is important to express friendships between the two in a respectful manner. Although rejection is never fun to encounter when proposing a romantic relationship with a friend, maintaining a quality friendship should not be given a negative connotation. Part of maturity truthfully stems from accepting situations as they are and learning to adapt – this could also be expressed in a new version of Figure 4.

Figure 5 could approach the steps to communicating one’s feelings or advancing one’s friendship with their potential mate. The original picture can be modified showing levels to jump onto that gradually bring Mario to the relationship he desires. One level could be labeled “share common goals,” another could read “respectfully support one another,” the next “give each other space when necessary,” followed by “cultivate your own life and allow him/her to as well.” The last level could read “congrats, you have reached your full potential – whether you end up in a relationship with him/her or not, you have developed a strong character.” This character could be depicted as a version of Mario showing super strength like the picture of him in a cape where he can fly himself to any new heights life has to offer him. These new heights could also be depicted as “dreams you wish to pursue” and “fearlessly living your life healthfully.” This design is productive as it gives advice that could work to obtain a relationship – even if it is not with the friend they desired plus it also expresses main components to manifesting a fulfilling life.

Figure 6 tackles an extremely controversial topic – one that could still be healthfully discussed with a little tweaking. One could take the image and put a “No” sign through it accompanied by the caption “coercive tactics are not cool or romantic – they are criminal.” Sex without consent is rape and rape is a crime – this needs to be emphasized as images like Figure 6 are too dangerous to ignore or take lightly. Many campuses, including my own at ASU have held consent campaigns encouraging individuals to understand the importance of sexual consent and discussing the dangers of using alcohol and other mind-altering substance to coerce others into sexual activities. It should be clearly expressed that a coercive sexual relationship is a violent crime – rape is not a joke or even a casual mistake to take lightly. This dangerous violent crime is far from a healthy and respectful romantic relationship earned through trust, commitment and shared goals. It should not even be counted as a romantic or even a sexual relationship as it is a crime. A murder is not a hostile relationship – it is a crime; rape needs to be regarded in the same respect.

Step 6: Reflection

Part of my own experience with romantic relationships and friendships include a fear of becoming friends with potential romantic partners – in the past I have been told I was mean and did not deserve a good romantic relationship because I did not accept propositions from others. It was also assumed that I was after someone when I merely enjoyed their company and powerful conversations. It is assumed that men and women sharing insightful conversations automatically are interested in each other romantically.

It is also assumed that women are fickle, play with the hearts of men and many are called sluts for not following through with one’s request for a relationship or sex. I

currently only become close friends with males in committed relationships or those not expressing romantic interest in me because I feel safe and do not need to explain my intentions. I know there are men who refuse to become my friend because they know that I am not looking for a relationship – some have called me a whore for not accepting advances because I still wished to remain close friends. I wish to see more positive expressions of cross-sexual friendships that do not heavily revolve around sexual tension or “failed relationships.”

Within myself, I wish to become a lot more confident that I do not owe explanations to others, should never be apologetic for not pursuing a relationship I do not feel is right for me and hope to see myself become less apprehensive about being alone with single men. Due to my culture’s constant emphasis on obtaining a romantic relationship combined with the many facets of shaming that surround a woman’s choice not to engage in a romantic relationship – I still feel conflicted. I see plenty of potential in cross-sexual friendships and wish to pursue more of these – my next step is practicing Rx 13 by accepting that my own conviction should be good enough for anyone I consider a friend. I do not like others feeling bad or believing that I caused the self-loathing of one feeling rejected – I must distance myself from their feelings and continue to understand that I cannot fulfill one’s happiness, only my own.

Myth #14 – All men are after in a romantic relationship is sex and power/All women are after in a romantic relationship is financial stability or to be spoiled.



Figure 8



Figure 9

Step 1: Detection

Figure 8 depicts the *All women are after in a romantic relationship is financial stability or to be spoiled* aspect of Myth #14. Apparently the only way to obtain a romantic relationship with a woman is to be wealthy and drive a new car since all women hold materialistic goods as the main priority. Figure 9 depicts the *All men are after in a romantic relationship is sex and power* aspect of Myth #14. Apparently the man was only being nice to the woman in order to get sex off of her.

Step 2: Description

Figure 8 shows Mario driving out of the friend zone in a stylish car as that is the only way he can obtain a romantic relationship. I have experienced many men claiming that all women want is their money. The car symbolized status and power as well as money – this also references the Alpha/Beta mentality TRP and Tomassi consistently endorse. Figure 9 reminded me of the post I saw on the social media website years ago. I remember feeling disgusted that anybody would feel that they are owed sexual favors for treating someone as a human. Figure 9 also depicts the man performing gender as he responds “Hot Diggity” to the woman’s accusation that he was only treating her nice for sex. This is not the kind of equality I bargained for – it is not right to portray men as sex crazed maniacs with no compassion for their lovers.

Step 3: Deconstruction

Figure 8 also reads Myth # 6 as the preferred reading by equating Mario’s car and cash to status – Mario must buy the princess to get his affection reciprocated because she does not have any money. Figure 9 slightly reads Myth #4 as the preferred reading as sex came easily and wonderfully for the man after his eighth act of benevolence.

Step 4: Diagnosis

Indulging in the preferred readings creates negative connotations of men and women. Figure 8 describes greed and superficiality on the woman's part. Figure 9 assumes the man is not interested in the woman; he just wants her for sex. Believing in the Myth's preferred reading places the woman up as a commodity in both Figures – Princess Toadstool can be bought as the woman in Figure 9 is worth a total of eight good deeds. This can also depict SMV as there might be different amounts of good deeds the men must perform based on the girl's looks, youth and availability.

Step 5: Design

Rather than Mario easily driving up a dollar bill in order to get to the princess, it would be great if she is waiting on the other side with ladders set up like steps. Each ladder represents the different things she desires in a relationship – Mario could obtain them along the way metaphorically. Even better, the meme could invite the observer to fill in their own desires in a relationship – this helps establish goals and core values to share with a romantic partner. This could also be applied to Figure 9, rather than punching off good deeds on a “nice guy card” – each box could represent shared goals or common values.

Step 6: Debriefing

I constantly get into arguments with people about men only wanting sex off of women – I do not believe that every single man is after sex more than the woman is and I especially do not believe that is all they are after. I have been told that it is impossible to have a productive relationship without sex, especially if my partner wants it. I am not obligated to give anybody my body and the audacity some have to insist that I would not

maintain a partner otherwise is sick. Galician even affirms “successful coupleships require genuine intimacy which goes beyond the purely physical” (Galician, 2004 p. 9). I truly do believe in the indescribable bond between romantic partners where each can be comfortable and maintain their completeness with each other.

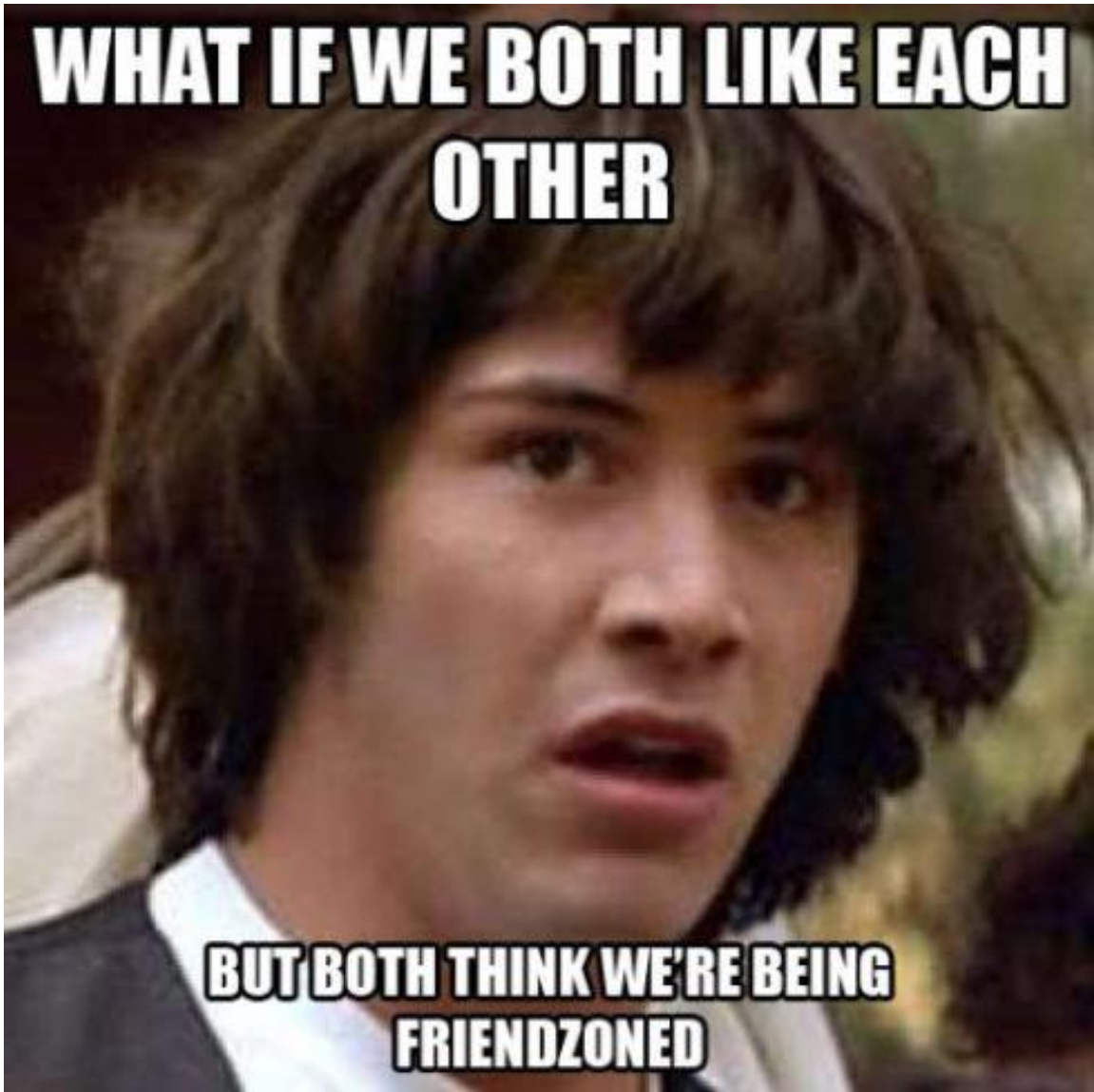


Figure 10

***Rx #3* – COMMUNICATE COURAGEOUSLY**

Although figure 10 does not directly promote Rx #3, acknowledgement of mutual liking that could be solved through enforcement of Rx #3 is demonstrated. This is an improvement on the other memes that encourage Myths as the preferred reading. It also encourages friendships between potential romantic/sexual partners. I hope to see a lot more memes that encourage antithesis statements to the Myths presented in my thesis.

Wing Girls – *How to Get Out of the Friend Zone*

The United States and other parts of the Western world are cultures of sex rather than cultures of friendship – therefore a large emphasis is placed on obtaining a romantic relationship, preparing for ultimate commitments to these romantic relationships and sexualization starts early (Rothblum, 2000). Ironically, there is a scarcity of resources available to discuss sexuality in a healthful manner. Sex education is under constant scrutiny – despite popular support “more than 700 communities had experienced intense controversies over sex education in local schools” (Irvine, 2011 p. 489). In response to Western culture’s fixation of romantic relationships as opposed to platonic friendships, many have published books claiming to solve the mystery of obtaining a heteronormative sexual relationship. One searching for a reliable resource on sex and romance may indulge in these books and take the advice offered seriously, especially if he or she lives in a culture that lacks alternative quality resources. Along with the older dating advice books like *Men are from Mars Women are from Venus* and *The Rules*, others have picked up on the friend zone phenomena and responded with their own advice books.

The Wing Girls, YouTube personalities that upload videos with dating advice recently published *How to Get out of the Friend Zone* – a text version of their YouTube videos. This book has specific guidelines to follow guaranteeing a greater chance of gaining a relationship from an unsatisfying friendship. Their tactics include emphasis on physical attraction, aligning with gender norms, a brief separation, trying new things and considering other possible candidates. Although some of their advice is commendable, most of their work contributes to the denigration of platonic friendships and highly emphasizes a need to participate in prescribed gender roles.

After analyzing the entire text utilizing Galician's 7-Step-Reality-Check-Up along with my two additional Myths/stereotypes, I found that Myths #5, #6, and #13 were used as the preferred reading. Rxs #1 and #10 were utilized as well. Their advice is heavy on gender performativity; although some of their advice is sound, they insist that it is necessary to make your friend jealous, avoid friendships with the opposite sex, change your appearance and avoid discussing important values if they are not considered good conversation topics. They also insist that you must be comfortable acting "sexy," however, avoiding sounding slutty or sex crazed. They also use made up terms "nitch" and "nasshole" to describe women who are the perfect cross between "bitch" and "nice" and men that are the perfect cross between "asshole" and "nice." This concept exemplifies the common stereotype in friend zone phenomena that being a nice individual (particularly a "nice guy") reduces one's value as a proper romantic partner.

Myth #5 –To attract and keep a man, a woman should look like a model or a centerfold

Step 1: Detection

One of the steps for getting out of the friend zone according to Jet and Star include getting a makeover and changing your look so that your friend can see you in a new light – they also imply that sometimes the reason others are in the friend zone is because they do not "work the sexy" (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 226). Their defense to anyone wishing to retaliate changing their style or focusing on their physical attractiveness to gain a romantic relationship is "It may sound shallow and superficial, but a lot of times, your style – or lack thereof – is one of the biggest things holding you back from getting what you want" (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 110). They also imply that improving your look boosts your confidence; in fact, they actually state "you may not even realize the effect

that feeling bad about your looks has on every aspect of your life” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 107). Although there is truth that feeling bad about one’s looks can truthfully harm an individual’s perception of self-worth, however, simply getting a makeover or changing one’s look is not always the solution. Acceptance of one’s looks and truly valuing one’s character and other traits that are much more beneficial are more likely the key to becoming confident, not a makeover that is liable to become a temporary fix to a permanent issue.

Step 2: Description

One of the quizzes for women separates one’s personalities based on eight questions with four available answers each; this quiz is meant to tell the reader what their “image” is. If the results are “sporty girl” or “worldly girl,” advice is given to dress more feminine to “soften” her image and appear more approachable; “sweetheart girl” is encouraged to dress with an “edge” and try a new daring look. Although it is commendable to encourage someone to step out of their comfort zone, giving an ultimatum that the sporty girl *must* wear dresses and implying that politically active women must soften their look encourages gendered stereotypes that are already overly reinforced. This is why such advice from the Wing Girls might only work as a temporary fix rather than a long-lasting solution. If a tomboy who hates wearing dresses and acting girly finally gets into a relationship with her friend – she may be stuck performing this identity if her friend does not like dating sporty girls. If her friend only dates women that dress girly and projects softer images than her true personality, her friend is not meant to be her romantic partner.

The quiz for men, on the other hand includes two results that give the reader more leniency for changing their look. The Artsy guy (as opposed to the Artsy girl) is told “anything goes” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 114) and encouraged to try many different looks with exception of approaching Halloween scary. The Funny guy (as opposed to the Worldly girl) is told that he does not have to “look hunky” because they are known for their personality (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 115). Everything from funny sayings on T-shirts, to ripped jeans, or “casual weekend wear” is considered appropriate because personality is present.

Step 3: Deconstruction

Not one single result for the women’s image quiz insisted that great personality could make up for any style chosen and two of them insisted on appearing softer and more feminine. Myth #5 is absolutely gendered in the Wing Girls’ book and encourages buying into gendered stereotypes when discussing who should take the lead, pay for everything or initiate passionate affection. Giving the men extra leniency with changing their look insinuates that men are innately more perfect through their personalities than women are – this creates a double standard and heightens the inequality in the relationship. Although the Wing Girls assert that the power in a relationship should be mutual and shared, buying into a skewed standard that women must spend an exponential amount more time and, energy, and change who they are to become a romantic partner increases the inequality of power.

Step 4: Diagnosis

Implying that women *must* come across sexy, yet not too slutty, feminine, yet edgy and given a greater amount of standards to hold up to when changing their look for

a romantic partner aligns with Western culture's constant influence that expects women to always spend a lot of time, effort and money to obtain perfection (Media Education Foundation & Jhally, 2010). It also indulges in the "virgin-whore" concept that is counterproductive to empowering women to explore their sexuality in a healthy manner (Fahs, 2011); it is impossible to keep the virgin-whore dichotomy as women are either told they are too prudish – expressed as "Mrs. Magoo" by the Wing Girls or too slutty. There is a quite a bit of slut shaming in Western culture that adds to the inference that women ask to be treated disrespectfully, however, do not benefit from being too virginal. Women reading the Wing Girls' advice might find themselves feeling even worse about their appearance and attempt to follow their advice step by step believing that it is the key to obtaining a romantic relationship. If the woman fails, she might consider herself unlovable and start to believe that she is never good looking enough to obtain a romantic relationship. The Wing Girls' assertions throughout the book that sexiness and physical attraction is necessary compromises the other good aspects of their book that encourage becoming a whole person and considering other romantic partners. Personality and completeness are not emphasized as strongly for women as they are for men in the book, thus women are expected to look like centerfolds or models in order to obtain and keep a man.

Step 5: Design

Rather than creating an ultimatum that a woman must become more feminine, more edgy, sexier, or less slutty, it should be encouraged that women try different looks for fun and always understand that their physical attractiveness is not the most important aspect of their lives. It is more encouraging to focus on a woman developing her

personality and becoming a whole individual. Instead of giving quizzes that insist women must change their looks, they could give helpful tips to truly boosting their confidence without focusing on physical attractiveness. They could encourage women to feel confident speaking their mind because the right romantic partner will value independence and freethinking individuals.

Instead of telling sporty girls to dress feminine, they could encourage them to take the skills they learned from playing sports and direct them into new hobbies and projects – perhaps to show their desire to help others through community service. Ruth Hall asserts that women’s participation in sports is beneficial as it “reinforces our sense of sisterhood, interdependence and cooperativeness” (Hall R., 2008 p. 110). I was disappointed to see the Wing Girls miss confidence-boosting aspects that can encourage sporty girls. There are so many confidence boosting aspects to encourage within sporty girls to use for themselves or to inspire other women.

They could apply their skills to a new aspect of their lives like taking on a leadership position at a community event, volunteering their time to teaching others how to be a team player, participating in a community service event that does not directly include sports, yet uses the skills they have obtained through such experiences. It would also be beneficial to encourage other women to get in touch with these because there is so much need for women empowerment. Rather than using the term “Mrs. Magoo” to refer to a shy girl showing no desire to engage in sexual conversations, they can encourage these young women to try a sport or a similar activity that involves teamwork like dance. Becoming much more confident socializing with others, nurturing their skills and finding

support in a new group of friends is much more helpful to these women than referring to them as “Mrs. Magoo” or insisting that they must dress sexy.

Step 6: Debriefing

As noted above, I struggled with confidence in my appearance as a full-figured woman and even dropped out of my physical activities due to these issues. I heard many horror stories of other dance groups putting weight limits on their participants and did not see much encouragement for those with my body type. I would feel out of my element because I could not relate to activities that promoted self-shaming my body that many of the girls in these activities engaged. They also made snide remarks about my body and given the environment of these activities, I did not feel complaints about these scenarios would be considered. Although quitting dance, karate and getting in my own way to try out for softball in high school was my own fault, I do feel that I could have felt more confident and inspired to participate in these activities if I saw a positive image of all body types participating. The stereotype that only certain body types should participate in sports, dance and other physical activities were represented consistently in the media with no examples of Myth #5’s antithesis expressed.

Growing up, I also felt controlled and broken when loved ones insisted that I had to wear makeup, obsess about my looks or cooperate with gendered norms in order to be considered “normal” or “right.” These statements were justified by the mere fact that I am “a girl” – arguments would ensue when my parents backed up my decision to be my own person and disregard shallow remarks. These scenarios were far beyond mockery and scrutiny – my parents were actually told I was a disgrace and that they were raising me incorrectly and produced wild prejudices against our family. Apparently refusing to

suffocate my face with toxic chemicals, believing in inner beauty and refraining from hating my body meant I had low self-esteem and would never succeed in life. I would not have felt such a need to revolt from these concepts if I was given the freedom to explore them freely without obligation. I found myself always feeling unworthy of obtaining a quality romantic partner due to my refusal to participate in gendered norms because I knew that being like everybody else would only ruin my own perception of myself.

I always prided myself in being different from others; however, I was guilty of considering sports and other physical activities ones that were not for me because I was not a stereotypical tomboy or even good at sports. I imagine that if I had seen an advice book like the Wing Girls' growing up with a constant emphasis on being feminine and constant discouragement on acting sporty, I would have avoided anything unfeminine and probably dropped my physical activities even sooner. I wish that perspectives like Hall's in regard to women in sports were more popular; if this were the case, I would have probably felt more confident in engaging in sports and might have realized that sports are not only for certain women.

Myth #6 – *The man should NOT be shorter, weaker, younger, poorer, or less successful than the woman*

Step 1: Detection

Part of the Wing Girls' advice includes aligning with prescribed gender roles – they specifically state “let him take the driver's seat, let him open doors for you, let him pick you up and pick out the movie” and even admit that this is part of the “courtship process” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 183). They also insist to men that they are to initiate physical contact without worrying about consent.

Step 2: Description

Although the Wing Girls insist that power in the relationship should be equal and claim that this set up ensures that men work for this relationship as much as women, supporting main components of Myth #6 produces inequality. It is especially harmful that they discourage men from worrying about consent when the physical contact progresses to kissing merely because they have already “read” the correct signals from less intimate physical contact earlier.

Step 3: Deconstruction

Chapter nine and ten of *How to Get Out of the Friend Zone* discusses fine details about how the man should be “in the driver’s seat,” how to read body language to understand the “signals” women are giving them for physical contact and how “lame” it is to ask for consent before kissing. They insist that men should always initiate the physical contact, even if it means the woman gives subtle hints to help the process along. They start off with harmless suggestions like slightly brushing up on one’s arm or hand and watching the reaction of the woman, the woman challenging a guy to a thumb war to signal that physical contact is acceptable and keeping the contact to a minimum at first. However, when they imply that men have blown their chance for a romantic relationship by not wanting to kiss the woman without her consent or produce such an idea as “lame,” they are feeding into a culture that insinuates that a man should force physical contact onto a woman. Even worse they clearly state, “you do not want your friend to think twice about it; you want it to just happen and asking permission ruins all the fun” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 203). Although there is no implication that these rules should continue into forced intercourse or unwarranted physical contact, it is easy for a reader to draw this

next conclusion if consent is given a negative connotation. Even though the book insists that kissing should be the last stage to enter on the first date with a friend, carrying a negative mentality on consent to an advanced sexual relationship can be harmful.

Step 4: Diagnosis

When the Wing Girls insist that men and women perform gendered cultural norms, they are elucidating that women should let the man “take the lead” in the dates including making the decisions, paying for everything, providing the transportation and initiating physical contact. Although their advice does not include hostile dominance or violence, this concept of masculinity is abundant in advertising and media – including “violence as genetically programmed male behavior” that relates dominance and control to masculine power (Katz, 2011 p. 263). Due to an abundance of highly influential advertisements in Western culture, a simple implication that men should assert their power as women passively follow is risky. Their advice could unintentionally ignite these messages from years of exposure to these mediums adding to the dangerous culture of dominance. Breanne Fahs’ research on the culture of sexual dominance concludes, “women’s performance of providing men with sexual access to them... is one of the primary manifestations of culture of violence” (Fahs, 2011 p. 187). Therefore, encouraging women to participate in a system that allows the man to control the situation, including physical contact could lead to violent consequences and possibly discourage the woman to take control when the situation becomes uncomfortable to them.

The Wing Girls’ advice lacks a space where women are told to proactively let their friend know that the physical contact is uncomfortable or men are encouraged to consider the reasons women might be reluctant to engage in physical contact. There is a

need to truly communicate about physical contact in any relationship – reading body language and looking for signals cannot substitute this. Manipulation of any sort when engaging in physical contact should also be discouraged as Fahs has found that “women less often called their experience rape if they submitted to a whining or begging boyfriend” or “gave in to an emotionally needy man” (Fahs, 2011 p. 189). A woman being told to allow gendered norms to transpire combined with a desire to satisfy one considered a dear friend might also become part of this statistic. Asserting performance of traditional gender norms can have extreme consequences and need to be addressed in the advice book.

Step 5: Design

Consent should never be considered lame, boring or unimportant when physical contact is involved in the relationship – communication between the two parties should be encouraged as it opens up the floor to understanding the relationship and each other’s boundaries. Because the Wing Girls assert that friends need to see each other in a light different from platonic friendships in order to make a romantic relationship work, they should encourage this conversation. Consent does not need to be dull or full of constant inquisitions – it could provide a great exploration of what one desires in a love interest and how they feel about engaging in these activities with each other. There could be past traumas that need to be discussed to ensure that the romantic partners do not make the same mistakes, each person could have a personal set of boundaries pertaining to one’s comfort or desire and there could be exciting new inspirations each individual wishes to explore.

A healthy conversation about sex is an important and typically underestimated trait to a successful relationship. A friend should be especially interested in these discussions when proposing a romantic relationship. Because the Wing Girls use many charts and lists to give examples of good conversation topics, they can also introduce good ways to comfortably discuss sex with their friend without making jokes or using gendered assumptions. It could be as simple as “what are your favorite places to cuddle or kiss” or as deep as “what makes you feel the most comfortable.” Anyone with basic communication skills can judge whether they are asking a question with the appropriate intimacy, in fact, The Wing Girls could also explore the levels of discussing sex with their friends as they are progressing into a relationship.

Step 6: Debriefing

My own experiences with gendered norms, especially in regard to Myth #6 consist mostly of family members, friends and other well-meaning older individuals. I have been told that I should *never* pay for my own part of the date, they should *never* be younger and they belong protecting me rather than the other way around. My ex was younger than me; I was comfortable with allowing him to contribute to paying for a date and enjoyed having doors opened for me. It did not work out because he was not on my maturity level, I was much more of a go-getter as he rarely applied himself and certain behaviors were unforgivable.

Several others told me that my relationship’s failure was due to his lack of abundant finances, his age and “non-manly” characteristics. At first I considered these concepts as truths because they all presented strong arguments beyond stereotypes – I do not want an unmotivated partner who is not on my level of maturity or intelligence.

However, I do not feel these standards should be couched through gendered norms. My own mother, as independent as she is told me she was upfront with my father telling him she did not want anybody who could not give her more than what she already had and desired wholeness in a partner. She thought she was pushing him away, when he was actually delighted that she was a complete person who was not needy or insecure.

Although she still asserts that the man should be older due to maturity, she has also agreed with me that maturity is not always equal to one's age. As Galician advises, I desire equal unity and respect rather than status, height, money, strength or power.

Myth #13 – Friendship between a man and a woman (or potential romantic partners) is a consolation prize that should be avoided at all costs

Step 1: Diagnosis

Remaining a good, loyal friend to a potential love interest is discouraged throughout the book – because the Wing Girls' advice is heteronormative, cross-sexual friendships are specifically discouraged.

Step 2: Description

The end of the book promises that following the “Friend Zone-Free Ten Commandments” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 225) will ensure that the reader will avoid the friend zone forever. The first one states “Thou shalt not be friends with the opposite sex” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 225). The defense presented asserts that the reader has a Friend Zone brain that is always tricks him/her by believing “being someone's friend is the way to their heart” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 225). Apparently potential love interests (particularly heteronormative ones) “are for dating, not for hanging out with and talking about your life's hopes and dreams” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 227).

Step 3: Deconstruction

Deliberately telling the reader that the opposite sex is only for dating heightens the encouragement of gender performativity expressed throughout the book. Saying that the opposite sex is not for sharing one's hopes and dreams also promotes Myth #9 as the preferred reading – that all you need is love and it does not matter if you have separate values. I find the later concept damaging as I still need to embrace Rx # 9 “crave common core values” – too much media beyond television and movies promotes that opposites attract. The mentality TRP consistently promotes is not helpful either as Game is used to lie, cheat, manipulate and use people in order to get sex. Another issue in accepting their statements is the heteronormativity – not all potential romantic/sexual relationships are between a man and a woman.

Step 4: Diagnosis

Giving the advice to never become friends with the opposite sex again adds to the tension between men and women, breeds inequality and discourages the development of strong friendships. As I stated previously, I currently do not become friends with single men because I do not want to be accused of putting them in the friend zone and experiencing the same issues I had in the past. I do not always do this, however, I notice a pattern in my communication with men – I am always afraid I will be accused of leading someone on and the potential consequences of this situation. This hinders my ability to make good connections and develop strong, trusting friendships that will help me with my trust issues I currently harbor. If I were to take the Wing Girls' advice to heart, I would never improve my circle of friends, I would have never had any romantic relationships and I would only seek out people who do not share my goals.

Step 5: Design

I would love to see an improvement to these statements as the Wing Girls miss the point of embracing strong cross-sexual friendships and place too much emphasis on sex and cliché romance. Instead of saying “no more becoming friends with the opposite sex” they should say “never let a few failed attempts get you down – friends are forever” or they can say “never underestimate the power of a strong friendship.” Another improvement they should make is emphasizing the need to develop core values and expectations in healthy relationships – talking about superficial topics like butterflies is not the key to a successful relationship.

Step 6: Debriefing

I always enjoyed the idea of men and women feeling comfortable as friends – friendship is a great thing often taken for granted. My friends saw me through my hardest issues, celebrated my greatest achievements with me and offered a quiet understanding that does not need to be met with physical attraction or sex. One criticism I have of Western media is the high emphasis placed on romantic relationships – especially sexual relationships and the little emphasis placed on friendship. This extends to friendships between the same sex as well as cross-sexual – too many teenage movies show girls fighting with each other and catty women. Although I would not compare this to the misogyny expressed on TRP or other related material, it is a highly destructive form of misogyny. The only movie I know that does not express this concept is *Now and Then* – a film about four girls during a summer break and the adventures they went on. The only fighting that occurs in the film is when Samantha fights for her friend rather than with her

friend. What brought me to feminism in the first place was the sisterhood and connection I felt with the stories other women shared.

Rx #1 CONSIDER COUNTLESS CANDIDATES

Although the Wing Girls insist on dating other people to make their friends jealous, there is a positive aspect to them encouraging dates with others. It aligns with Rx#1 - they even state “be honest with them – tell them you’re not looking for anything serious” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 142) – this encourages Rx# 3as well since open communication is encouraged. Even I could use this tip since too much media and cultural perceptions of fickle women have made me feel weird about casual dating. I understand that the Rx does not necessarily mean dating several people at once – however, such a concept is not bad. Positive encouragement of this would do a lot of good to deflate the virgin-whore dichotomy women are constantly held to. The media, TRP and American society in general needs to get more creative with how to discuss love and sex in a positive format without insisting that men should date more women to raise their status and women need to remain pure.

Rx #10 – CULTIVATE YOUR OWN COMPLETENESS

Although I may not agree with all of their commandments, The Wing Girls’ fourth one titled “thou shalt do thy thang” (Wing Girls, 2013 p. 230) promotes Rx#10. The best advice I was ever given for a relationship is that it takes two whole people. Many misunderstand what it means to become a whole person – the basic core is developing your skills, achieving goals, and maintaining healthy self-esteem. The metaphor I was given is that I cannot walk into a relationship 50% while the other has the additional 50% - that causes one to depend on another for constant validation or

reassurance. 100% from one and another 100% from another, on the other hand allows me to remain independent and grow.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Throughout all the texts Myths 5 (Physical Attraction), 6 (Man = Stronger), and 13 (No Cross-Sexual Friends) were all proposed as the preferred reading. Myth 14 (Men Want Sex/Women Want Money) was prevalent across the memes and TRP/Rational Male. All four of these myths are highly laden with gender performativity and are damaging to one's perceptions of healthy and respectful relationships. As the Elliot Rodger case has shown, indulging in friend zone phenomena as the preferred reading of cross-sexual friendships can lead to violence. Although Rodger's case is extreme, there are plenty of concerns with endorsing rape culture and violence against women in the Manosphere, a culture Rodger indulged in prior to his violent behavior. TRP, Tomassi, the Manosphere and those indulging in misogynistic retrograde desperately need to consider Galician's 12 Myths/Rxs and stop propagating feminism as the fall of society. I am afraid of these concepts destroying decades of progress. My fear is not because I am a bigot "afraid of having the truth expressed" to me (Feminism is man hate, expose it) like TRP insists, it is the opposite. Hannah Arendt warns about totalitarianism manifesting through ideologies. The Manosphere fits the descriptions as it

becomes emancipated from the reality that we perceive with our five senses, and insists on a "truer" reality concealed behind all perceptible things, dominating them from this place of concealment and requiring a sixth sense that enables us to become aware of it. The sixth sense is provided by precisely the ideology (Arendt, 1976, pp. 470-471).

TRP is a prime example of providing this sixth sense as they insist that equal rights are wrong and claim to hold the authority of what real science is. Tomassi's book and website even use the slogan "why do my eyes hurt? You've never used them before" (Tomassi, 2013 p. intro). TRP is especially guilty of developing this fake sixth sense by comparing their cult like atmosphere to the matrix – a movie based on learning the truth.

I know that RPer's and others of the Manosphere will disagree with my work and call me a "Social Justice Warrior" (SJW) (Acronym and Glossary Thread, 2013) as an insult. It is a good thing that I stand by that title and wear it with pride. The progress made through the decades that give me the opportunities I have today could all cease to exist if the Manosphere gains control.

My loved ones have told me horror stories of coat hanger abortions, living with abusive spouses, and not having the opportunity to get a credit card or take an elective different from home economics in school. One specific story I hold close to my heart is the bravery of a woman I know who escaped from her ex-husband after being held up by a gun – she waited until he passed out from abusing substances. Once he passed out, she crawled out of their home and ran for help. This was in the early 1970s, when no-fault divorces did not exist. Some of the conversations of TRP guffaw over rape and claim no-fault divorces are ways to exploit money from men. What is most concerning is this nostalgic look to the past and a desire to regress. When one is nostalgic, he or she may remember only the positives while forgetting all the issues that occurred during these times.

The only hope I have for the members of TRP is that they truly consider the damages their ideologies have on real victims and utilize Galician's resources to manifest

a healthier perception of love, romance and sex. My own challenge to TRP and other related Manosphere members is to develop their own perception of positive masculinity that does not indulge the hegemonic forces deep in the media and Western culture. As I evaluated, some of their self-improvement tactics are not bad – everybody should look out for their health, develop a complete identity and manifest abundance. The most important policy I can offer them is to be respectful and not compromise or exploit someone else's rights and humanity to obtain their own.

Recommendations for Future Research

For future scholars, I recommend interviews, surveys and other studies on friend zone phenomena. My thesis provides a backbone for researching friend zone phenomena beyond textual analysis. Although additional analysis is recommended and would act as an exceptional follow up to my work, collecting data from participants would significantly help in understanding how friend zone phenomena affects others. My research also omitted non-heteronormative relationships and scenarios where the woman is friend zoned due to time constraints. Not all healthy and respectful romantic relationships are cross-sexual and scenarios where the woman feels friend zoned also exist. Both of these facets need to be adequately addressed by future scholars to present a clearer image of friend zone phenomena. Additional research on the Manosphere is also recommended as research on the topic is still sparse. If areas on the internet and in Western society are pushing for an agenda that looks to dismantle decades of progress, it is necessary to look into these forums.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Damaging Messages in Data

Retrograde misogyny is prevalent across all Myths referenced in my analysis and are laden with gender performativity that include harmful consequences. TRP and Tomassi endorse Myth #6 as the preferred reading through constant emphasis on biological differences between men and women and a push to revert back to a culture that kept women out of the public sphere. Progression from this culture was made long ago to promote equality, prevent domestic violence and provide resources for any citizen to pursue their independence. To ignore all the positives that were achieved through this progress and remain determined to restore traditional gender roles without considering the harmful consequences is the opposite of “balanced” or “scientific.” Seeing that TRP now has over 100,000 subscribers, this mentality is not secluded to a select few individuals on the internet. The memes and the Wing Girls also assert these concepts and promote inequality with a romanticized vision of retrograde misogyny.

All texts promoted Myth #5 as the preferred reading – this emphasis on physical-attractiveness is limited to a narrow group of individuals. Not only are women expected to be thin, aesthetically pleasing and flawless – they are also expected to stay young. A woman’s peak SMV as depicted by Tomassi and TRP has a short lifespan and declines after the age of 23 – therefore, only young, attractive women are considered valuable and worthy of a quality romantic (or sexual) relationship. The memes also reiterate this mentality as whether one is “hot” is considered the only way to escape the friend zone in Figure 2 as Figure 1 promotes a large amount of physical-attractiveness as a requirement

for dating or marrying. The Wing Girls also assert that “working the sexy” is a prime component to obtaining a romantic relationship. The most damaging messages these texts promote through Myth #5 are their contributions to the hegemonic forces within the media that provide unobtainable standards as the ideal. As a result, many are unable to visualize a standard of love, compassion and companionship different from the impossible standards presented through the media. I even have a hard time imagining what the alternative looks like. I am given minimal examples to choose from, many of which I do not relate to. There is nothing “new” or “real” about these images.

Promoting Myths #13 and #14 as the preferred readings also contribute to damaging perceptions guided through retrograde misogyny. Both promote heavily misogynistic perception of women, couching them as fickle, mean and exploitive – therefore pushing the agenda participants of the Manosphere promote. Propagating women as greedy, immature and shallow conveniently provides a scapegoat for the Manosphere to peddle their retrograde agenda to prospective members. This unfavorable tactic has shown much success as depicted by the large amount of RP subscribers, policies that push to reform laws that promote equality and responses like Rose’s NPR interview that deny rape culture and denounce feminism. There remains a need to address these issues, continue the discussion of consent and promote alternative media to these damaging messages.

What to Do About These Damaging Messages

Along with the suggestions in the discussion, I also encourage analyses on media that depict consent positively. As Galician encourages celebration of positive models that demonstrate Rxs, I encourage celebration of positive models that promote consent and

healthy conversations about sexuality. A few examples include the kissing scenes in *Honey We Shurnk Ourselves* and *Now and Then*. In *Honey We Shrunk Ourselves*, Jenny Szalinski pushes Ricky King's forceful kiss away and tells him she is not comfortable with his actions. Jenny states that she would have felt differently if he asked her or if they had a conversation prior to the action when Ricky states that "most girls" like it (Bernardi & Cundey, 1997). *Now and Then* provides a kissing scene where Christina Ricci portrays Roberta Martin, a tomboy who falls for Scott Wormer, the oldest brother in a group of boys that rival her friends. As they sit on a bench, Scott asks "can I kiss you?" and waits for Roberta's consent before they briefly make out and then discuss it afterward (Todd, King & Glatter, 1995). Both of these scenes show that consent is not drawn out, boring or lame – both are artistically executed. Discussions on consent in the media and communities are a must to address rape culture and provide examples of healthfully discussing sexuality.

References

- Acronym and Glossary Thread. /r/TheRedPill. (2013, February 5). Retrieved October 11, 2014, from http://www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/comments/17xmry/acronym_and_glossary_thread/
- American Psychological Association (Producer), (1989). *Sex and gender: Maturing and aging* [Motion Picture]. United States: WGBH, Boston.
- Andersen, M., & Witham, D. (2009). *Thinking about women: Sociological perspectives on sex and gender* (8th ed.). Boston, M.A.: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.
- Arendt, H. (1976). *The origins of totalitarianism*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Inc.
- Baumeister, R. (2001). *Social psychology and human sexuality*. Philadelphia, PA.: Psychology Press.
- Bernardi, B. (Producer), & Cundey, D. (Director). (1997). *Honey, we shrunk ourselves* [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney Home Video.
- Blake, M. (2015). Mad men: How a feminist once hailed by Gloria Steinem launched the men's rights movement--and inspired an army of haters and trolls. *Mother Jones*, 40(1), 16-16. Retrieved March 22, 2015, from EBSCOhost.
- Branstetter, B. (2014, May 29). *It's time for reddit to flush the red pill*. Retrieved from www.dailydot.com/opinion/time-reddit-dump-red-pill
- Bright, K. & Crane, D. (Producer). (1994). *The one with the blackout* [Friends]. Burbank: Warner Brothers Burbank Studios.
- Buss, D. (2003). *The evolution of desire: Strategies of human mating* (Rev. ed.). New York: Basic Books.
- Buss, D. (2005). *The handbook of evolutionary psychology*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.
- Burgess, G. (2007). Assessment of rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs in college men: development, reliability and validity of the rape attitudes and beliefs scale. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22(8), 973-993. Retrieved October 28, 2014, from ASU Libraries.
- Chrisler, J., Golden, C., & Rozee, P. (2008). Women's fear of rape: Cause, consequences, and coping. In *Lectures on the psychology of women* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

- Clarke, D. (2014, March 31). Mass shooting sends messages on gun control, misogyny and pick-up culture. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R.L., & Shaw, L. L., (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Epstein, D. (1999). *A dangerous knowing: Sexuality, pedagogy and popular culture*. New York, NY: Cassell.
- Fahs, B. (2011). *Performing sex the making and unmaking of women's erotic lives*. Albany: State University of New York, Albany.
- Feminism is man hate expose it. Retrieved January 25, 2014, from <https://exposingfeminism.wordpress.com/shaming-tactics/>
- Galician, M. (2004). *Sex, love & romance in the mass media: Analysis & criticism of unrealistic portrayals & their influence*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Galician, M. (2007). *Critical thinking about Sex, love, and romance in the mass media: Media literacy applications*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Goldberg, M. (2015, February 22). An unbearable burden. *The Washington Post*, p. B01.
- Hall, D. M. (2008). Feminist perspectives on the personal and political aspects of mothering. In *Lectures on the psychology of women* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hall, R.L. (2008). Sweating it out: the good news and the bad news about women and sport. In *Lectures on the psychology of women* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hewitt, J., & Shulman, D. (2011). *Self and society: A symbolic interactionist social psychology* (11th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Hockenbury, D., & Hockenbury, S. (2007). *Discovering psychology* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Worth.
- Holthouse, D. (2006). A few bad men. *Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report (Summer)*.
- Irvine, J.M. (2011). Politics of sex education. In Seidman, S., Fischer, N., & Meeks, C. (Eds.), *Introducing the new sexuality studies* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Karneadou. (1 year ago). Sunday red pill humor courtesy of chris rock from bring the pain [Msg 1]. Message posted to http://www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/comments/22x31v/sunday_red_pill_humor_courtesy_of_chris_rock
- Katz, J. (2011). Advertising and the construction of violent white masculinity. In G. Dines & J. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, race, and class in media: A critical reader* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Kumble, R. (Director), & Davis A. (Writer). (2005). *Just friends* [Motion Picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.
- Marwick, A. (2013). Memes. *Contexts*, 12, 12-13. Retrieved September, 24, 2014, from ASU Libraries.
- Media Education Foundation (Producer) & Jhally, S. (Director). (2010). *Killing Us Softly 4* [Motion Picture]. United States: Media Education Foundation, Northampton, MA.
- Miller, I. & Cupchik, G. (2006). *Meme creation and sharing processes: Individuals shaping the masses*.
- Myers, D. (2009). *Exploring social psychology* (5th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Poole, E. K. (2014). Hey girls did you know? Slut-shaming on the internet needs to stop. *University of San Francisco Law Review*, 48(221, 2013), 221-260.
- Pk_atheist. (2 years ago⁹). Almost a hundred subscribers! Welcome newcomers [Msg 1]. Message posted to http://www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/comments/12v1hf/almost_a_hundred_subscribers_welcome_newcomers/
- Retrograde 3. (2012). In *Merriam-Webster's collegiate(R) dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster. Retrieved from https://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://literati.credoreference.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/content/entry/mwcollegiate/retrograde_3/0
- Rock, C. (Performer) (2011, January 31). Chris rock – women’s platonic friendships. *Youtube*. [Video podcast]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zywIR_ZFLts

⁹ On Reddit, only a username and password are required to participate in the sub forums. Specific dates are not given as they are only expressed with approximate time frames (e.g. “2 years ago, 1 day ago) – this adds to TRP’s anonymity.

- Rodger, E. (2014, May). My twisted world. Retrieved January 26, 2015 from <http://abclocal.go.com/three/kabc/kabc/My-Twisted-World.pdf>
- Rose, J. (2014, September 2). For men's rights groups, feminism has come at the expense of men. Retrieved October 17, 2014, from <http://www.npr.org/2014/09/02/343970601/men-s-rights-movement>
- Rothblum, E.P. (2000). *Poly-Friendships*. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 3(1-2), 68-83. Retrieved April 16, 2015, from EBSCO.
- Rubenstein, A., Kalakanis, L., & Langlois, J. (1999). Infant preferences for attractive faces: A cognitive explanation. *Developmental Psychology*, 35(3), 848-855. Retrieved February 20, 2015, from ProQuest.
- Rubin, L. (1986). *Just friends: The role of friendship in our lives*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Salsano, S.A. (Producer) (2012, July 21). Friend zone ft jenn and dane. *Friend zone*. [Video podcast]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APtz-dDEGe1s>
- Scudder, J.R., & Bishop A. H. (2001). *Beyond friendship and eros*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Scott, B.A. (2009). Women and pornography. In *Lectures on the psychology of women* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Smith, C. (2008). Women, weight and body image. In *Lectures on the psychology of women* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Southern Poverty Law Center (n.d.). *The groups*. Retrieved June 26, 2015, from <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2006/summer/irreconcilable-differences/the-groups>.
- Sternberg, R. (1998). *Cupid's arrow: The course of love through time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strong, B., Yarber, W.L., Sayad, B.W., & DeVault, C. (2008). *Human sexuality: diversity in contemporary america*. (6th ed., pp. 228-233). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- The Red Pill. /r/TheRedPill. Retrieved October 11, 2014, from <http://www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/>
- The Red Pill Handbook 2nd Edition. (2014). Retrieved March 25th 2015, from <https://www.reddit.com/r/theredpill>.

Todd, S. (Producer), King, I.M. (Writer), & Glatter, L.L. (Director). (1995). *Now and Then*. [Motion picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.

Tomassi, R. (2013). *The rational male*. Nevada: Counterflow Media LLC.

U.S. Department of Justice. (2014). *Rape and sexual assault victimization among college-age females, 1995-2013* (BJS publication No. NJC 248471). Washington, DC: Sinozich, S. & Langton, L.

Werking, K.J. (1997). Cross-sex friendship research as ideological practice. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships* (2nd ed). West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Wing Girls. (2013). *How to get out of the friend zone*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

Woman, the most responsible teenager in the house. No-maam.blogspot.fr. Retrieved October 11, 2014, from <http://no-maam.blogspot.fr/2012/06/woman-most-responsible-teenager-in.html>

Yager, J. (1997). *Friendships: The power of friendship and how it shapes our lives*. Stamford, CT: Hannacroix Creek Books.

APPENDIX A
CLARIFICATION OF FIGURE 2

“Flowchart” as pictured on page 57 starts with the question “Have you told her how you feel?” with the option to choose “nope (1)”, “yup(2)” and “kinda(3)”.

1. The answer “nope” leads to the question “why not” with “too scared (A)” and “don’t really know how(B)” as options.

- a. “Too scared” is followed up with “is she hot?” leading to the option to say “yes” or “she has an attractive personality”. A “yes” answer leads to “are you hot”? A “yes” to this final question leads to the only way to enter the “END ZONE” depicted as success while a “no” leads to “FRIEND ZONE”. The “she has an attractive personality” answer leads to the question “so she’s ugly” with “my mom told me ‘it’s what’s inside that counts’” as the only option leading to “your mom sounds ugly too”. The observer is lead to “how is this supposed to help me” with the answer “dude, you went to a comedy site for dating advice. What did you expect? You deserve to be single” with the result ending with “FRIEND ZONE”
- b. “Don’t really know how” leads to “and this stupid article is the first place you looked”? This is followed by the statement “well I was already on the internet...” leading to “wait...were you creeping on this girl’s facebook profile”? The options “ya...” and “NO” are given with “don’t lie to me” leading the chart to “ya...” to later inquire about whether the girl is hot. A “yes” leads to the same scenario as 1b describes with an inquisition of the individual’s physical attractiveness

with an option to say “yes” and end up in the END ZONE or a “no” for the FRIENDZONE.

2. The answer “yup” asks “...and what did she say” with “she pretended like it never happened(A)”, “awe, you’re sweet(B)” and “she told me that I’d make a great boyfriend(C)” for options.

a. Option A leads to “is this the first time you asked her” with “yes” and “no” as options”. Answering “yes” leads to “has she ever told you about a boy that she likes(I)” with the two options of “yes” and “no”. Answering “No” asks “roughly how many times are you talking here” with “a few” and “>50” as options. Answering “yes” to option I leads to the FRIEND ZONE while “no” leads to “well there is someone else” leading to “WHO?” with the answer “well this is awkward...it’s me bro.” This leads to the “how is this supposed to help me” scenario described in option 1 leading to the FRIENDZONE result. Answering “a few” to the inquisition of “how many times” leads to FRIENDZONE as the “>50” answer leads to DANGER ZONE.

b. Option B immediately assumes FRIENDZONE as the result

c. Option C leads to the question “But...” leading to “oh god, she didn’t compare you to a brother did she”? with options “brother” (I), “father”(II) and “creepy uncle” (III).

i. A “brother” result leads to FRIEND ZONE.

ii. A “father” result leads to the question “well that’s weird, how much older are you” with “old...” as the only option. This

final result leads to the comment “sir, please remain calm. I have alerted the proper authorities. Anything you say can and will affect you in a court of law” with DANGER ZONE as the result.

iii. A “creepy uncle” result directly leads to DANGER ZONE.

3. A “kinda” answer leads the observer to “what the hell does that mean” with “I sent her locks of my hair(A)” and “I texted her(B)” as options.

a. The answer “I sent her locks of my hair” leads to the “sir please remain calm...” answer as described in option 2II above with a DANGER ZONE result.

b. Selecting “I texted her” leads to the question “did you use emoticons” with “...” as the only answer leading to FRIEND ZONE