The Discourse of the Seducer: Pickup Artists, Subjectivity, and the Hysteria of Instrumentality

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I also extend my gratitude to the Sydney seduction community, who so warmly welcomed my interest, and offered theirs in return.
All acts of bastardry are based on the fact of wishing to be someone’s Other.

—Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*
Abstract

The ‘seduction community’ is a subculture composed of men who actively cultivate a skillset that allows them to more effectively engage in sexual intercourse with women. Against the established academic narrative that the subculture has emerged out of late-modern capitalist rationalities, this thesis explores the influence of the seduction community’s members’ sexual ambivalence alongside the subculture’s embeddedness in market-driven ideologies. This investigation involves a Lacanian discourse analysis, and examines the online video content of five prominent personalities in the worldwide seduction community. In doing so, this project intends to reveal the ‘pickup artist’s’ understanding of himself in relation to the world in which he exists and to examine the sexual discord at the heart of his gendered project. This research troubles normative understandings of masculine speech-acts as materializing out of notions of dominance and entitlement, and allows that these speech-acts may emanate from a place that ultimately alludes to the production of a contingently gendered subject.
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Chapter 1 | The Open: An Introduction

Problematising Instrumentality

This thesis seeks to analyse the motivations of the seduction community, which is a masculine subculture whose members purposively foster knowledge and skills to competently seduce women. While much of the content consulted by the seduction community in the cultivation of their skillset is found online, there still exists a range of written material that communicates the knowledge required to cultivate this skillset. If you, like its members, search the online bookstore Amazon for texts on how to seduce women, something peculiar occurs. Canonical texts of the seduction community dominate the search results initially, but further browsing of the ‘Customers who bought this item also bought’ section reveals certain themes. These range from less well-known books on seduction, to books on manhood, to general self-help, until Machiavelli’s (2009) The Prince begins to appear regularly as a related purchase. The Prince’s reputation as a classic guide to attaining (and retaining) power, combined with its $4.99 price tag for its Kindle edition, could easily explain its presence, given the general conceptualization of men who actively practice seduction as those who seek to enact the domination of women. Being a fan of Machiavelli myself, however, I recalled that Machiavelli’s gift to Lorenzo de Medici was, before it was a work of political philosophy, an exercise in instrumental rationality: a lesson for readers that one always takes action for a desired result. The link between instrumental rationality and the seduction community is key here. Established literature on the subculture largely embeds it within a capitalist political economy which dictates the form of the instrumental rationality enacted by the seduction community: one that seeks to dominate and consume woman as an object (Almog & Kaplan 2015; Baker 2012; Clift 2007; Hendriks 2012; O’Neill 2015b; 2017).

Without denying the influence of instrumental rationality in the project of the seduction community, this dissertation seeks to problematize capitalistically informed instrumental rationality
as the zero-point of explanation. I intend to interrogate what underpins its members’ engagement with such instrumentality, and locate this foundation in a discord of sexual difference – which facilitates the appearance of the subculture’s project in the first place. I apply Lacanian discourse analysis to argue that it is an antagonism of sexual ambivalence that drives the seduction community’s enterprise: a sexual ambivalence that speaks to feelings of insecurity that compel the seducer forward and entrap him within a repetitious loop of encounters with woman.

The Seduction Community

The seduction community is a subculture made up of men\(^1\), principally organised around the goal of fostering a skill set to optimize one’s social and sexual success with women (O’Neill 2015b). The group’s members are loosely termed ‘pickup artists’ (PUAs) however only a tokenistic identification with the community and its goals is necessary for one to have ‘joined’ as the group is largely open and welcoming to new members. The subculture operates with its own vocabulary (Hendriks 2012), utilizing a range of neologisms and cryptic acronyms to communicate, discuss technique, and evaluate recent interactions with women that PUAs may have engaged in. Having been identified as emerging in the early 1970s (Clift 2007), the subculture then existed in a limited capacity. In the 1980s and 90s, the group saw sporadic growth, usually within and around major American cities. This period saw the rise of the likes of Ross Jeffries (née Paul Ross) who was dubbed by Strauss (2005) as ‘The undisputed father of seduction’ (p.38). Jeffries (2008), with his brand of ‘Speed Seduction’, promised to show men ‘How to install the super get laid attitudes in yourself’ (p.8), ‘how to fake like you’re warm and friendly’ (p.16), and ‘how to swiftly detect

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\(^1\) There are an increasing number of instances in which females are identifying with the subculture and its goals of cultivating sexual agency and self-actualization. Because of the overwhelming majority of PUAs being men however, this dissertation uses masculine pronouns when referencing the PUA throughout.

\(^2\) A play on the aviation term ‘wingman’. A wing is an individual (usually another PUA) who accompanies a PUA when seducing women. He offers logistical and moral support, often humouring a target woman’s friends, or simply
women who are wackos, low-lifes, crazies and scum’ (p.74). Jeffries offered (and still offers) seminars and a range of media on how to increase one’s success with women. At that time, however, the subculture could hardly be called a community. It was the appearance of the Internet that, in the late 90s, provided the opportunity for the seduction community to flourish into its current incarnation.

The interconnectedness that the Internet offered saw an online seduction community culture emerge in which the discussion of technique and provision of tutelage could take place (Clift 2007). PUAs could find and share helpful tips, find ‘wings’ in their area with whom they could practice their craft, and provide ‘field reports’ recounting recent outings. Such accounts offered an opportunity for a PUA to receive (sometimes not so) constructive criticism on his application of seduction principles and thereby progress past his ‘sticking points’. It was in this online milieu that Mystery (née Erik von Markovik), a community personality who would fundamentally change the face of the emergent subculture, made himself known. Mystery, besides participating in and contributing to the aforementioned online fora and moderating the popular MSN messenger group ‘Mystery’s Lounge’, became the first personality in the seduction community to offer hands-on tutelage in the form of what would become known in the community as a ‘boot camp’ (Strauss 2005, p.289) – a weekend workshop where a seduction coach accompanies students into social settings (such as bars, nightclubs, high streets, etc.) and guides them towards sexual success in their interactions with women. With his ‘Mystery Method’, Mystery (2007) provided a guide to seduction wherein evolutionary psychology and biology were mobilized to figure the human as a ‘biological machine’ (p.15). Mystery’s (2007) text provides a systematized approach, an ‘algorithm for getting women’ (p.2) whereby attraction is figured as a science, and that attraction can be fostered by way of the input of information into the aforementioned biological machine. Mystery

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2 A play on the aviation term ‘wingman’. A wing is an individual (usually another PUA) who accompanies a PUA when seducing women. He offers logistical and moral support, often humouring a target woman’s friends, or simply adding excitement and value to an outing. PUAs, on a night out, will often wing each other. That is, they will change roles throughout the night, with one PUA winging another at any given time.
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delineated the axiological dimensions of attraction and told PUAs how to cultivate and signal social status for a desired partner. Principles such as the ‘indicator of interest (IOI)’ (Mystery 2007, p.215) and the infamous ‘neg’ (p.217) originated from the Mystery Method and demonstrate the rhetoric that has become widespread in the seduction community in which the provision and reception of information is navigated unto a sexual encounter (Denes 2011).

While personalities such as Jeffries and Mystery continued to ply their trade, it was not until the publication of Neil Strauss’ The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pick-Up Artists (2005) that the seduction community reached the mainstream. With the release of Strauss’ book, the community gained an immense number of new followers as many socially and sexually frustrated men identified with Strauss’ story (O’Neill 2015b). In The Game, Strauss documents his journey from an ‘AFC’ (average frustrated chump) (Strauss 2005, p.439) who could not get a date to his being dubbed the best PUA in the world under his community pseudonym ‘Style’. Both Jeffries and Mystery are featured in The Game, with Mystery providing the majority of Strauss’ tutelage. Since the publication of The Game, the seduction community has grown into a worldwide phenomenon. Most global cities have their own ‘lair’ (a collective of pickup artists in a given locale), and a plethora of literature is available in the ‘community-industry’ (O’Neill 2015b, p.1) whereby aspiring PUAs can learn the techniques and doctrines that will maximize their success with the opposite sex. Dating coaches, or master PUAs, continue to offer hands-on tutelage in the form of boot camps, with some lasting a weekend and others lasting weeks with students taking up residence with their coaches.

While the seduction community’s main goal is to foster sexual success through communicating knowledge on how to seduce women in any social situation with a range of techniques, there exists alongside this main goal an active endorsement of a project of self-

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3 Mystery (2007) provides his definition of this term: ‘A subtle-yet-negative statement that puts a target off-guard and makes her question her own value, increasing yours on a relative basis’ (p.217). Because of the contentious nature of this principle, the original definition is provided here for the reader’s consideration outside of the context of existing commentaries (see Bradshaw 2015, for example).
actualization that should be undertaken by the PUA. This project of the self is integral to the community’s principal goals. A fundamental insufficiency of the self is identified and admitted to by PUAs. Most reference an ‘extreme emotional deficit’ (jlaix 2012, at 04:30) that preceded their entry into the seduction community. This deficit is oft cited as the chief undermining characteristic in the life of a PUA before he encountered seduction. Many speak of having not been able to form real friendships, and of approaching women from a frame of emotional insecurity. Identified personal shortfalls are to be managed and overcome on the road to becoming a competent seducer. Much of the practical material on seduction provided in a range of media by the subculture ties in closely with the notion that alongside doing seduction (i.e. deploying pickup techniques), one should concurrently move towards being a seductive individual, one that is highly desirable in and of himself, prior to the concrete use of technique. As Mystery (2007) explains: ‘If you aren’t getting the results you want while practicing your game, it’s time to examine your social life in general, your health and fitness, and your career’ (p.22). This need for growth, and the method through which it is achieved, offers an indication that something beyond the objectification and domination of women is at play in the discourse of the PUA, and that perhaps it is an identified relegation to feeling less-than, a recognition of a manifest insufficiency, that underpins his social practice. An engagement with this insecurity is important to undertake in order to question accepted narratives around masculine subjugation of women, as universalizing an injunction to dominate in the male psyche may be harmful to interventions aimed at regulating young men’s engagement in sexual relationships.

**Approaching the Pickup Artist**

Generally, views of the seduction community and its members are not positive. They are often accused of objectifying women and promoting rape culture (Badham 2016; Smith 2012). The
seduction community also has loose associations with men’s rights activists (MRAs), whose rhetoric contradicts normative feminist arguments that hold that men routinely exploit and dominate women (Messner 2016). MRAs maintain that men are, in fact, victimised in late-modernity (Mountford 2018), citing higher rates of mental illness, lower rates of male representation at universities, and a lack of male reproductive rights as sites of struggle for men and privilege for women. While the data that emerged in the completion of this dissertation were devoid of this rhetoric found in the manosphere⁴ and its MRAs, because some MRAs identify as PUAs and with the seduction community’s sporadic mobilisation of positivist stances on the nature of woman, the pickup subculture has often been equated with men’s rights activism. Leading voices of the seduction community (such as those analysed below), implicitly and explicitly distance themselves from these fringe men’s groups who may themselves sympathize with the consolidated ‘mainstream’ of the subculture. Because of this relation being drawn however, popular news media has become a site of discussion of the seduction community and its fringes that spill over into the territory of men’s rights activism. As a result, the journalistic realm has become a valuable resource for gathering information on widely held opinions on the seduction community and its fringe elements, and is a resource from which this dissertation will continue to draw material.

An example of this relation between the seduction community and fringe chauvinist groups coming under media scrutiny is found in the case of Roosh V. Roosh V (Née Daryush Valizadeh) is a prominent self-proclaimed chauvinist (Valizadeh 2016) and author in the manosphere. Originally writing as a PUA, publishing sex-travel guides in which he offered advice on how to navigate a destination’s culture and nightlife towards sexual intercourse with women, Roosh V eventually moved away from identifying as a PUA (Valizadeh 2016) and wrote mainly on masculinity, chauvinism, and gender politics. His website, Return of Kings, contains a variety of sexist and

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⁴ A loose network of bloggers and online spaces wherein topics such as the imminent decline of masculinity, anti-feminism, seduction of women, men’s (hetero)sexuality, and politics associated with the alt-right are discussed (Neiwart 2017).
‘neomasculinist’ articles with titles such as ‘Sweden is Forcing its Young Boys into Homosexuality’ (Roark 2018), ‘The #MeToo Movement Has Ruined My Sex Life’ (William 2018), and ‘27 Attractive Girls Who Became Ugly Freaks because of Feminism’ (Valizadeh 2017). Roosh V endorses a brand of polarizing masculinity that aligns with the heterosexual, domineering mode outlined by Connell (2005). Roosh V believes such masculinity is what will win a man sexual success, and in response to the Isla Vista killings, where Elliot Rodger murdered six people, Roosh V argued that pickup, and an alignment with his neomasculine beliefs would have prevented the killings and facilitated Rodger’s social and sexual acceptance, a lack of which was cited as Rodger’s motive for the murders (Dewey 2014).

In 2015 Roosh V sparked controversy after posting an article entitled ‘How to Stop Rape’ (Valizadeh 2015) in which he posits legalization of rape as that which would prevent it from occurring. Roosh asserted that by legalizing rape on private property, a woman would be effectively responsibilized to protect her body and ensure her own safety at all times: ‘a girl would absolutely not enter a private room with a man she doesn’t know or trust unless she is absolutely sure she is ready to sleep with him’ (Valizadeh 2015). Roosh was soon the target of campaigns asserting that he and his followers actively promoted rape culture (Smith 2016). Soon after, Roosh was forced to cancel appearances in Australia and Canada because of an inability to guarantee that the scheduled Return of Kings meet-ups could be kept private and safe from outside interference (Smith 2016). Roosh later stated that his article suggesting the legalization of rape had been a work of satire and that he is strictly anti-rape, and anti-violence against women (Valizadeh 2016). Roosh V continues to post anti-feminist, pro-chauvinist content on Return of Kings, with a marked absence of the pickup advice seen in the past.

An instance in which the more mainstream seduction community received negative attention was the 2014 media controversy surrounding Real Social Dynamics (RSD) executive coach Julien Blanc. Blanc became embroiled in an internet scandal after video footage surfaced of him practicing
seduction in Japan, where he was filmed grabbing women’s heads and forcing them into his crotch. Video of Blanc with his hands around the throats of women who he was attempting to seduce also appeared. Much of this footage was posted on Blanc’s own YouTube channel (Lana Massi 2017) and has since been removed. At the time that this footage surfaced, a tweet from Blanc’s Twitter account came to light, where he commented on a chart outlining signs of intimate partner violence, stating that the chart ‘[m]ay as well be a checklist… #HowToMakeHerStay’ (Blanc, cited in Watt & Mason 2014). At that time, Blanc was scheduled to hold a series of seminars in Australia. An online petition was started, calling for venues hosting Blanc’s seminars to cancel the scheduled events. The online campaign also called for logistical apparatuses, such as RSD’s ticketing client, to withdraw support for these events (Li 2014). The hashtag #TakeDownJulienBlanc soon began trending on Twitter and an RSD event that had been moved to a new secret location in Melbourne was cancelled mid-event after protesters learned the new location of the affair and intervened. Blanc’s Australian visa was soon cancelled and he was forced to leave the country (Gibson 2014a). The United Kingdom and Singapore soon followed suit and restricted Blanc from entering their borders to ply his trade (BBC News 2014; Gibson 2014b). Julien was soon dubbed by Time magazine as ‘the most hated man in the world’ (Gibson 2014a). Blanc later appeared in a CNN video apologizing for the posted content, stating that much of what had been taken as offensive was a ‘horrible, horrible attempt at humour’ (Lana Massi 2014 at 02:47) and had been ‘taken out of context’ (Lana Massi 2014, 02:53). Blanc continues to work as an executive coach for RSD. Since this scandal, his output for RSD has become increasingly geared towards self-actualization and self-development (Blanc 2017), eschewing much of the seduction-based content that was formerly communicated in his products (Blanc 2014; 2015; 2016).

Despite the media’s conflation of PUAs and MRAs and the seduction community’s categorisation as power-hungry misogynists seeking to dominate women, in this dissertation I will propose that PUAs are motivated by not power, but the quest for self-knowledge. In 1963, Lacan
(2017c) stated that ‘[m]ens anxiety is linked to the possibility of not being able (p.189, emphasis in original): that is, not performing competently as man in-the-world. Such an observation resonates deeply with what I found to be the case in a group of men who actively work on not only becoming competent in interactions with women, but also work on being enough for these women. I read the seduction community’s key text, Neill Strauss’ *The Game* (2005), years ago. Where many male acquaintances of mine were excited to employ the seduction techniques Strauss uses in the book, many female friends, in turn, expressed unease and disgust at the objectification and manipulation of women that one might assume to find in such a text. *The Game* is more of a story than a how-to manual. Despite the drama and humour, the book fundamentally recounts the tale of a guy (Strauss) who had never felt good enough. *The Game* is an archetypical hero’s story, in which one engages in a struggle, triumphs, and receives a reward. The (manifest) reward for Strauss in *The Game*, is, of course, women. Strauss engages in the struggle of becoming a seducer and, in doing so, ends up being dubbed the world’s best pickup artist.

It is this identification by the subculture with a pre-existing feeling of not being good enough that interested me and put in motion the process by which I gained access to the community’s interior. In a time where such feelings amongst young men of subjective deficiency or ‘not being enough’ (socially, financially, sexually, etc.) have been arguably the foundation upon which elections have been won and brutal acts of violence committed (Mishra 2017), it is important to look to subcultures such as the seduction community. With males spamming journalists’ social media with rape threats over gender representation in video games (Nagle 2017), and young men such as Elliot Rodger and Dylan Roof murdering individuals for their gender and race (Neiwart 2017), one cannot but find it necessary to investigate a subculture wherein a feeling of not being enough is integral to its emergence. This taking of the subculture as an object of analysis is not at all because it consciously aligns itself with violent action – it doesn’t. I take the seduction community as my object of inquiry because it is a site of struggle wherein men seek to escape the
aforementioned personal insecurity that may underlie their violence of all kinds. The mind-set of the PUA and the social practice in which he participates are key manifestations of the social to understand in the current sexuo-political climate. The seduction community is a subculture that stands at the nexus of the result of a masculine ‘crisis’ of the self, and one’s specific reaction to it.

In coming to engage the seduction community as an object of inquiry, I joined one of the subculture’s Facebook groups that facilitated the communication of PUAs in Sydney, Australia. I was soon privy to community meet-ups occurring in Sydney and decided to attend. I came upon a stirring dichotomy: those who admitted to feelings of being less than competent actively engaged in social interactions in which they were almost cartoonish in their confidence. While this may seem like the expected result that one might find in an individual purposively learning a skill, as opposed to one who finds himself naturally proficient, what was most compelling is that these over-the-top engagements with women mostly ended positively. A young South-Asian man named Nav, who stood well under 6 feet tall, and easily weighed less than 60 kilograms, as we stood in a nightclub in Sydney on a Monday night told me: ‘I get really bad AA [approach anxiety], man’. Minutes later he had endeared himself to a group of young women, having approached and opened with the line: ‘Ugh, I just took a shit in a nightclub bathroom. I feel dis-gus-ting!’. While one of the young women was visibly off-put, the rest seemed to enjoy the novelty of the interaction. After eventually taking one of the group aside, kissing her and exchanging social media information, Nav returned to say goodbye to me. I commented on his opening line. He replied: ‘Yeah man, it’s not really what you say. Its more how you say it! Everyone loves dumb shit like that. Most guys are chodes and say ‘Hi, you’re beautiful’ or some shit. Chicks love guys who are different’. It was as if his deficiency, the social incompetence that Nav felt, compelled him to be over-confident. It was as if knowing that he was lacking, allowed him to actively cultivate social abundance. It seemed that it was not an active project of domination that Nav was enacting, but rather, one of an attempt at emancipation
from his relegation to a subordinate social position, where he did not have access to the necessary social capital that would afford him mobility there.

Much in line with the findings of Elana Clift (2007) over a decade ago, what I had encountered were not the psychopathic monsters that were so frequently placed under the spotlight by journalists covering the seduction community (e.g. Armstrong 2016; Bradshaw 2015; Freeman 2014; Kukshtel 2016; SBS News 2014; Shaw 2016; Smith 2012; Squires 2016; Taylor 2014). Of course, like most subcultures, the seduction community is not without its particularly unsavoury elements (see Zadrozny 2016). A corollary to this is that of course, the online news media is not without its responsibility to offer the most remarkable accounts of degeneracy of easily fetishizable objects (Taylor & Harris 2010).

This thesis examines the seduction community by way of a discourse analysis of the online video content of leading PUAs, personalities within the seduction community who men such as Nav look to for guidance and tutelage in the ‘Venusian arts’ (Mystery 2007, p. xiv). The analysis of this content is informed by the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, which offers a perspective uniquely suited to positioning gendered subjects based on an analysis of their speech-acts. This research breaks new ground in its deployment of the emergent methodology of Lacanian discourse analysis developed within the field of social psychology. Through the lens of Lacan’s discursive equations, I analyse the speech-acts within the online video content towards discursively locating the PUA as a speaking subject in-the-world. I do so towards a comprehension of the PUA’s understanding of himself in relation to the world in which he functions and finds the need to deploy the practices and doctrines of the seduction community. This project then, ultimately seeks to answer the question: What does the discursive location of the pickup artist-subject reveal about the subculture’s formulation and pursuit of the masculine project beyond its embeddedness in late-

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5 Mystery, a revolutionary figure in the seduction community in the early 2000s, uses this term in his groundbreaking The Mystery Method (2007), in the sense that the art of seduction is juxtaposed against the art of war. He calls seduction ‘the Venusian arts’ (as opposed to the martial arts), after the Roman god of love.
modern instrumental rationality? I ultimately conclude, subverting the narratives of general feminist and journalistic indictments, that the PUA is a hysterical subject, seeking to fulfil a Don Juan type fantasy in which the repetition of encounters with the feminine will somehow afford him access to the knowledge of a ‘true’ essence of woman and, by way of situating such knowledge, allow him to orientate his masculinity thereby. While current journalistic and sociological accounts conceive of the PUA as a subject aligned with traditional formulations of masculinity which subjugate the feminine, this dissertation’s psychoanalytic approach reveals that he is actually oriented and fixated on the nature of the feminine, and that the conceptualization of the feminine stands as a pivotal point in his production of self.

In the next chapter, I survey the existing literature on the subculture and its practices. Here, I identify the paucity of research on the seduction community that is informed by psychoanalytic theory and its notions of sexual disposition. I also recognize the established theme of a location of the PUA in political economy in the literature, while taking peripheral research on the subculture as an indication that there may be more to the seduction community’s emergence than a pure identification with capitalistic instrumental rationality. I then offer elucidations as to the methodology and theory that inform this research. Given the relatively new approach to social research that Lacanian discourse analysis (LDA) represents, I unpack theoretical concepts that are essential to the efficacy of this methodology such as sexual difference, and the Lacanian structures of discourse. In my analysis, I locate the PUA in the hysteric’s discourse wherefrom he questions and transgresses the normative social conventions around relations between men and women. From this location of the PUA, I situate him further, figuring his praxis as aligned with the hysteric’s questioning as to whether he is a masculine or feminine subject. It is here that I conclude that the seduction community’s praxis indicates an instrumentalization of the feminine in the project of its members. I ultimately suggest that the directed, repeated, and measured effort to encounter the feminine on the part of the masculine subject indicates a fundamental sexual dis-location that
accompanies the late-modern mediation of the project of seduction, indicating that while the PUA engages in objectifying the feminine, reproducing a gendered power differential, he acts from the realisation of a deficiency of the self; a deficiency founded on an ambiguity of his existence as feminine or masculine.

This research stands to have both academic and social consequences. At the academic level, this research contributes to the relatively scarce body of knowledge on the seduction community and the articulations of masculinity therein. Here I provide an account of the seduction community’s subjectivity, adding to the understanding of the subculture. While this provides a base upon which further inquiry can be conducted, I also, by way of this contribution, open the field of research in the social sciences to a concrete application of LDA, not only proving this methodology’s efficacy in social research, but further developing its modalities of application. This is worth noting due to the fact that up until now, there has been a limited deployment of this methodology with it being confined to social psychology and preliminary—though robust—theoretical development (see Neill 2013; Parker 2010; Parker 2015 & Pavón Cuéllar 2010). This project, alongside its findings, offers an illustration of the potential for Lacanian psychoanalysis in the study of masculinities and hopes to advance the possibility for its further application therein. By placing the masculine subject at the centre of this inquiry, this research will offer insights into the subjective rationalities at work in the seduction community. I also demonstrate the use of the psychoanalytic structure of hysteria as a tool for the analysis of late-modern masculinity. While this category has been traditionally applied to feminine subjects (see Freud 1990; Freud & Breuer 1974; Lacan 2006; Lacan 2017a; Lacan 2017c; Žižek 1997), this research reveals the potential insights that a reading of the masculine subject’s discourse through hysteria can yield towards informing a more robust formulation of the masculine in late-modernity.

At a social level, the potential impact of this research is discernable in relation to the well established problematic of masculinity’s relationship with manifestations of violence in most social
arenas (Connell 2005; Franklin 2004; Messerschmidt 2005; Messner 1990; Salter 2016; Schrock & Schwalbe 2009). Recognizing the intersubjective complications and obstacles that this issue brings, along with the social and economic cost of the fallout of such violence, this research stands to impact ongoing developments regarding the emergent healthy relationships agenda. This is a growing initiative which holds the potential to affect public health discourses in its dissemination of ideas regarding safe, respectful intimate relationships and in its contribution to primary intervention strategies targeted at reducing the proliferation of intimate partner violence (Antle et al. 2011). Many contemporary messages aimed at men in relation to intimate partner violence are founded on normative, traditional understandings of masculinity that may be undermining their own efficacy (Salter 2016). Through this study’s contribution to a more well-rounded understanding of masculine subjectivity in relation to its feminine Other, and the observation of masculinity’s self-compromising, reiterative discursive practices, more effective messages may be able to be crafted in the further development of the healthy relationships agenda, offering improved intervention strategies in the future. While existing literature on the seduction community’s relationship to political economy is useful, understanding the underlying antagonism that accompanies his economically mediated attempts at intimacy would help increase capacity for intervention at the level of gendered identifications that precede and ground the subject’s navigation of capital-driven rationalities. This research implicates a deficiency at the heart of the PUA’s compulsion to carry out what is an essentially gendered project in relation to its feminine site of actualization. Where the PUA is normatively identified as one who mobilizes instrumental rationality to dominate the feminine, this research figures this domination as a secondary consequence of the mobilization of said rationality, identifying, rather, the originary impulse underpinning such a mobilization in a gendered deficiency relating to a sexual ambivalence of the subject. This understanding may subsequently have consequences for the (re)formulation of intervention initiatives at the primary, secondary, and even tertiary levels as messages might be more effectively fashioned so as to
endorse relationship-practices that do not necessarily reiterate hegemonically aligned masculinities but, rather, endorse a broadening of the discursive field in which masculinities can become more positively pluralised.
Chapter 2 | Social Proof: Existing Research

This chapter provides an overview of the relatively limited body of academic research on the seduction community, supplemented by provocative and insightful journalistic contributions. In reviewing this literature, I identify an established academic narrative of the seduction community emerging out of a constellation of capitalistically mediated instrumental rationality. This literature also suggests that the current practices of the community are also shaped by such market-driven ideology, resulting in a subculture that objectifies and manipulates women. This body of literature that analyses the seduction community in its embeddedness in political economy is contrasted by peripheral inquiry on the community’s use of language in the constitution of its project, and research on the community’s homosocial performativity. This survey of existing research suggests that further investigation is necessary in order to make sense of the self-identifications and self-understandings of PUAs. It is ultimately this understanding that this thesis aims to accomplish.

Pickup Artists, Capitalism, and Sexism

The majority of the academic literature on the seduction community sees the PUA as emerging out of the constellation of capitalist technological rationality and cultural manifestations of consumer society. For instance, Kray’s (2017) analysis of the seduction community formulates the notion of the pickup artist as produced from structural themes found in Western literature. Through readings of seductions by Don Juan, Casanova, and Søren Kierkegaard, and positioning each seducer within their historically located masculinity and modality of courtship, Kray (2017) manages to situate the seducer in an arrangement of ‘social tropes’ (p.1) wherein the gaze, the construction of the love triangle, and ‘uncontrollable passion expressed through extreme polar opposites’ (p.7) are utilized to elicit attraction. These tropes are explored as elements that structure
a seduction and which influence the techniques and doctrines present among contemporary PUAs. Kray’s (2017) offering brings the historicity of cultural and structural societal manifestations to the fore in identifying the rationalities underpinning the emergence and functioning of the contemporary seduction community, supporting a body of literature that locates the subject in a wider socio-cultural discourse.

Clift (2007) conceptualizes the advent of the seduction community as emerging out of the context of America’s historically synthesized, class-based dating customs. Through a historical inquiry analysing the development of courtship in America, Clift (2007) posits that American rituals of dating and courtship were underpinned by ‘a need to reenergize manhood’ (p.29) that was born out of the undermining of existing masculine ideals in the nineteenth century by emergent corporatist economics. Clift (2007) accounts for the appearance of the seduction community by identifying a masculinity de-stabilized by the emergence of different dating rituals based on class. Where the rich would receive suitors into their homes, the working class would need to use public space in their courting of potential partners, bringing about the necessity for a set of social skills that would secure potential romantic encounters in the public sphere. Clift’s ethnography of the seduction community offers a preliminary level of insight to what would become one of the most identified themes in the formulation of the seduction community: that historical and economic factors weigh heavily, not only on the subculture’s emergence, but also on the doctrines and behaviours that constitute its praxes.

This notion of the indebtedness of the seduction community’s appearance to hegemonic political and economic influences of late-modernity is extended by Rachel O’Neill (2015b; 2016; 2017) and her body of research on the seduction community. O’Neill conceives of the seduction community and its methods and doctrines as the result of a ‘mediated intimacy’ (2015b, p.4) that has emerged in late-modernity. By ‘mediated intimacy’, O’Neill (2015b) references a type of encounter ‘in which intimate and sexual subjectivities are configured through broader social and
cultural rationalities’ (p.4). Besides this manifestation of intimacy being squared as a discursive product of the consumerist ideologies that permeate late-modern Western society, wherein neoliberal rationalities extend into the dating lives of individuals, O’Neill has recently extended the conceptualisation of mediated intimacy into territory that further resonates with the interests of this project. O’Neill (2017) goes on to explain that in the mediated intimacy in which the PUA engages and thus reproduces, further mediation takes place in which the PUA’s social practice is influenced by consumerist rationalities, hegemonic ideals of embodied feminine beauty, and, by extension, the manifestations of such beauty standards and their idealised reception in the ‘irrevocably social’ (O’Neill, 2017, p.333) encounter of sexual desires in the face-work of the seduction. O’Neill (2017) then asserts—while maintaining all the while the potentiality of agency on the part of the PUA to subjectivize the other—that the PUA’s social practice exists in a constellation of structural and cultural influences and his goals are formulated and realized within this constellation.

Eric Hendriks (2012) locates the seduction community in the wider field of subcultures of self-help, arguing that the enterprise of the pickup artist is ultimately an ascetic one. Hendriks, through a Weberian analysis of the seduction community, asserts that the PUA actively pursues pain and engages in struggle towards self-actualization through meeting women, physical training, and regimes of self-discipline. This engagement in struggle is figured as derivative of the Protestant ethic from which capitalism emerged. Hendriks goes on to posit that the PUA’s approach to his ascetic project of the self is both embedded in, and reproduces, the capitalist rationality that has produced the PUA-subject: ‘In its secularized form, this asceticism—the work ethic—fuels capitalism, taking hold wherever capitalism has spread’ (Hendriks 2012, p.12). In response to Hendriks’ investigation, Longo (2012) acknowledges the gratifying inverse of the purposeful struggle by the PUA, wherein one finds ‘a disciplinary practice for self-building that turns out to be pleasurable in its own right’ (Longo 2012, p.15). Again, the PUA is situated in capitalist rationality,
wherein even his enjoyment must take on the dimension of production, which sees him enjoying by way of a struggle to produce the self.

The recognition of the effects of political economy on the emergence and functioning of the seduction community is further found in Almog & Kaplan’s (2015) textual-analysis of PUA literature, where a relation between ‘nerd masculinity’ (p.3), tech start-up culture, and the seduction community is identified. For Almog & Kaplan (2015), the seduction community ‘is characterized by a hyper-consumerist stance’ (p.17) from which a use of the technologies of seduction techniques ‘promises its followers individual upward mobility in the hierarchy of masculinities’ (p.18). Besides an alignment with the readily observable mechanism of the subject under capitalism (to be consumed and to consume unto social mobility), this acknowledgment of the PUA as existing in a masculine hierarchy further draws our attention to the homosocial element which is seemingly inherent in the praxis of the PUA; the gaze of the masculine other is present and mediates the impetus to do masculinity, and to do it according to a specific, hegemonic modality. The PUA exists as a subordinate-masculine subject and thus technologizes the seduction community’s techniques towards attaining the social and sexual dividends that the hegemonically aligned masculine subject enjoys. This indicates that such technologization is a response to this recognised deficiency, a compensation for an inability to exist as an individual who enjoys a high level of masculine prestige.

While a journalistic contribution, Katie Baker’s (2013) cultural analysis of a PUA operating in an environment governed by an egalitarian economic structure cannot be discounted here due to its identification of the role of political economy in a concrete case of a PUA’s attempts at seduction. Baker asserts that the techniques of the seduction community, being born out of an ideology of capitalist instrumental rationality, function with less efficacy in a social milieu which is averse to such instrumentality. Baker reveals, through the example of the former-PUA Roosh V and his admonishment of Scandinavia and its women, that the PUA finds less success in countries with
democratic socialist leanings. Roosh V’s frustration with Scandinavian women (that is, the result of his lack of sexual success among them) is explained by Baker as the consequence of a fundamental impossibility of communication between an individual whose speech is couched in the aforementioned instrumental rationality, and a woman who is ‘not susceptible to the narcissistic salesmanship’ (Baker 2013, p.11) of the PUA because of her alignment with ‘gender-equalizing policies supported by an anti-individualist culture’ (p.11).

Within the existing literature on the seduction community, like in the journalistic realm, there exists a strong current of indictment and condemnation of the subculture for its subscription to biological essentialism and non-affordance of agency to the feminine subject (Christensen 2012; Clift 2007; Denes 2011; O’Neill 2015b; 2017). Christensen’s observations on the seduction community acknowledge the PUA’s total de-subjectivisation of the feminine other, interacting with her much like a technician would a mechanical apparatus. For Christensen (2012), the PUA interacts with his object by way of an input of information to elicit a desired reaction, acknowledging no capacity for the deployment of rationality or agential decision making in the feminine Other. The PUA puts knowledge to work towards an instrumentalization of woman. Similar sentiment is echoed by Denes (2011) in her close reading of Mystery’s seminal how-to text on seduction: The Mystery Method (2007). Denes critiques the pickup artists for their ‘privileging the body as truth and essentializing of the female sexual experience’ (Denes 2011, p. 411) and for their belief ‘that women do not even have the capacity for logical interpretations’ (p.415).

Alternative Perspectives

Standing in stark contrast to these indictments of the seduction community as an enterprise of patriarchal domination is the research of Oesch & Miklousic (2012) who, in a review of the existing social-scientific literature, found that much of the seduction community’s claims in regards
to deployable approaches and technique ‘are in fact grounded in solid empirical findings from social, physiological and evolutionary psychology’ (p.899). Oesch & Miklousic (2012) go on to reveal that while some strategies deployed by PUAs require further research to confirm their efficacy in the PUA’s pursuits and that much of the seduction community’s technique holds potential for abuse, ‘there is in fact a substantive degree of psychological research to support many claims made by the [seduction] Community’ (p.905) in regards to physical escalation, trust building, and pre-selection by potential sexual partners. Oesch & Miklousic’s (2012) claim that ‘when properly and ethically understood, the dating and seduction industry, despite its provocative label and origins outside of academia, is founded on solid empirical research as well as first-hand courtship and relationship experience’ (p.901), functions as an indication that there exist bodies of work in the fields of physiology and evolutionary psychology that have ventured to uncover the knowledge that the PUA seeks; that there exists a current of inquiry that pursues information that results in the construction of the human as a manipulable apparatus that can be influenced with the application of the appropriate stimulation.

The field of linguistic pragmatics has also made investigative inroads into the seduction community’s techniques. Hambling-Jones & Merrison’s (2012) research into the efficacy of the PUA’s use of spoken language locates the operational foundation of seduction in speech, as opposed to mobilisations of biology of evolutionary psychology, and assumes that the PUAs’ ‘realities’ are constituted in their talk’ (p.1116). Hambling-Jones & Merrison’s (2012) analysis investigates the PUA’s discourse at the manifest level via audio recordings of four attempted seductions. They find that the functional aspect of the PUA’s speech is in its foregoing of conversational equity, a normative consideration in most polite interactions (an individual approaches the conversation at the same level of ‘appropriateness’ with regard to topic and conversational taboos as their interlocutor). Hambling-Jones & Merrison (2012) find that the PUA’s interlocutory method is based on ‘going into the red before getting into the black’ (p.1125) whereby
the PUA will build inequity into the interaction by verbally transgressing a conversational convention to foster an investment in the interaction on the part of the individual who has been approached. This investment does not always occur, but when it does, one sees the approached individual encounter an assumed familiarization in the PUA’s transgression, which results in a ‘categorisation of the relationship as one of ‘friends’” (Hambling-Jones & Merrison 2012, p.1125). The transgressive nature of the PUAs speech may also garner this investment in its being taboo, where the approached party becomes invested in the PUA out of sheer curiosity as to why he would converse in such a manner. Having garnered such an investment, a more conventional, comfort-building conversation can begin. While Hambling-Jones & Merrison’s small sample size is a limitation in this instance, the presence of a fundamental transgression in the speech of the PUA indicates an instrumentality of outrage that aligns with much of the published research on PUAs.

David Grazian (2007) manages to further document efforts at seduction by college-aged heterosexual men through a qualitative study of students’ recounted efforts of seduction. While Grazian does consider the influence of Strauss’ The Game at the time of his research, he offers insights into the project of seduction in general. Grazian does find, however, that not only do young men feel a social pressure to go ‘girl hunting’ (p.221), but also that this pressure is acted upon in the face of overwhelming odds against the would-be seducer. Grazian (2007) explains that despite existing data indicating that less than one-fifth of individuals socializing in the night-time economy seek to engage in the quintessential one-night-stand, ‘for these young men the performance of masculinity does not necessarily require successfully meeting a potential sex partner as long as one enthusiastically participates in the ritual motions of the girl hunt in the company of men’ (p.232, emphasis in original). Here, taking up the mantle of the seducer falls more within the purview of an enactment of collective masculine performance than within that of sexual or romantic pursuits. Such conclusions lend weight to the formulation of the seduction community’s project as an essentially gendered one wherein the gaze of the masculine Other plays a role as important as that
of the feminine, however no conclusions are offered towards understanding what makes this impetus for masculine performance emerge in the first instance.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that, in light of the literature mentioned above, that the PUA is both situated in, and produced from, the instrumental rationality of late-modern capitalism. The existing research characterizes the PUA’s practice as situated under ideologies that compel the exploitation of a manipulable object. This literature, however, largely defers explanations of gendered undertakings (such as attempts at sexual relationships) to political economy, moving away from elucidations of such a project from within the purview of gender and sexuality. There are no accounts here that make sense of the seduction community from a purely gendered perspective. These accounts are, rather, bolstered by referring to categories outside of gender. This research then, moves to provide such an explanation through psychoanalytic theory, couching the PUA’s gendered enterprise in concepts of sexual identification and ambiguity around the subject’s idea of the gendered self. Hendriks’ (2012) analysis of the subculture goes as far as to identify the ever-present vein of self-development in the seduction community as an ascetic undertaking, a project of struggle, pain, and self-sacrifice. Such a characterisation is perplexing given its juxtaposition against the ostensibly Dionysian principal activity of the seduction community. Such a distinction however, is key here. The dominant narrative applied to the seduction community wherein they are figured as calculating would-be masters of the feminine object is fundamentally undermined by this compulsion for development of the self. Taking into account the indications by Hambling-Jones & Merrison (2012) that there exists a constitution of the reality of the PUA in his speech, and that, according to Grazian (2007), seduction is not only about seeking out and engaging in sexual intercourse, we can assume there is another element constituting the PUA’s alignment with capitalistic instrumental rationality.
This thesis explores this additional element, contributing further to an analysis of the PUA’s speech-acts and his use of seduction for reasons outside of sexual gratification. With an apparent contradiction in the existing literature between an identification with capitalistically informed instrumental rationality, and a location of the social practice of the PUA in the deployment of language and homosocial performance, this research intends to further these avenues of inquiry which conceive of the PUA’s project as not necessarily reliant on politico-economic factors, but rather on ideas of social performance and enactment of a project of the self in language. I seek to, by way of an analysis of the PUA’s speech, investigate the gendered project accompanying the PUA’s location in a constellation governed by market rationalities, wherein the PUA’s speech-acts, in conjunction with a curation of his gendered image, can be interrogated. I want to suggest that there is a fundamental underlying sexual ambivalence that governs the emergence of this exploitative arrangement, and that it is in this ambivalent position in sexual difference that the PUA’s project originates.
Chapter 3 | Comfort Building: Methodology and Theory

The theoretical and methodological approach to this research project covers new ground in the study of masculinities and masculine subcultures, studies of online media, and the applications of psychoanalytic theory. Deploying a relatively new approach to discourse analysis in social research through Lacan’s (2007) discursive topologies, I analyse the speech-acts of five contemporarily prominent seduction community coaches. In doing so, I uncover a discursive positioning of the PUA which formulates him as a hysterical subject struggling to master his relationship with woman – the feminine Other. This struggle underpins the PUA’s instrumentality that has been established in prior research. This section outlines the study’s parameters and offers explanations of the fundamental principles of Lacanian psychoanalysis that are pertinent to the reading of the PUA’s discourse.

Research Design

The data for this study was drawn from video content posted on the YouTube channels of five community personalities: Jeffy Allen (2018), James Marshall (The Natural Lifestyles 2018), Valentino Kohen (2018), Kezia Noble (2018), and Richard La Ruina (2018). YouTube is the standard arena in which PUAs and dating coaches, ever embedded in late-modern technologically rationalised capitalism (Hendriks 2012; O'Neill 2015b; 2016; 2017), post content and instruction. This is done largely as a branding tool to facilitate sales of boot camps and tutelage packages (JulienHimself 2017), however the content offered includes practicable advice and doctrine that falls in line with the larger body of PUA teachings. Three hours of content per community personality was analysed amounting to fifteen hours of total content. Detailed notes pertaining to
actual speech (enunciated words, hedges, parapraxes, negations, etc.), body language, insinuations, production quality and viewer comments were taken to inform the analysis of the video content.

The personalities named above are all highly respected PUAs and dating coaches within the worldwide seduction community, though all take slightly different approaches to seduction. These differences are generally found in distinctions between ‘inner’, identity-based approaches to seduction (wherein the PUA seeks to become a seducer) and more practical tutelage, where the PUA does seduction: where he purposefully ‘does the things that women like’. All of the personalities have an established presence and following on YouTube, and all either own and run, or are part of, a successful seduction coaching company.

YouTube was chosen as the site of analysis because of its status in the seduction community as the current mainspring of readily accessible community knowledge. While in times past, mail-order material and online fora were standard loci of this knowledge (Clift 2007), YouTube has become the stage on which seduction coaches communicate a large amount of advice and technique, while at the same time marketing their boot camps, publications, and pay-for-access online tutelage packages. Indeed, in my time spent with the seduction community in Sydney, seduction coaches’ videos were repeatedly recommended to me. These recommendations from within the subculture influenced the selection of the coaches chosen for analysis.

The mise en scene of PUAs’ YouTube videos is, generally speaking, composed in such a way that the PUA is relaying information to a group of students who are located behind the camera. Sometimes, the crowd of students is large enough that it spills into frame, or large enough to be included in-shot so as to act as an endorsement of the coach who is speaking (see jiaix 2015). There are, however, many instances where the PUA is simply walking along on the street, being filmed, or sometimes filming himself (see Valentino Kohen 2017a). The videos are often of very high production quality, with musical soundtracks and high quality editing throughout. They may
include introductory packages adorned with complex visual graphics (see The Natural Lifestyles 2018), and include pop-up links and advertisements throughout so as to sell texts and boot camps.

The personalities whose discourses are analysed in this study were selected for their prestige in the community: all are leaders in the field. All actively participate in the running of programs that teach seduction. Jeff Allen (2018), otherwise known as jlaix, RSDJeffy, or simply Jeffy, is a senior coach for seduction industry leaders RSD. He is 44 years old, Caucasian, slightly shorter than the average male, and based out of San Francisco, California. The style of pickup that Jeffy teaches falls within the ‘identity based’ school that RSD is part of. He encourages students to embrace the absurdity of pickup, often making reference to Camus’ (2005) The Myth of Sisyphus in describing the mindset required to be a successful seducer. Besides being a Karaoke champion, Jeffy is the author of Nine Ball: Confessions of an Angst-Ridden Maniac Who Decided to Get Laid or Die Trying (2009) and Get Laid or Die Trying: The Field Reports (2014). He has also released three tutelage packages: The Jeffy Show (2008), The Program (currently in its second edition as The Program v2.0) (2017b), and Resonator (2017a). These packages school students in Jeffy’s general approach to pickup, online dating, and voice projection respectively. He regularly runs boot camps for RSD in many of the world’s capital cities. In early 2016, Jeffy was holding a series of workshops in Australia when his visa was cancelled in response to a petition to have him ejected from the country (see Jowett 2016). His association with Julien Blanc, and Jeffy’s infamous 1984 Ford Econoline dubbed ‘the consensual sex in the missionary position for the sole purpose of reproduction van’ (jlaix 2018, at 07:28), a van in which Jeffy and his assistants (both men and women) have sex with people they have picked up, were cited as indications of Jeffy’s poor character (Badham 2016; Ireland 2016). The comments left on Jeffy’s videos generally praise him or tell him how hilarious he is. Jeffy continues to maintain a presence on YouTube while teaching boot camps and selling his products through RSD.
James Marshall (The Natural Lifestyles 2018) is an Australian seduction coach based in Budapest, Hungary. From their base there, James’ company The Natural Lifestyles runs boot camps all over Europe and America. A former musician, James is tall and slim with well-curated facial hair. He is in his late thirties. James, like his counterparts in RSD, is part of the identity-based pickup school. He explicitly discusses with students the importance of being the seducer over doing seduction. He is the author of A Natural History: The Seduction Journals of James Marshall (2016), an anthology of journal entries and essays from James’ first few years in the seduction community. Marshall is markedly uncontroversial compared to the likes of Jeffy and his RSD peers. Marshall often empathises with men in their engagement with pickup, understanding that it is an endeavour that is initially fraught with humiliation and disruption of one’s self concept. James’ YouTube channel (The Natural Lifestyles 2018) contains videos ranging from seduction advice, day-in-the-life style vlogs, and ‘sneak-peeks’ into the operation of boot camps. Viewer comments on these videos are generally appreciative of what James has put forward, and often make some reference to his resemblance to Viggo Mortenson. The Natural Lifestyles continue to post content on their channel regularly.

Richard La Ruina (2018) (née Richard Poingdestre Sloan), otherwise known as Gambler, is the founder and head of PUA Training, a seduction industry leader in the United Kingdom. He is 37 years old and a London native. La Ruina entered the seduction community in 2006 and by 2010 was recognised as one of the best PUAs in the world at that time (21 Studios 2010). La Ruina is the author of two books: The Natural Art of Seduction: Secrets of Success with Women (2007) and The Natural: How to Effortlessly Attract the Women You Want (2012). Richard is celebrated for his brand of ‘stealth attraction’ and its application to ‘night game’, wherein a PUA seduces women in a nightclub without people in the venue knowing that the seduction is taking place. This method is valued because it prevents a woman’s friends (or lovers) from interfering in the interaction (21 Studios 2010). PUA Training continues to offer a range of home training products however the
company’s output of boot camps and live workshops has slowed in recent years. Most recently, La Ruina has released a video game called Super Seducer (RLR Training Inc. 2018). This ‘choose your own adventure’ type game sees players controlling Richard’s actions in his attempts to pick up women. One must attempt to guide Richard to a successful seduction by choosing the correct action from options provided. If the player selects the wrong option, the screen cuts to Richard sitting on a bed alone, where he provides the player with feedback as to why his actions were incorrect. If one selects the correct course of action, the screen cuts to Richard sitting on the same bed surrounded by lingerie-clad models, where he explains why the option selected was best. The video game has garnered controversy, being accused of promoting rape culture and teaching men how to make women uncomfortable (Farokhmanesh 2018; Frank 2018; Hood 2018; Maiberg 2018; Orland 2018), yet has a ‘Very Positive’ review rating on the gaming site Steam (Valve 2018). Richard’s YouTube presence is relatively intermittent, posting videos monthly. The comments on his videos are generally positive, with many men sincerely thanking him for the information he provides.

Kezia Noble (2018) is a female pickup coach: ‘the world’s leading female dating and attraction expert for men’ (Kezia noble 2017a at 01:12). Kezia is 35 years old, from London, and began her career as a dating coach working as a wing girl for Richard La Ruina’s PUA Training. She has also spent time as a model and pop musician, releasing two albums on Renaissance Records. After leaving PUA Training, Kezia founded Kezia Noble Limited in 2009. Her company offers boot camps, dating workshops, and a variety of products including her book The Noble Art of Seducing Women (2012). Kezia maintains a strong YouTube presence, with many of her videos accumulating millions of views. Her videos often open with a video package where Kezia performs administrative work around an office. In these videos Kezia, often accompanied by a colleague, communicates practical, situational advice to viewers. Kezia’s videos reference specific seduction goals such as ‘How to seduce an older woman (step by step)’ (Kezia noble 2016) or ‘How to flirt via text message’ (Kezia noble 2017b). The comments on Kezia’s videos are a combination of
positive feedback on content, and remarks on Kezia’s breasts. Kezia’s channel routinely ‘likes’ the comments that viewers leave.

Valentino Kohen (2018) is a relatively uncontroversial, yet highly respected figure in the seduction community. Valentino hails from rural Switzerland and, like other coaches, delivers boot camps in cities around the world. Valentino takes an identity-based approach, and calls his system ‘invisible game’ (Valentino Kohen 2015 at 00:05), recommending that when one seduces a woman, one should not make it look like a seduction. This follows La Ruina’s approach, however Kohen’s identity-based strategy is geared towards making seduction invisible for the PUA using it too, as he ideally assumes the identity of a seducer, so that seduction happens naturally in his interactions. Valentino’s videos are underpinned by a ‘zero-to-hero’ theme where he references his past failures as proof of one’s ability to fundamentally change their identity to one that an individual desires. The reception of Valentino’s videos is positive. The comments left on his videos are generally appreciative, with many men indicating that he is an especially positive influence in their lives. In turn, Valentino asserts that his mission is possible only because of media like YouTube, where communication between him and his followers can take place (Valentino Kohen 2016) as Valentino often replies to comments left under his videos with gratitude and advice.

Lacanian Discourse Analysis

The data gathered was analysed through the application of Lacanian discourse analysis (LDA). This method applies Lacan's (2007) schemas of ‘the four discourses’ (p.11) to the speech-acts observed in the video content with a view to discursively locating the PUA, deducing the discourse from which he speaks. This was done with the intention of revealing the PUA’s subjective positioning in-the-world so as to better understand his assessment of the world, his conception of its appraisal of him, and his relation to the goals of his gendered enterprise.
The research methodology used here differs from generally accepted and utilised approaches to discourse analysis. Like other forms of discourse analysis however, such as the Foucauldian (1972) 'genealogical' approach, Fairclough's (2009) dialectical relational method, or even various, borderline vitiated 'critical' approaches, Lacanian discourse analysis takes some series of 'signs' and 'statements' and assigns them 'particular modalities of existence' (Foucault 1972, p.107) by designating this 'corpus of statements' (Kendall & Wickham 1999, p. 42) as 'text'. 'Text' then, like 'discourse', could mean any number of things. Indeed, 'discourse' 'has perhaps the widest range of possible significations of any term in cultural theory and yet is often the term within theoretical texts which is least defined' (Mills 2004, p.1). Here, I will characterize discourse as it is identified in relation to LDA: that which can be read in both manifest speech-acts, and in the slips and errors that punctuate these communications.

The rationale underpinning the selection of LDA as a research methodology is three-fold. Firstly, taking into account this project’s distinct move away from analysing the socio-structural determinants of the seduction community and towards the understanding of the PUA’s reality being constructed in his speech, LDA is an especially suitable framework of analysis. Psychoanalysis has historically been used to analyse the speech of clinical patients, and as such is grounded in a solid foundation of taking a subject’s speech and working with it towards an interpretation beyond that which is manifestly present. Secondly, psychoanalysis’ pedigree in the interrogation of sexuality and—as is elucidated in this chapter—its formulation of sexual difference (Lacan 1998b) is especially suited to an investigation of the PUA’s social practice. The PUA’s project, governed as it is by an individual’s sexuality, the act of sexual intercourse, and attempts at communication between the sexes, provides an abundance of material for Lacanian analysis. Thirdly, because this project takes the speech-acts of individuals as its object, the subjective interpretive pitfalls underpinning the reception of these communications by the researcher can be mitigated. By interpreting the subject’s speech through the prescribed structures of Lacan’s (2007) formulations
of discourse, the potential for researcher bias in the analysis is somewhat (but never completely) tempered. A free-for-all of interpretation is allayed by identifying the structures of discourse as set out by Lacan (2007) in the speech of the individual analysed, allowing for a more measured approach to interpretation than what may otherwise be encountered in unstructured approaches to making meaning from another’s speech-acts.

There is a small yet robust body of scholarship on the development of LDA for use as a potential research methodology, particularly in the field of social psychology by Ian Parker (1997; 2005; 2010; 2015) and David Pavón Cuéllar (2010). While Parker's contribution has remained primarily within the purview of practically applicable principles in performing discourse analysis through a Lacanian lens such as characterizing discourse in the Lacanian field (2005), identifying the subject in-discourse-in-research and offering methodological insights into the application of LDA to interview transcripts (2010), Pavón Cuéllar ventured deeply into the use of theoretical concepts such as Lacan's three registers (symbolic, imaginary, and real) and their recognition's consequences for discourse analysis. Pavón Cuéllar (2010), Ian Parker (2010), and Callum Neill (2013) have all offered demonstrations of the direct application of Lacan's structures of discourse: the only direct examples of how one might employ the discursive schemas in research besides those few collated by Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (2006) in their edited volume interrogating the lessons of Lacan's (2007) seventeenth seminar.

We should keep in mind that Lacan’s notions of discourse emerged and were practiced by him in a clinical setting. While this clinical context governs much of Lacan’s teachings, distinct reference to the social can be read in his 1969-1970 seminar The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, the text in which his four structures of discourse are elucidated. Discourse as one encounters the term in

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6 Indeed, this is, as Lacan points out in his seventeenth seminar, discourse at work. For the first ten years of his seminar, Lacan delivered his teachings at Sainte-Anne Hospital in Paris. Lacan reveals in his first seminar delivered at the Faculté de Droit at Place du Panthéon in Paris that the location in which a discourse takes place is indeed part of the contextualization upon which meaning can be made in said discourse. It shapes the discourse and provides apparatuses of signification upon which sense occurs in speech. Teachings in Sainte-Anne Hospital are invariably based on the analytic experience as encountered in the clinic. Teachings at the Faculté de Droit see Lacan indicting locations for their role in discourse and making repeated reference to the social ‘agitations’ that affect his teacher’s discourse.
the body of Lacan’s work, is overwhelmingly ‘analytic discourse’ (Lacan 1998b, p.26). That is, it is
the discourse at work in the psychoanalytic session, taking place on the part of the analysand,
facilitated by the analyst. This distinction between the clinical and social scientific application of
psychoanalysis to discourse is conspicuous, and while Lacan provides us with the formal tools by
which to analyse discourse, he does not provide us with a particularly workable and congruent
close to a definition of discourse can be found in his first seminar:

‘[T]he subject’s discourse normally unfolds . . . within the order of error, of misrecognition, even
of negation—it is not quite a lie, it is somewhere between an error and a lie. These are the truths of
crude common sense. But—this is the novelty—during analysis, within this discourse which
unfolds in the register of error, something happens whereby the truth irrupts and it is not
contradiction’ (p.265).

Here, Lacan defines discourse: it is not found in the primary use of signifiers, but rather, in a
secondary irruption of the unconscious: ‘it is as slips that they signify something’ (Lacan 1998b,
p.37). Through parapraxes and purposive denials (i.e. negation), the subject’s truth begins to reveal
elaborates on the structuro-determinant nature of discourse, notions that are in line with
conceptualizations of discourse found elsewhere (Foucault 1972), the characterization of discourse
as ‘belonging to’ a subject, being of a subject, indicates the field in which my discourse analysis
takes place.

One can further explore, however, the Lacanian understanding of discourse along the lines
of the universality of the intersubjective in speech. In coming to understand the basic structure of
discourse as presented by Lacan (2007), one needs little guidance to realise that the subject’s
discourse is addressed to an audience or imagined Other. With discourse being constructed from a
chain of signifiers, the signifier enunciated
‘requires another locus—the locus of the Other, the Other as witness, the witness who is Other than any of the partners—for the speech borne by the signifier to be able to lie, that is, to posit itself as Truth’ (Lacan 2006, p.684).

Without an Other, a discourse would cease to function. The subject in question would simply find himself without a locus at which to aim his speech-acts. As these speech-acts come to constitute the ego, without this functional locus of the Other, there would be no place at which to direct speech and thus no way to inscribe oneself in the symbolic order. No recognition or disclosure of one’s being through language would be possible without this formulation of the Other which facilitates the very occurrence of discourse. Discourse is constructed, at bottom, by a chain of signifiers (Lacan 1998b), and so as the signifiers are posited (in verbal speech, and actions-as-speech), so too is the symbolized image which the subject aspires to be recognised as in-the-world.

With the indispensability of the Other to the efficacy of discourse established, we come to the second fundamental concept that constitutes the analytic discourse for Lacan: readability. Aligning with other intellectuals in their description of discourse as a systematised body of signs and statements (Derrida 1978; Foucault 1972; Pêcheux 2014), insofar as the arrangement of the chain of signification underpinning attempts at communication adhere to the laws of a symbolic system, Lacan (1998b) further delineates the realm of discourse which a psychoanalytic approach takes as its object:

‘It is quite clear that, in analytic discourse, what is involved is but that – that which is read, that which is read beyond what you have incited the subject to say’ (p.26).

It is not simply in formal language then, as we know it, that this readability emerges. Keeping in mind that discourse, as Lacan (1991) described above, emerges between the fully articulated signifiers, in the real of enunciation where the formal signifier is absent—to put it simply, a theoretically informed ‘reading between the (actually existing) lines’—what should be noted in light of the above quote, is that discourse is anything which is taken as readable. A spoken word, a
hand gesture, a silence, an awkward silence, all of these are able to be read insofar as they can be symbolized through the use of signifiers and function as subjects for other signifiers just as a word in the dictionary is the subject of those signifiers assembled to signify it. This is the ‘beyond’ that Lacan references above. There is the language employed, and there is the signification beyond. This is where the reading that allows us to locate the subject within a discourse emerges, as does the problem of interpretation.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

By analysing the discourses of the seduction coaches in their YouTube content, I was able to identify patterns of speech and meaning being made that indicated that the PUA was situated within one of Lacan’s (2007) prescribed discursive structures. He was found to be ultimately speaking from the hysteric’s discourse. While this insight is particularly valuable in coming to understand the disposition of the PUA—and even the masculine subject in general—in late-modernity, situating a subject within a discursive structure is not without its limitations.

One limitation to LDA is that it is fundamentally an inquiry into the discourse of a subject. This investigation analysed the speech-acts of a particular subset of subjects so as to deduce their affective disposition. LDA does not—indeed cannot, due to its clinical historicity—analyse or grasp discourse in-general; that is, a wider socio-determinant discourse. LDA focuses on speech acts (Neill 2013; Parker 1997; 2005; 2010) and does not interrogate the discourses of material institutions as one might identify in a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis (Kendall & Wickham 1999). In a Lacanian approach, such social manifestations are themselves determined subjects of language (Lacan 2007).

Another limitation that must be acknowledged—although such an acknowledgement does not particularly set LDA apart from any other research methodology—is that data analysis in an
application of LDA intimates a fundamental inclusion of the subjectivity of the researcher. The researcher’s interpretation, by way of the topologies of Lacan’s (2007) four discourses, must be acknowledged as ‘a necessarily creative process’ (Neill 2013, p.336). Neill (2013), in his introduction to LDA continues:

‘[D]ispense now with the delusion that our reading might produce anything objective. It can’t. And to endure in the delusion that it might is only to endure in a delusion. This is not, however, to recoil to a position of anything goes. But we need to know, to acknowledge, what we are doing when we read, when we analyse, when we interpret. To assume to access an objective plane which somehow transcends our investment or identification in the text is to deny what we do and, from the off, to produce a disingenuous discourse’ (pp. 336–337, emphasis in original).

This limitation, however, is found in all reading and interpretation. Neill identifies the acknowledgement of such a notion as an essential element in producing as close to an honest and informed interpretation as one might be able to offer. Neill’s warning against a free-for-all in interpretation is informed by LDA’s discursive structures. One can only interpret through and against the structures offered by Lacan (2007), steering the analysis towards territory that lies beyond the offering of a kind of ‘rich translation’ across hermeneutic frameworks. One must conduct their analysis with the reflexivity that this realisation affords them, allowing it to inform the application of the methodology so as to produce a genuine, authentic interpretation through the application of the four discourses. The researcher, in analysing a given discourse, must see that despite his being a ‘stranger’ to the discourse, ‘that does not at all mean that he is ‘outside’ . . . Precisely as an outsider he is inside in a certain kind of position’ (Parker 2010, p.166). This position is one that is just as discursively determined as the object of analysis (Žižek 2008).

Finally, while Branney (2008) has asserted that the existent formulations of LDA lack a robust system of data analysis, there has since been scholarship that addresses this very problem. Both Callum Neill (2013) and Ian Parker (2010; 2015) have formulated frameworks through which to approach a text using LDA, providing examples from literature and film to illustrate steps by
which one might interpret social phenomena. In the same vein as these individuals who have
developed LDA’s potential, Pavón Cuéllar (2010) has presented the most comprehensive
elucidation of LDA to date. Pavón Cuéllar (2010) has indicated that the interrelation of the
symbolic, imaginary, and real registers has a profound effect on both a discourse’s manifestation in-
the-world and our ability to penetrate said discourse towards any sort of analysis. By
acknowledging the interplay between these three dimensions of subjectivity, Pavón Cuéllar
suggests that we can more accurately read a subject’s discourse. These registers—the symbolic,
imaginary, and real—designate the three dimensions of the subject’s Being. The symbolic denotes
just that: the realm of symbolic interaction in which meaning is made and communicated (Lacan
2006). The imaginary is the realm of both phantasy and the images by which the subject projects
himself and perceives the Other (Fink 2016). The real is the realm of ‘the failure of representation
as such’ (Babich 1996, p.43), the negative pre-symbolic register wherein signification does not
function (Žižek 2006).

An important parameter indicated by Pavón Cuéllar (2010) in his formulation of guidelines for
the employment of LDA as a research methodology (albeit specifically in the field of social
psychology) is the distinction that must be made by the researcher between the three registers and
the acknowledgements of the essential roles of these registers, along with the differential limitations
of access to them by the researcher. Pavón Cuéllar (2010) points out that while the symbolic
governs the mechanisms by which the imaginary can function, and the real in turn provides the
negative, structural space for the symbolic to perform its role and impose its order, a researcher
should, in a congruent and honest discourse analysis, largely discount the imaginary at the level of
the signifier and consider carefully its actual value for the analysis in question:

‘[D]iscourse analysis can be seriously affected and obstructed by the imaginary of the analyst and
by everything that determines it outside the analyzed discourse. In fact, the imaginary must
primarily be approached to be avoided. Its exploration must be subordinated to the analysis of the
symbolic and the real of the symbolic. In any case, Lacanian analysts should never devote
themselves to the imaginary to such a point that literal discourse is forgotten’ (Pavón Cuéllar 2010, p.10).

It is within these parameters that this research remains, for Pavón Cuéllar (2010) makes this distinction in line with the limitations of a discourse analyst. The content of the imaginary of the speaker can be speculated upon, but there is no direct access to the raw material of this register in the speaker’s mind at the level of the signifier in relation to its signifieds. The imaginary’s function can be analysed, but not its content. One cannot access the sound-image that occurs to an individual when he hears a spoken signifier. It is only the symbolic and its laws as contextualised by the socio-cultural landscape that might be grasped. We have access to the signifiers of the subject and their possible function. We have no access, however, to the corresponding signifieds of said signifiers as they appear and function for our subject at the level of the imaginary (Lacan 1966). It is only the symbolic function that we can approach, for we are subject to the same symbolic interactions as those in our social milieu. Despite the ineradicable level of creation in the production of knowledge from any discourse analysis (Neill 2013), the raw material (words, explanations, valuations) can be approached with a minimal level of objectivity in the considerations of their significance and observed correspondence to a signified in-the-world: While the signifier ‘dog’ corresponds to a particular form of creature for those dwelling in the same symbolic order, the image of this creature will appear differently in the mind of each individual that hears the word ‘dog’. It is ultimately in the identification of the ‘exchange value’ of a signifier for the subject whose discourse is our object that meaning can begin to be accessed from the perspective of the researcher. By considering the symbolic economy at play in a given situation (such as noticing that individuals find something funny, or frown upon a certain speech-act), one can access the meaning at work in a discourse and make effective sense of the use of language there. In the video content analysed then, the imaginary will be approached only at the level of the image, while the symbolic interaction in the
communication between the PUA and his audience will be a key factor in the understanding of the meaning being made in the spoken discourse.

Discourse, Sexual Difference, Jouissance

This section outlines the site of antagonism for the PUA. In eventually locating his speech in the hysteric’s discourse, his recognition as a masculine or feminine subject is acknowledged as a vital distinction that underpins the discord that the hysteric feels. In the interest of informing the reader’s understanding of the claims of this thesis, the relation of jouissance (the subject’s existential enjoyment) to discourse will be elucidated. Such an explanation is necessary, as the way in which a subject enjoys fundamentally indicates his location in sexual difference. Sexual difference is operationalized here in line with Lacan’s (1998b) schema that is founded in the formal operation of the symbol of the phallus: because of the possession of the phallus by a symbolic conceptualization of the father, there comes to exist a set of subjects (that is, masculine subjects), who do not possess it, in relation to the exception that does. This dynamic determines the emergence of the category of the masculine, which is a concrete unity in relation to its constitutive exception (the symbolic father who possesses the phallus). Masculinity can thus be universalized to cover all those who enjoy in a particular manner. Because no such primordial conceptualization of the father, no exception that sets itself apart from all others, exists in relation to the feminine, there is no constitutive exception to form the closed set of woman, leaving the side of the feminine to be constituted by particularities, which are not formally organised into a universal category against one that stands apart from it. This is important to outline because, in ultimately locating the PUA in the discourse of the hysteric, I identify his project as a symptomatic acting out that takes place in order for him to formulate his gender identity in relation to the (feminine) Other which he repeatedly
encounters. He ultimately encounters woman so that he can know her enjoyment in order to better position his own in the schema of sexual difference.

Discourse is constructed by a deployment and arrangement of signifiers by the subject (Lacan 1998a), and it is by way of this deployment that the subject then constitutes himself in-the-world, using language to announce his existence as something in the symbolic order in which he dwells. Lacan (2007) further complicates matters however, with his reference to the role of *jouissance* in discourse:

‘[I]t is clear that there is no more burning question than what, in discourse, refers to *jouissance*. Discourse is constantly touching on it, by virtue of the fact that this is where it originates. And discourse arouses it again whenever it attempts to return to this origin’ (p.70).

*Jouissance*, the subject’s deep-seated modality of existential enjoyment, is yet another element which is found in discourse. *Jouissance* is key as it alludes to a ‘beyond’ of Freud’s (1961) pleasure principle: the rule by which the subject avoids pain and seeks pleasure in accordance with basic drives (such as the consumption of nourishment and engagement in sexual intercourse). *Jouissance* can be formulated as the ‘beyond’ of the pleasure principle as *jouissance* is a transgression of said principle (Lacan 1992; 1998a). It is an enjoyment that heightens the psychical tension that the pleasure principle seeks to abate: it is unbound by the pleasure principle. Given that all discourse is demand, in constituting himself through his discourse, the subject is ultimately demanding that he be loved for what he posits himself as (Fink 2016), by way of what he offers up to the Other to be read: ‘I signify myself as this, read me and love me as such’. Taking into account the presence of *jouissance* in all discourse, the subject then ultimately demands to be understood as *one who enjoys* in a certain manner. Lacan (1998b), in his articulation of sexual difference between the masculine and feminine, posits these as categories of enjoyment into which all articulations of *jouissance* might fall.
In his table of sexual difference (*Figure 1*), Lacan identifies the masculine on the left and feminine on the right. The top-most boxes use formal logic to illustrate the categories of both the masculine and feminine. On the masculine side, the logical schema illustrates the constitutive exception among masculine subjects. The top-most line in the top-most left box of *Figure 1* represents the primordial father, who Freud (2010) identifies as he who possesses the phallus and has access to all women, who was de-throned by the other males of his tribe in the original crime.\(^7\)

Possessing the phallus, this father is the only man who is not castrated. He stands as the exception against which the masculine can understand himself as castrated, as subject to the phallic function.\(^8\)

The father who possesses the phallus is thus that Other against which the masculine can be negatively determined.

On the side of the feminine, however, no such constitutive exception exists. Without this Other against which determinant negation can take place, there can be only an abstract unity – a multiplicity. This is why Lacan (1998b) writes woman as barred in the box on the right and famously said that ‘there’s no such thing as Woman’ (p.72). Lacan posits that with woman existing

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\(^7\) Represented by the formula $\exists x \Phi x$, wherein the existence of one which negates the phallic function is illustrated.

\(^8\) Note the absence of the bar, the negation of the phallic function, in $\forall x \Phi x$ on the side of the masculine.
as an ‘ideal unity’ (Žižek 2014, p.51), she is not categorically universalizable. There is no universal ‘woman’ in Lacan’s schema.⁹

Such an observation has implications for the PUAs’ modalities of enjoyment. What Lacan delineates in his schema is that because of the absence of the phallus and its role in constituting the masculine subject, his enjoyment—his jouissance—is always object oriented. This is why the masculine subject loves by way of a ‘unary trait’ (Lacan 1998b, p.47). The partial object (the breasts, the buttocks, the voice, the frigidity, etc.) in the image of the Other becomes the object against which his enjoyment is organised and around which the Other in question is formulated. This is why Clift (2007) takes note of the PUA’s propensity ‘to view the opposite gender in a one dimensional manner’ (p.49). Of course, the access to the Other in their complete subjectivity is denied (Fink 2016). The image by which one identifies the Other must be ‘filled in’, organised around the same partial object against which the subject’s masculine jouissance is organised (Žižek 2010). This object-orientation of masculine jouissance is not solely about physical objects: character traits, identified goals, and completion of projects are all objects against which he can articulate his enjoyment. The masculine enjoys, then, through that which he takes as his object. This is phallic enjoyment, an—as Lacan (1998b) put it—idiotic, even masturbatory enjoyment.

On the side of the feminine, we find the counterpart to phallic jouissance: the Other jouissance. Such a jouissance seeks a transcendental engagement. Because of the non-universalizability of woman, there is no object around which to orient enjoyment. If the category ‘woman’ is a logically negative category, then it cannot organise itself against the positively constituted object. Feminine jouissance is a transcendental jouissance: that of the mystic, the zealot,

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⁹ This is observable in current gender scholarship: There exists a hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005), however there is no hegemonic femininity invoked as its opposite.
the one who goes beyond. Feminine *jouissance* is the Other *jouissance* and thus organises the irreconcilable Otherness of woman (Lacan 1998b; 2007).10

It should be clarified at this point that masculine and feminine *jouissance* can be found in both biological sexes. Lacan’s (1998b) explanation of sexual difference is primarily a delineation of modalities of enjoyment, not of concrete gendered categories. A subject who functions under the signifier ‘man’ does not necessarily enact a masculine *jouissance*. This is readily observable in explorations of the life-world of individuals who identify with a masculinity that is deemed ‘subordinated’ (Connell 2005, p.78) in the hierarchy of masculinities. Despite mention of hierarchies and gender politics however, what should be noted going forward is that Lacan’s (1998b) schema of sexual difference is a distinction between modalities of enjoyment across the lines of gendered signification. What is crucial here is a subject’s disposition in relation to the symbol of the phallus, not normative notions of gender.

We return then to our dyad of discourse and the *jouissance* that originates in the discourse that is ‘constantly touching on it’ (Lacan 2007, p.70). If we take these elements of discourse, demand, and jouissance together, we realise that the subject seeks to posit a signification of himself through his discourse, elicit the love of the Other, and thereby be inscribed in the symbolic as one who enjoys in a certain manner. *He seeks to be recognised as one who enjoys as something* (man or woman). He offers the image of his *jouissance* through his discourse, the discourse that carries his demand.

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10 Such a modality of enjoyment is readily observed in feminine subjects: the Dervishes’ connection with the totality (that is, God) is one example. Another example is the sexual phantasies of women as opposed to those of men. Where men paint concrete pictures of sexual scenarios in which their ideal sexual escapades take place (logically organised, inhering a narrative structure, involving sex with a known person, etc.) women often report phantasies which involve disjointed structure and a subversion of the subject during orgasm (Vice Staff 2015a; 2015b).
The Four Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analyst</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Master</th>
<th>Hysteric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$a \rightarrow S$</td>
<td>$S_2 \rightarrow a$</td>
<td>$S_1 \rightarrow S_2$</td>
<td>$S \rightarrow S_1$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S_2$</td>
<td>$S_1$</td>
<td>$S$</td>
<td>$a$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: The four discourses (Lacan 2007)

And so we come to the concrete tools of the discourse analysis at hand. These ‘four legged schemas’ (Lacan 2007, p.102) outline the structural form that discourse takes in the organisation of its constituent parts. These four structures are what the PUA’s discourse has been read against, providing the tools for both interpretation and for analysis. The four signs that adorn and make up the structures in Figure 2 ($S_1$, $S_2$, $S$, and $a$) maintain a circular order, with each quarter turn of the arrangement producing a new discourse.\(^{11}\) All speech takes place from one of these discourses, indicating the relation of the subject as constituted through speech to the Other, knowledge, and enjoyment. Here, an explanation of the fundamental structure of discourse as outlined by Lacan (2007) is necessary:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Agent} & \rightarrow \text{Other} \\
\text{Truth} & \rightarrow \text{Production}
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 3: The structure of discourse (Lacan 2007)\(^{12}\)

\(^{11}\) Lacan does eventually re-arrange the order of the symbols to produce the discourse of the capitalist ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2 \rightarrow a$) however, this is in order to demonstrate the consequences of the failure of the master signifier ($S_1$) to function in discourse (Clemens & Grigg 2006) and is generally not considered one of the functional discursive schemas.

\(^{12}\) While in his seventeenth seminar, Lacan (2007) articulates this arrangement in a number of ways ($\text{master signifier} \rightarrow \text{knowledge} \ (p.92); \text{desire} \rightarrow \text{Other} \ (p.93); \text{agent} \rightarrow \text{work} \ (p.169)$), the characterization in Figure 3 is generally accepted as the standard mechanistic schema by which discourse operates among Lacanian scholars (Clemens & Grigg 2006; Neill 2013).
In the top-left position sits the agent. This is what speaks and sits in the position of action in a discourse. The agent here is always figured as having been caused to act (Clemens & Grigg 2006): it speaks to, acts upon, or acts against its Other (as indicated by the arrows in the top-most row of the diagrams in figures 2 and 3) – the site that allows for actualization of the agent’s discourse. The Other is often what elicits action from the agent. The bottom-left position is that of truth. What resides here underpins and shapes the speech-acts of the agent in their actualization in the Other. In the bottom-right position of the schema is the hallmark of discourse: production. From the agent’s speech-act directed at and actualized in the Other, underpinned by truth-knowledge, is produced an outcome, a consequence, a formation whose appearance ensures either a discursive autopoiesis, or an instigation of speech from another discursive arrangement.

The bars that separate the elements in the above mathemes represent repression: the inaccessibility of one element from the position of another. The sign situated as truth, while functional, is not manifestly retrievable for the agent, nor is the product of the discourse readily conceivable to the Other. The symbols’ significations are not univocal. Depending on their position in the schema, the elements take on differing functions. The arrows in the top row of the mathemes simply represent the direction of the agent’s action or speech. He speaks to the Other. He enacts discourse.

‘St’ represents the master signifier. This is an anchoring point of a given discourse, a signifier around and through which other signifiers are contextualised (Neill 2013). It supplies the discursive ground upon which the ‘point de capiton’ (Lacan 2006, p.681) (quilting point) is manifest. The function of the point de capiton is easily illustrated in the difference in the reception of the sentence ‘I have killed’ in different instances of it having been spoken. If a tattooed man in an orange jumpsuit utters the sentence, the meaning and feelings that emerge upon its enunciation are very different from those which might emerge when a man dressed in a finely pressed military uniform replete with medals deploys the same signifiers, even with the same verbal delivery.
Enunciated and non-enunciated signifiers mediate each other. The point at which the understanding—which can always function as understanding even if it is misunderstanding (Cunningham 2012)—occurs in the subject hearing the utterance, is the point de capiton, where ‘the signifier stops the otherwise indefinite sliding of signification’ (Lacan 2006, p.681).

‘$S_2$’ signifies knowledge: ‘everything that can be known’ (Lacan 2007, p.108), or as Neill (2013) puts it: ‘it is the existing body of knowledge, the knowledge of the time. It is what it is possible to think’ (p.343). The role of knowledge is indispensable to the understanding of discourse (Parker 2009), but in going forward, its expansive abstractness must be noted. This includes remembering that, even though $S_2$ refers to ‘everything that can be known’, this ‘is not to suggest that we cannot or should not think the impossible’ (Neill 2013, p. 343) or make allowances for the capacity of such thinking in those whose discourse we analyse.

‘$S$’ denotes the barred subject; the subject who is divided and alienated from himself. The representation of the subject in this manner ‘consists in the fact that the subject is, in part, barred from what constitutes it qua function of the unconscious’ (Lacan 1966, p.3). $S$ is the subject who inheres the divide separating conceptions of knower and known, of self-consciousness and unconsciousness. It signifies the division of the image of the unified body and the experience of it as fractured and compartmentalized. This is a subject who can characterize himself as an I, understanding that he is ‘one one’ (Lacan 1998a, p.141, emphasis in original) – a one unto his own recognition (Neill 2011). $S$ is the subject who is constituted by the lack that marked it upon its entrance into the symbolic order – the lack which orients desire towards object $a$. Such is the conception of the PUA operationalized here, along with his interlocutors.

Object $a$ or ‘objet petit $a$’ (Lacan 1998a, p.17) ($a$), is another of Lacan’s concepts which is simple in its forms, but complex in its fluidity. It is often understood as the object-cause of one’s desire, whatever form that may take. If our subject ($S$) was symbolically castrated upon entrance into the symbolic order, object $a$ then comes ‘to symbolize this central lack expressed in the
phenomenon of castration’ (Lacan 1998a p.77). It symbolizes the lost object: that which marks the subject with the deficiency that he must countervail. Object a symbolizes a lack, it represents what the subject is without, and thus orients his desire. There exists a symptomal antagonism in the subject as he navigates the loss of object a. Object a is related to S1 here, as the subject’s (whose social practice is altered in relation to his pursuit of object a) discourse adopts an S1 to anchor the chain of signification, to signify all other signifiers. This inevitably fails, for the signifier functions always as a subject for another signifier and so always ‘says too much’, the signifier signifies more than it intends to and in this dynamic, the subject’s discourse produces a surplus, articulated by Lacan and presented in the Master’s discourse as a, as ‘surplus jouissance’ (Lacan 2007, p.107), a surplus of enjoyment-as-knowledge. Thus, the non-univocality of a is established, standing in for desire’s object, its cause, its antagonism, and its consequence.

Having established the function of the constitutive elements of discourse, the operation of two of the arrangements above must be elucidated to inform the analysis that follows. The discourses in Figure 2 are the four positions from which a subject might speak, and make up the framework through which the PUA’s discourse was interpreted and analysed. While the analyst’s discourse outlines the ideal discursive arrangement of the psychoanalytic treatment, and the university discourse references the mechanism by which subjects are trained and endowed with certain knowledge, in line with their direct relevance to the findings of the current investigation, the master’s and hysteric’s discourses will be elucidated here.

The discourse of the master describes the relationship between the master and slave. S1 speaks to, acts towards, knowledge (S2). It puts knowledge to work in the production of a, surplus enjoyment (plus de jouir). In the position of truth however resides the subject (S). In the classic arrangement of a (slave)master operating his enterprise, it is, in truth, the work of his subjects—his slaves—that puts knowledge into action in the production of commodities. While this analogy may assist in illustrating the function of the master’s discourse, we must remember that this dynamic is
not confined to the operation of feudal—or even capitalistic—economy. What is crucial to understand here is that when one speaks from this discourse, one co-opts the knowledge of a subject unto the generation of jouissance. It is the subject’s (S) subscription to the laws of the master signifier (S$_1$) and its capacity to contextualise the field, to ‘set the stage’ of meaning-making, that affords S$_1$ its agency here. S$_1$ co-opts the knowledge of the subject towards the production of whatever form object a may take for it. One can see the potential here for both mobilization of this discourse unto domination and for the reproduction of said domination.

With a quarter clockwise turn of the schema, we come to the discourse of the Hysteric, in which we will ultimately situate the speech of the seduction community and its members. In this discourse, the subject, positioned as agent, effectively ‘speaks back’ and is afforded the capacity in his discursive position to question the master signifier (S$_1$): that is, to bring into contention the functioning of the symbolic order in which he operates. S is underpinned by a here. He is compelled by this lack and the antagonism that it imposes. Thus, ‘the law is being called into question as a symptom’ (Lacan 2007, p.43). This encounter produces S$_2$, new knowledge. This is simple in its abstract form and, following Kojève’s (1969)$^{13}$ reading of Hegel, maintains an emancipatory subtext: one stands to inform one’s own freedom from servitude through the synthesis of knowledge. The hysteric’s discourse however, has particular implications for the current investigation. This discourse

‘has the merit of maintaining in the discursive institution the question of what the sexual relation is, namely how a subject is able to maintain it or, to express it better, is unable to maintain it. As a matter of fact, the answer to the question of how he is able to maintain it is the following—leave speech to the Other, and precisely as locus of repressed knowledge’ (Lacan 2007, p.93, my emphasis).

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$^{13}$ In his seventeenth seminar, when discussing differing readings of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, a text which clearly informs the formulation of the four discourses, Lacan refers to Alexandre Kojève as his ‘master’ (p.169) indicating either his own subjectification at the hands of Kojève superior insight, or perhaps intimating that Kojève co-opted his knowledge as per the master’s discourse. Perhaps both.
This allusion to the hysteric’s discourse and its connection with the sexual relation (which cannot truly function (Lacan 1998b)) is crucial here. Not only does the PUA constantly question the symbolic laws governing the social field, but he also mobilizes this discourse unto locating himself within the schema of sexual difference. It is this transgression unto such a location that the following analysis acknowledges for it is through knowing woman that the PUA might come to know himself as man.
Chapter 4 | The Pull: Uncovering the Hysterical

Establishing the Hysterical Location

Having outlined our theoretical methodology, we can now begin, by way of considering the discourse of the seduction community personalities, to characterize their speech-acts as emanating from one of the aforementioned discursive structures. Here, given that much of the seduction community would subscribe to the rhetoric put forward by the personalities analysed, I want to suggest that the PUA speaks from the hysteric’s discourse. Towards drawing such a conclusion, I will first offer fragments of spoken discourse and interrogate them against the discursive structures formulated by Lacan (2007). In locating our PUAs’ subjectivity within the hysterical structure of discourse, I will go on to unpack the implications of this positioning, asserting that locating the PUA’s speech-acts within this discursive structure indicates a number of symptomal manifestations within the seduction community and its members. This will be done while at the same time moving to interrogate the non-location of the PUAs’ speech-acts in the master’s discourse. The symptomal manifestations just mentioned will include a consideration of the PUA’s speech-acts against ‘the hysteric’s question’ (Lacan 1993 p.161) that is based around a sexual ambivalence in the subject. Still analysing the PUA’s discourse in light of its hysterical underpinnings, I will move to offer an explanation, through notions put forward by Lacan (1998b; 2017c) as to why the PUA’s discourse takes on the character that it does, why such a hysterical disposition results in the practices and doctrines which constitute the seduction community, and what prefaces the compulsion to carry out one’s social practice in relation to the capitalistic instrumental rationality that has been identified in the enterprise of the PUA.

In identifying the PUA as speaking from the hysteric’s discourse then, we need to return momentarily to its topology:
Recalling the subject’s ‘speaking back’ to the master signifier ($\rightarrow S_1$), its questioning of the contextualization of the field, we should note that besides the common indictment of the seduction community as deviant, the PUAs themselves actively transgress and call into question normative, market driven, ritualistic societal praxes. They see themselves as subjugated, in regards to masculine hierarchy as Almog & Kaplan (2015) have observed, or even in terms of their general attitude to what might be called mediocre or standard approaches to Being-in-the-world. Jeffy Allen, in suggesting that at PUA should embrace disorder in his life, offers his perspective:

‘There’s a lot of different avenues that most people use to deal with this disquieting realization that there isn’t a lot of order to be found in things. When you look at it a lot of people gravitate towards religion. A lot of people gravitate towards just mainstream societal kind of groupthink beliefs you know? The traditional stuff like ‘go to college, get a good job, get married, have the picket fence, the two-point-five kids, 401K and everything will be fine. The good job where you– your corporate job where you just do your work and leave and get your paycheck every two weeks on the dime. And if you do that, I can set up– like, that’s a system, like structures I’ve set in place around me that’ll protect me from the chaos’ (jlaix 2014b, at 05:48).

Here, Jeffy is questioning normative societal arrangements. He explicitly rejects the normative avenues of engagement in the capitalistic project established in the current literature (Almog & Kaplan 2015; Baker 2012; Clift 2007; Hendriks 2012; O’Neill 2015b; 2017). The invocation of terms such as ‘traditional’ and ‘mainstream beliefs’ indicate that Jeffy acknowledges a kind of societal injunction to subscribe to the lifestyle that Jeffy is demonizing. He acknowledges a regulation, a law outside of which he chooses to live, and against which he defines the dimensions of his deployment of technique and life-project more broadly. He speaks against it and questions its
validity. He has asked why such an arrangement should be adopted and found answers wanting, a trademark of the hysteric (Gherovici 2014). He endorses a lifestyle that he deems characteristic of the ideal PUA, a lifestyle that eschews the categories above, which—as one might notice—contains no articulation of particular substitute objects. Jeffy endorses the openness of chaos and disorder, leaving the field open for the production that might emerge from the encounter between $S_1$ and the $S_1$ in question; that which may gradually emerge from ‘when you realise that the universe is fundamentally devoid of absolutes’ (jlaix 2014b at 14:17). He realises that in interrogating the incongruence of the absolute, one instigates the production of knowledge ‘through the process itself’ (jlaix 2014b at 15:05).

Questioning normative conventions of a culture in which the PUA is embedded is common among the personalities investigated here. In the formal structure of the hysteric’s discourse, it is important to remember that the hysteric seeks truth (Lacan 2007) by way of this questioning, by this transgression. This truth is sought by way of the production of knowledge out of the aforementioned questioning. As Lacan (2007) asserts in Seminar XVII, what the hysteric ‘wants is knowledge as the means of jouissance, but in order to place this knowledge in the service of truth’ (p.97). While Jeffy (jlaix 2014b) mentions that there are no absolutes, the logical fallacy here is that this statement is, of course, an assertion of an absolute, indicating that Jeffy believes in the possibility of their emergence. This questioning of $S_1$ unto the emergence of new knowledge-as-truth continues to emerge in James Marshall’s (The Natural Lifestyles 2016a) teachings:

‘Western males submit themselves to voluntary slavery often for their entire lives because there is the idea that that is ‘of virtue’ in and of itself. Which it’s not. No one ever— [James pauses] No one is there at the end to go: ‘good on ya buddy’. If they are it’s with a watch, it’s like; ‘there you go, off you go. Next! Next! Into the Machine! Churn them up! Churn them up! Yeah? Don’t blame that on feminism, don’t blame that— you can blame it on the military-industrial complex, you can blame it on the Illuminati, you can blame it on whatever, but blame it on yourself. [An individual off screen sings ‘blame it on the rain’] Blame it on the rain, yeah? Blame it on the boogie—don’t do that— blame it on yourself, for staying in it when you realise as of today—or, you guys have
had these thoughts, you know, you’re people who’re thinking outside the box. That’s what people who come here are—it’s not the first time they’ve had that kind of thought before. And it’s the thought that is at the base of the gut of most men as they’re going through another year of that grind, another year of that like: ‘fuck I’m so not happy with my life’” (The Natural Lifestyles 2016a at 10:01).

Again, we see the hysterical questioning of that which is assumed to be governing the lives of men along with a fracturing of the perhaps premature conclusions of existing literature in regards to the PUA’s acceptance of a market-driven mediation of his project. In line with Hegel’s (1977) dialectic of mastery and servitude upon which Lacan’s structure of discourse is based, James calls up the notion of slavery from which man should emancipate himself. This is the emancipatory element of the hysterical’s discourse emerging in our subject’s speech. The hysterical subject, who cannot bear to be the object of the Other (Žižek 1997), questions the master (signifier), the conditions that would enslave him again, for in this dialectic ‘it is only through staking one’s life that freedom is won’ (Hegel 1977, p.114). This ‘staking’ here, is the positing of the subject’s challenge to S1. The movement of $ \rightarrow S_1$ is clearly identifiable in James’ speech here, however his questioning of S1 takes on a particular dimension; it is articulated via a series of negations. Lacan (1991) discusses negation (verneinung) in the discourse of the subject and, following Freud (1959), asserts that it is a manifestation of resistance, blocking the truth of the unconscious, yet simultaneously affirming the presence of the repressed thing. Negation then, is ‘at once to deny, to suppress and also to preserve through suppression, to raise up’ (Lacan 1991, p.62), ‘a removal of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed’ (Freud 1959 p.182). In telling the audience what not to blame their circumstances on, James has affirmed the presence of the effects of these circumstances. ‘We never discover a ‘No’ in the unconscious’ (Freud 1959, p.185) and so James’ denial of the effect of outside circumstances can be read as him believing that an Other affects his life and the lives of men more broadly. While he articulates his negations in a joking manner, the effects of the negation still stand as he, the speaker, has been the one to induct the notion of
responsibility into the discourse. What is crucial here is ‘that the person denying something in this way unsolicitedly introduces, puts on the table, the denied content’ (Zupančič 2017, p.482). If James had been responding to a question asking about the effects of agencies outside of oneself, his negations would not be affirming the repression of anything. Where he found it necessary to negate a notion affirms its repression, its imposition. Thus, by employing such psychoanalytic listening, next to the manifest notions of emancipation from ‘slavery’, we can again deduce the hysterical questioning of an invocation of an effective Other’s imposition on the PUA’s subjectivity.

While there are many other examples of this calling the Other into question in the discourses analysed here, one striking example of this is Richard La Ruina’s calling into question of the congruence of the seduction community’s normative approaches. Richard (Richard LaRuina 2014) addresses a number of techniques deployed, and rules to which PUAs often adhere, and deems endorsement of such techniques ‘advice that might get you in big trouble’ (at 00:23) or simply ‘just stupid’ (at 06.21). Many of the techniques that La Ruina derides are pickup staples, such as ‘demonstrations of higher value’ (DHVs) and proficiency in storytelling. DHVs are an integral part of Mystery’s Mystery Method (2007) and one of the most utilized techniques within the seduction community, while storytelling is actively endorsed, taught, and commodified as a seduction skill (see jlaix 2017). La Ruina’s (Richard LaRuina 2014) discourse here is not performing the move that we have seen until now—a questioning of the efficacy of the social field and its conventions—but rather, a challenge of the normative doctrines of the field of seduction itself, a field which La Ruina is a subject both in and of. While it may be the case that this is a manifestation of the characteristic instrumental rationality of the seduction community that sees O’Neill characterising the subculture as a ‘community-industry’, (O’Neill 2015b, p.1) insofar as La Ruina (Richard LaRuina 2014) may be attempting to delegitimize his market competitors’ content, in light of the general rhetoric of the seduction community in relation to their questioning of conventions, this may be an example of the hysterical relation to the Other manifest within the seduction community itself. La Ruina’s
followers carry this suggestion further. A number of comments on La Ruina’s video denounce his content and reassert the conventions of the seduction community:

‘This whole video: basically whatever mystery endorses, we shouldn’t follow’ (Chad TV 2017);

‘Bah, so negative. I like that you wanna talk some sense into guys but over the back of Mystery, who helped us get where we are is just a no-no’ (Social 24/71 2017);

‘I thought pua's are exceptional to rules. That's why they stand out’ (Emran Hasib 2017).

Here, we see the interlocution that underpins the continuance of the hysteric’s discourse at play. La Ruina (Richard LaRuina 2014) has challenged the conventions of the field, yet conventions are offered as rebuttal. Mystery’s mastery of the field holds true with the first comment, while Social 24/71 invokes pickup’s historicity; the parameters in which the seduction community’s knowledge-practices (the field of jouissance) emerged. Emran Hasib (2017) calls up a notion by which PUAs identify, and through which, maximise the efficacy of their encounters with women: that PUAs stand outside of convention. This reassertion of pickup ‘law’, its history, and its traditional approaches—just like James Marshall’s negations—negates and thus affirms the characterization of La Ruina’s speech-acts. His challenge of seduction community conventions being rebutted allows us access—in line with the suggestions of Pavón Cuéllar (2010)—to the symbolic economy at play here; access through which we can determine the value of said conventions, and the symbolic weight of challenges against them. To transgress such boundaries, to question their efficacy, demonstrates the hysterical discourse within the field of seduction alongside that which emanates from the seduction community.

Returning to Jeffy Allen (jlaix 2014a), we encounter another discursive challenge to the Other which binds our subject within the symbolic economy that he feels subordinates him. In front of a huge room of PUAs in New York, Jeffy (jlaix 2014a) is, in recalling an exemplary case,
warning his students of the dangers of relating to a woman as a friend, and recommending an interaction based on the sexual difference between the parties involved. Jeffy asserts that a friendly frame of interaction has no chance of being successful: ‘Women will punish bad game ruthlessly. Why? Because they are not running a sex charity for losers’ (jlaix 2014a at 28:02). Prefacing the delivery of his case study with this warning, Jeffy continues to tell the story of a student who has continued to employ a friend-to-friend frame in his encounters with women during his time on boot camp:

‘Ok, so he’s been getting pummelled, ‘nice to meet you, nice to meet you’ so whatever. So long story short I come and I see him and he’s talking to some woman and this woman’s like some old lady, like my age and, you know, her body was pretty hot but her face appeared like some sort of major league baseball equipment, like a cat– like a catcher’s mitt. Right? Like a catcher’s mitt. But, you know, body was hot so whatever and then he’s like kinda– and she’s like you ‘oh honey, derpadaderp’, and she’s like ‘you hot’ but he’s just kind of like ‘ur durdurdur’. I’m like ‘you know what? Pfff step off motherfucker, boom’ and I like shove him away. I’m like ‘yo, come here!’ She’s like ‘hey’ I’m like ‘yeah’, she’s putting her hand on my dick, I go: ‘oh, really? Here, have a look’ and I just, I take it out. And this is in the middle of the intersection at like 2nd and Howard at like 2.30pm. Yeah, it’s like a fair, it’s a street fair. And then so my dick’s out and then she gets like, she starts sucking my dick in the middle of the street. And I’m like, I’m like: ‘See? Do you see now?’ [crowd laughs and applauds] And he’s like ‘yeah, ok’, he’s like, taking notes’ (jlaix 2014a at 28.20).

Here we see a number of themes that have been identified as operating within the seduction community to date: the objectification of women’s bodies (Christensen 2012; Denes 2011), the repeated use of references to sport (Almog & Kaplan 2015), and the engagement in a struggle, through the staking of the self, to acquire knowledge (see the humiliated student resorting to taking notes above) (Hendriks 2012). Our current analysis, however, offers some new insights. Firstly, we encounter a new modality of the transgression, of the challenge to social propriety. While one may contend that these challenges to social convention can be found everywhere, and that what is considered challenging to social norms is forever changing and that the number of actions that may
fit into a category of deviance or transgression may be ever-decreasing, we need only to look at the crowd’s reaction to access the meaning of Jeffy’s act here. Jeffy recounts a story of what is, for all intents and purposes, an act of public indecency.\footnote{Jeffy is speaking of the ‘intersection of 2nd and Howard’ in San Francisco, California. Under the Penal Code of California 1872 (s. 314), Jeffy has indeed performed a misdemeanor: Indecent Exposure or Obscene Exhibition.} It is not only against the law, legally speaking, but also, in relation to the enthusiastic response from the audience, Jeffy’s transgression of the law (both legal and social), holds a symbolic exchange value for the PUAs listening. Jeffy subverts social convention unto the production of knowledge (he offers his transgression as an object lesson on how to navigate encounters with women), which is the hallmark of the hysteric’s discourse for what the hysteric seeks is knowledge in this encounter with the Other ‘as locus of repressed knowledge’ (Lacan 2007, p.93). This is why we find $S_2$ in the place of production in Figure 3 and—as is elucidated below—why Jeffy subscribes to his doxa and enacts its subsequent praxis. This hysterical seeking of knowledge is further reflected in the student’s note taking. Jeffy does not indicate that the student laughed or was embarrassed by the scene in front of him. Jeffy recalls that the student began taking notes, consuming the scene—the transgression of and encounter with the Other—as a locus of knowledge. Thus is demonstrated the dynamic: $\frac{S}{S_1} \rightarrow S_2$. The subject speaks, questions, challenges, transgresses unto the production of new knowledge, towards the emergence of new possibilities for what can be known and new possibilities to deploy what is newly known. It is as if Jeffy is demonstrating the production of knowledge for the student: ‘Do you see? Do you find here the knowledge of how to question through transgression?’

Simple transgression of normative boundaries however, does not a hysteric make, even with the ample evidence of a non-acceptance of the position of object—or slave, speaking from the Hegelio-Lacanian tradition—in the dialectic of the subject and its Other. Having utilized the discourses provided by Lacan to situate the PUA’s speech-acts however, we can begin to comment
on the nature of this subjectivity, even if only insofar as to inform a more robust investigation of the hysterical subject that we have identified.

Before continuing however, it would be prudent at this time to address the PUA’s discourse beyond locating him in the schema from which he does speak, and unpacking his dis-location from the Master’s discourse. This discussion must be taken up in the wake of the established formulation of the PUA as a subject produced of late-modern capitalistic instrumental rationality as discussed in Chapter 2. Given this formulation, locating the PUA within the master’s discourse seems straightforward. His active deployment of instrumental rationality attests to this. Transposing his project upon the schema of the discourse of the master sees the PUA deploying normative conceptualisations of masculine dominance and women’s bodies as truth (Denes 2011). He puts the knowledge of seduction and of the feminine Other to work in order to produce jouissance, designated by \( a \) in Figure 4.

\[
\frac{S_1}{S} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}
\]

**Figure 4:** The master’s discourse, from which the PUA’s speech does not materialize.

In considering the possibility of our subject’s speech coming from the master’s discourse, we should consider three crucial points: Firstly, that knowledge is ‘the Other’s jouissance’ (Lacan 2007, p.14); the primordial unknown kernel of enjoyment’s pure potentiality in the alterity before the subject. Secondly, that the PUA seeks a repeated encounter with this Other, that is, woman. As Lacan (1998b) states: ‘Woman has a relation to the signifier of that Other insofar as, qua Other, it can but remain forever Other’ (p.81). She is ‘the Other in the most radical sense, in the sexual relationship’ (p.81). While this may seem to be a reassertion of a designation that De Beauvoir (1972) so strongly indicted, Lacan (1998b) designates woman as Other here in the sense that she represents a radical Otherness, both in her modality of enjoyment, and in the category’s unlimited,
formal composition as an ideal unity in relation to the phallic function (see Chapter 3). Thirdly, that this repeated encounter, for a hysteric, is enacted in the search for the true essence of the feminine, to know woman as a universalizable whole (Lacan 1993; 2017c). Having taken these three attributes of the hysterical structure into account, we might on an initial approach, find that the PUA speaks from the master’s discourse so as to co-opt the feminine other’s knowledge, to take her as object, that is, as an Other in—but not for—itself, and to co-opt her (feminine) knowledge in a quest to encounter her jouissance (which is an Other, transcendental jouissance) through an engagement in sexual enjoyment. To take her as this object (the orientation of phallic jouissance) is to render her the slave (represented by $ in the master’s schema), as the holder of the necessary savoir-faire. This is to relegate her to, and consume her from, a position that provides the necessary knowledge in order to (discursively) produce surplus jouissance. This reading makes sense. It works. However, what is it that underpins the desire to speak from such a discourse in the first instance? As Lacan (2007) discusses:

‘We can observe that historically the master has slowly defrauded the slave of his knowledge and turned it into the master’s knowledge. But what remains a mystery is how the desire to do this could have arisen from him’ (p.34).

Of course, this arrangement of domination is a familiar one, well recognised in feminist psychoanalytic scholarship (see Benjamin 1988; 1995; Chodorow 1978; Dinnerstein 1999, for example). But why do the arrangement, and the contingent circumstances it produces, become manifest, even in half-complete displays of masculine impotence so often? Why does it repeat? The answer: The PUA only aspires to mastery. He is, at base, as demonstrated so far, a hysterical speaking subject, for—separating the masculine subject from his relationship of dominance over woman for a moment—‘[w]hat remains, in effect, is the essence of the master, namely, that he does not know what he wants’ (Lacan 2007, p.32). This essence here is a phantasmatical excess, an
insubstantial remainder of an attempt at mastery. The standard reading of the PUA as one who speaks from the master's discourse misses the fundamental deficiency at the heart of his project.

In light of this dis-location of the PUA from the master’s discourse, I want to suggest that the current body of literature asserting that the seduction community operates as per the ideologies of instrumental rationality of late-modernity (Almog & Kaplan 2015; Baker 2012; Clift 2007; Hendriks 2012; O’Neill 2015b; 2017) does not go far enough in interrogating the gendered antagonism that underpins an identification with such social practice. In continuing my consideration of the speech-acts of the PUA, I offer that he is, rather, located in the discourse of the hysteric, allowing us to re-characterize a subculture and behaviours that are commonly demonized as not operating through capitalistically informed instrumental rationality in the first instance, but rather through an instrumental rationality that is informed by gendered contingency, where the subject cannot locate himself as man or woman in sexual difference. This allows us to reformulate the dimensions of the PUA’s instrumentality. I present findings that facilitate the characterisation of this instrumentality not as one using woman as an object of pure exploitation and pleasure, but rather, as an object that provides the PUA with the necessary gendered coordinates that will allow him to understand himself in the schema of symbolized sexual difference. It is by engaging the feminine that he might know himself as man.

**Implications of the Hysteric’s Location**

To understand this aspiration to mastery though, we must further interrogate the hysterical praxis of the PUA. Here, I consider the question that structures the hysteric’s behaviour but remains unanswered: a questioning of the nature of woman. I assert that it is a belief that knowing the essence of the feminine will allay the anxiety surrounding a sexual ambivalence in the psyche of the PUA and that it is this formulation of woman as the site of this knowledge that compels him to
repeatedly attempt to witness and account for her feminine enjoyment through the project of seduction. To continue then, we should look to ‘how the desire to do this could have arisen from him’ by analysing the hysterics question:

‘What characterizes the hysterical position is a question that refers precisely to the two signifying poles of male and female. The hysteric addresses it with all his being – how can one be either male or female? – which implies that the hysteric nevertheless has reference to it. The question is this – what is it that the entire structure of the hysteric, with his fundamental identification with the individual of the sex opposite to his own by which his own sex is questioned, is introduced into, suspended from, and preserved in? The hysterical manner of questioning, either . . . or . . ., contrasts with the obsessional’s response, negation, neither . . . nor . . ., neither male nor female. This negation comes about against a background of mortal experience and of hiding his being from the question, which is a way of remaining suspended from it (Lacan 1993, p.249).

The hysteric’s acting out then, stems from the search for an answer to this question: ‘What is it to be a woman?’ (Lacan 1993, p.175).15 This question originally arises out of a lack of symbolic recognition of the subject, where the subject in question fails to be fully integrated into sexuality as such (Lacan 1993). One does not effectively distinguish their recognition as sexed being: ‘it’s because one doesn’t become one that one wonders and, up to a point, to wonder is the contrary of becoming one’ (Lacan 1993, p.178). Both male and female hysterics ponder femininity (Lacan 1993) and address its impossibility through a phantasy of its possibility (Lacan 1998b). Beyond the base articulation of this fundamental question however, Lacan indicates in the above quote that this question is addressed through a relation to the Other. It is with reference to this Other, ‘the sex opposite’, that the answer to this question is pursued and so this Other’s truth must be known. Knowledge must be produced of the Other so as to know oneself. The ‘hiding of his being’ that Lacan speaks of in the hysterics discourse is the mechanism by which he mines the knowledge necessary to his project. As I will assert, it is by way of the positing of an image of a ‘woman’s

15 Lacan (1993), in his discussion of the question at the core of the hysterics structure, offers a number of articulations of this question: ‘To be or not to be [woman]’ (p.168); ‘Who am I? a man or a woman?’ (p.171); ‘Am I a man or am I a woman?’ (p.171); ‘What is a woman?’ (p.178); ‘Am I capable of procreating?’ (p.171), and, in relation to the obsessive’s question: ‘What am I?’ Or ‘Am I?’ (p.170).
dream’ (Lacan 2017c, p.192), a ‘man who is perfectly equal to himself, a man who lacks nothing’ (Rabinovich 1991, p.89), that the subject seeks to attain new knowledge of the Other. This new knowledge will then be mobilized by our subject as a reference point by which he might orientate his own sexual position. By knowing woman, he will then possess the necessary coordinates by which to know himself as man. The Other has a crucial role to play here, but first we must explore the PUA’s hysterical questioning of what it is to be woman. Such rhetoric is common among PUAs. Comments and insights on feminine subjectivity abound in the seduction community’s earliest texts (see Jeffries 2008; Mystery 2007; Strauss 2005, for example). Of course, in order to possess an object and use it in its ownmost, one must know it fully. The problem, however, arises when the sought object cannot be universalized, as is the case with the PUA’s object – woman. I claim, by way of taking into account the PUA’s hysterical discourse, that the seduction community’s focus on feminine desire goes beyond a pure instrumentality to possess or consume and, rather—as is indicated by S2 in the position of production in the hysteric’s discourse—indicates a desire to know woman so as to answer the fundamental hysterical question. The discussion of feminine subjectivity is by no means absent from PUAs’ spoken discourse. As Jeffy (jlaix 2015) explains:

‘You know, when you’ve done this and that and you’ve banged 300 odd girls, what tends to happen is you, you become like a girl, in many ways. [Crowd laughs] and what that means…is…you have a period every month [crowd laughs louder]. But, no, you really—hehehe you get kind of attuned to the life that they lead, right? In other words, you have tons of options. You have a deluge of female attention [male members of the crowd can be seen nodding], you have competing girls hitting you up on your phone that wanna get a piece of your time. Every fuckin’ day’ (at 02:57).

Jeffy continues:

‘It puts you into the mindset of a girl. Right? You need to be the guy. You need to be the hot chick that has, you know, lots of girls vying for his attention’ (at 04:26).
It is made clear here that feminine subjectivity stands as a kind of destination, as an end point for the PUA. Jeffy endorses the assumption of the feminine disposition. It is as if the PUA should pursue his project wherein he repeatedly encounters woman so that he might achieve the symbolic value of the feminine, so that he might access her modality of jouissance (the Other’s jouissance). This is, as we have situated the PUA’s speech in the hysteric’s discourse, in order to produce knowledge, to access the knowledge that might offer an understanding of a universal category of woman (which we know is structurally impossible to encounter). Already we see the arrangement which sets up the repeated encounter with the feminine Other which characterizes the PUA’s project. The masculine dimension of this project emerges here as it is when ‘you become like a girl’ that one can access the necessary coordinates of sexuation, coordinates that were previously corrupted by a subordination of one’s masculinity, of one’s failure of symbolico-sexual integration. This becoming ‘like a girl’ sets up the perpetuity of the PUA’s project. The PUA seeks to know woman by assuming her subjective position however, given that ‘for the hysteric, desire is established as the desire to be desired, as desire for desire—that is, desire of the Other’s desire’ (Gheorghici 2014, p.61), which is always not enough for the hysteric (Lacan 1993), the PUA assumes a feminine disposition to know woman, and in doing so elicits the desire of the Other and is doomed to repeat this encounter as the desire to know woman is repeatedly undermined in his encountering her one-by-one; that is, in encountering her in her impossibility of universality.

In the second quote above, the sexual ambiguity of the hysteric is carried further. Jeffy’s assertion that ‘you need to be the guy’ is immediately followed by what would seem to be a purely contradictory statement: ‘you need to be the hot chick’. Note that there is no qualification offered between the two statements. Remaining at the symbolic level of interpretation allows us an insight here: The signification of the injunction to enact masculinity (‘be the guy’) is equated with the signification of an injunction to assume a feminine position (‘be the hot chick’). Jeffy seems to posit that to be one, you must be the other, furthering the assertion that knowledge of one sexual position,
a specific modality unto enjoyment, allows one to know the other. What it is to be woman then, is here invoked as a reference point for what it is to be man.

Besides this manifestation of sexual ambivalence in the hysterical discourse of the PUA, there also occurs an abundance of consideration for how women may be feeling in the face of the seduction community’s pursuit of its goals. One such example comes from James Marshall (The Natural Lifestyles 2016c):

‘Most of the time girls reject the offer for you to come and talk to them not because you’re a loser piece of shit, but because she’s scared of things that she’s not used to. That’s really the main thing, yeah? And we don’t really understand what it’s like to be a woman in terms of how you deal with men, that men are dangerous, overall. Strange men are dangerous. Men that you don’t know through your social circle are dangerous. Because you’re just complete unknowns. Even if you look like a nice guy, you might be a rapist, yeah? Or you might be a guy that’s gonna become a stalker and obsessed with them. Coz– most girls I know have had a stalker of some sort. Not necessarily like the sitting outside the window ones—although yes—but the keeping on texting them year after year. You know, rockin’ up at their work places and sort of sitting outside the front of them. Ummm, like hunti– trying to get into their social circles and doing all this, like, infiltrating into it to hassle them, and being followed, and all this stuff is a reality for women. Uhh, not every woman but it’s very very common and even if they haven’t experienced it, they’re aware that that’s out there. They know that you’re not supposed to talk to strange men because it’s a risk. So the fact that any of these girls ever do talk to us and the fact that that girl walked off with Tom now to go and have a date with him is amazing’ (at 09:15).

With James’ observations here, we encounter an effort—and a demand for such effort given that he is speaking to a paying audience in this video—to offer knowledge on the feminine disposition towards the masculine Other. James elucidates the image of the masculine subject for its Other, the image that the masculine subject is received as for the typical feminine subject. James is of course correct in his observations here (Mellgren, Andersson & Ivert 2017), but what is important to note is the purpose towards which this knowledge is mobilized. While such ‘taking into account’ of feminine subjectivity could be figured as a kind of ‘articulation unto disarticulation’ which scholars such as O’Neill (2015a; 2015c) have described wherein feminine standpoints are acknowledged so
as to licence their disregard, I suggest that what occurs in the quote above goes a step further. Said knowledge is used to facilitate a more effective encounter with the feminine Other. James mobilizes the truth of women’s plight at the hands of potentially violent males to perpetuate the project of the PUA. He mobilizes this truth to further question Si, to more effectively challenge the societal expectations so that the repeated encounter with woman unto her knowability might take place. The fact that James thinks that ‘that girl walked off with Tom now to go and have a date with him is amazing’ is proof of his internalization of the transgressive nature of his project. James relays this information then, to create more effective PUAs, to facilitate their project of knowing woman: ‘Women are fearful of strange men, be a strange man differently so that you might effect a more productive encounter’.

The focus on women in the video from which the above quote was sourced did not go unnoticed by its YouTube Audience:

‘The gynocentry [sic] is strong as hell in this video; although it's natural, and I have nothing against it per say [sic], I still wish you said the truth. Like Will Smith says: "tell the truth". It seems like a PUA needs to justify his existence by creating new obscure content, and blur the reality through assertive frame (making it credible). The truth is there and it's simple: women like men, men like women; there is hypergamy and the woman is choosy, she values sex less than a man does even though they get the same pleasure out of it; and she won't invest as much as you dudes would. She won't approach you cuz she aint need to. So having you begging for sex is, it's fair to say, refreshing and is a gift to the world. I'm not bashing the community, I'm part of it myself, but I wish you guys said some truth.’ (richsocaplaya1 2017);

‘PUA as a whole is gynocentric’ (pete89au1 2017, in reply to richsocaplaya1 2017).

These realizations of the gynocentric nature of the seduction community offer further insight into the subculture’s understanding of its orientation to the hysteric’s question. Whereas the first commenter seemingly indicts James’ content for its obscurity by way of being too centred on feminine subjectivity, the user replying to the first comment naturalizes such rhetoric, asserting that the seduction community is indeed focussed on knowing woman. Between these comments, we see
two different acknowledgements of the seduction community’s gynocentrism: in the first comment, as an obstacle to the completion of the PUA’s enterprise, and in the second comment, as part and parcel of the enterprise itself. richsocaplaya1 (2017), while he feels that the gynocentric rhetoric above obscures the ‘truth’, nonetheless affirms its presence in pickup. The ‘counter-truth’ that he asserts above again avows our hysteric’s focus on truth, on producing the required knowledge through which to better pursue his goals as a PUA. In reply, pete89au1 (2017) seems to blunt the assertion of the richsocaplaya1’s counter-truth by asserting that ‘this is what we do’, yet the comment offered in reply confirms the community’s self-awareness of its rhetoric being largely centred around the subjectivity of the feminine Other against which the masculine project of the community is actualized.

Another avenue by which we can realize the PUA’s functioning through the hysteric’s question is by acknowledging the content of a female dating coach and its impact. Kezia Noble (Kezia noble 2017c) brings the full weight of her feminine legitimation of knowledge to bear in a video in which she is accompanied by one of the coaches that she employs, Jozzy. Jozzy sits next to Kezia and explains the importance of smooth, unapologetic sexual escalation in an interaction with a woman. He explains the importance of the communication of intent, of being unreactive in the interaction, and of physical touching. After Jozzy demonstrates techniques of physical escalation, on Kezia’s body to a group of men behind the camera, Kezia (Kezia noble 2017c) interjects:

‘Preach! Seriously, this guy, he’s, he’s speaking the truth and, you know what? This is going on YouTube and there’s gonna be so many people going: ‘I think this is disgusting’ and, but it, the problem is, it works. This is the truth. And sometimes the truth is a bitter pill to swallow’ (at 16:39).

Kezia continues in conclusion:

‘That’s one of the most ruthless talks I’ve ever heard in my boot camp and, I just, I agree with it all from a woman’s perspective. I agree with it all. I’ve been– I’ve been out with these kind of guys and it infuriates us when we meet these guys but it works, it works’ (at 26:42).
In the wake of Jozzy’s offerings, wherein he reminds students that ‘everything you’re doing in terms of the escalation when you’re on your own, it’s based around, you know, taking the girl home and ravaging the fuck out of her’ (Kezia noble 2017c, at 01:37), and warns that if ‘my entire life comes crumbling down because a girl doesn’t wanna kiss me, I mean, fuck me, you shouldn’t be, you know, you shouldn’t be there’ (at 10:34), Kezia offers the above endorsements. This confirmation of the efficacy of Jozzy’s assertions does two things: firstly it alludes to the inherent transgressive nature of the project being undertaken (‘there’s gonna be so many people going: ‘I think this is disgusting’), again echoing the $ \rightarrow S$ relation of the hysteric’s discourse. Alongside this, however, Kezia speaks to the hysteric’s questioning (which is represented by $a$ in the hysteric’s schema). As Kezia endorses Jozzy’s tutelage, yelling ‘preach!’ and telling the students how much she agrees with what has been put forward, we must take into account the image of that which speaks. Before the men in the audience and those consuming the video on YouTube, is a feminine image, a semblance of that which the PUA would ideally know towards the answering of his question. Knowledge is posited by Jozzy and then legitimated by Kezia’s endorsements. Her image becomes the apparatus by which PUAs seek the knowledge she endorses. She essentially says: ‘this is how you would come to know me’. She also seems to hold the information put forward as universally applicable, offering no qualifications in this instance of situational applicability: ‘it infuriates us [women] when we meet these guys but it works, it works’. It is in the valuation of Kezia’s content (indeed, some of her videos have millions of views), that we can read the PUA’s hysterical discourse further. Through valuing such content which contains a feminine legitimation of the technique by which the PUA might produce the desired knowledge of woman in his discourse, we can figure such content and its (re)production as characteristic of the PUA’s discursive location.

Before moving on, interrogating the efficacy of ‘these guys’ that Kezia speaks about, another notable manifestation of striving to answer the hysteric’s question, seeking to know woman
as a congruent category, is found in La Ruina’s commentary of the power differential in attempts at the sexual relationship. In explaining how pursuing a woman often sees the pursuer relegated to a position of servitude, La Ruina makes reference to the fact that this is one of the only times in which a woman may assume the position of mastery:

‘Imagine that you’re a woman and you have a guy around you who wants to sleep with you. And how does he behave? You know, he’s always saying: ‘Morning, how are you? Do you want to meet later?’ So he’s giving her attention, he’s probably giving her compliments and in a few cases he might even give her gifts, offer to help, and basically be an all-round nice guy. Now, what are you gonna feel if you’re a woman in that situation? You’re gonna feel a sense of value, it’s gonna make you feel good. You’re also gonna feel like you have power over this guy because you’re in the position of choice and you can basically affect his emotions. You know that if you agree to a date he’s gonna be happy. If you say ‘no’ he’s gonna be like: ‘oh, that’s sad’, you know, so you’re in a position of power. And, you know what? The average young girl, you know, she doesn’t have much power in her life. She doesn’t have power in her family, she doesn’t have power at work. So, you know, these situations with guys are often the only situations where these girls might have power. So, that’s why she would wanna keep it going as long as possible’ (Richard LaRuina 2016, at 00:55).

Here, the first acknowledgement that we should make is that La Ruina finds the need to articulate this message. He has realized this arrangement and thus warned the aspiring PUA against being entrapped within it. La Ruina makes the observation that most young women are indeed without a significant abundance of power in many dimensions of their daily lives (in the domestic setting (Power 2010), public space (Mellgrenn, Andersson & Ivert 2017), and in the workplace (Iverson & Rosenbluth 2010), not to mention in the sexual field) yet seems to articulate this absence of power as a kind of void into which a sexually interested man might fall. The fact that La Ruina finds it necessary to offer such a warning to men speaks to the notion that the PUA should be equipped—by way of such realizations—to question the contextualization of the sexual field, to be wary of the meaning that the discourse might produce given its arrangement of speech-acts. At base, he tells the
audience ‘if you do act a certain way, what you represent, by way of your speech acts, will be fundamentally different to that which you desire’.

This misrepresentation then sees the pursuer relegated to the position of truth in the master’s discourse, wherein $S$ is not questioning or speaking to the $S_1$ of the discourse, but rather helping to (re)produce the object of its efficacy as an $S_1$. A PUA, who has made the misstep against which La Ruina warns has thus nullified his status as a seducer in the symbolic field and is in the position of the slave who the master (in this case the pursued woman) ‘defrauds’ of his knowledge, of his enjoyment: ‘he’s giving her attention, he’s probably giving her compliments and in a few cases he might even give her gifts, offer to help, and basically be an all-round nice guy’. While I use the Lacanian figurative ‘defraud’ here, there is nothing particularly disingenuous occurring on the part of the pursued woman, as La Ruina points out. The normatively powerless feminine subject has here encountered a manifestation of her mastery and, as Bruce Fink (2017) asserts: ‘the master is unconcerned with knowledge: as long as everything works, as long as his or her power is maintained or grows, all is well. He or she has no interest in knowing how or why things work’ (p.31). In defrauding the pursuer of knowledge, of his jouissance, she cares not for an interaction wherein she might encounter and know his masculine enjoyment. She just goes on enjoying the prestige in which she otherwise does not partake. La Ruina then, is effectively issuing an injunction to the audience. He asserts that if one is to be an effective seducer (and all that comes with it), one must maintain a disposition towards the Other in which one can more effectively encounter its knowledge, its jouissance. To access the enjoyment of the Other (which is, as above, the locus of knowledge in the social link of discourse), one must avoid relegation to servitude. One must instead, assume a position from which one challenges the Other’s valuation, the efficacy of its power. La Ruina endorses the maintenance of the hysterical disposition wherein one does not produce enjoyment for the Other, but rather knowledge of the Other through an encounter with her. He essentially recommends that if one intends to encounter a true idea of the feminine, one must
question and transgress any position of dominance that she might find herself in, that there is no access to a true feminine essence against which one might locate his own masculinity (or, potentially, femininity) if one relates to her from a position of servility. For Richard, the hysterical disposition is the correct way to produce knowledge of the feminine.

**The Form of the Hysteric’s Question**

Having located the PUA in the hysteric’s discourse, wherein his speech-acts question the efficacy of S₁, and having explored the dimensions of this questioning insofar as it takes place against the background of the subject’s perceived failure of inscription into the sexuo-symbolic field, further investigation of the form that this hysterical discourse takes in-the-world will be undertaken. In the hysteric’s encounter with the Other, the encounter by which the hysteric’s query of the essence of the feminine takes place, the answer given in reply is never enough. The hysteric effectively posits himself unto the Other, the locus of S₁, and in the pursuit of the knowledge by which he would locate himself in the field of sexual difference, asks by way of this positing: ‘What am I?’ He, out of this encounter, receives some articulation of ‘You are this!’ as he reads the reception of his image in its reflection out of the Other (Lacan 1993). Thus, the primacy of the image in the hysteric’s discourse emerges. Gherovici (2014) explains the contours of the hysterical questioning in the encounter with the Other:

‘To this other, the hysteric addresses the question: “what am I?” and identifies with whatever answer is provided by whoever occupies the position of the Other. “Whatever you say I’ll be” (a witch, a saint, a hysteric, a pithiatic simulator, a martyr) . . . the hysteric is a speaking riddle who commands the Other to answer the question, “what am I”? This demand compels speech and expects an answer even if this answer is marked by an essential flaw. When the Other responds to the question, “What am I?” with “You are this”, it reduces the subject’s search to a finite object. But no answer can settle the hysteric’s question’ (p.58).
This asking of the Other ‘What am I?’ should not be read as a manifest occurrence. Of course, one rarely, if ever, encounters another individual who sincerely asks for an answer as to the nature of their being. The hysteric’s question then, is posited by way of the image. It is the positing of the image of the one to the Other that ‘compels speech’, that elicits an answer to the hysteric’s question. In the person-to-person encounter, ‘What am I?’ is, at a manifest level, rather asked as ‘What do you find this image before you to be?’ as for one to be recognised by the Other as something, effectively actualizes the image in-the-world. It thus inscribes the recognised thing into the (sexuo-) symbolic order, disclosing its being. Here is where Lacan’s (1998a) notion of the ‘donner-à-voir’ (p.115), giving to be seen, asserts its importance. It is through this mechanism that our hysteric seeks an answer to his question. This is why, as Jeffy (jlaix 2014a) alludes to above, a ‘man-to-woman’ relation is recommended in the PUA’s interactions: In relating under these signifiers, the subject elicits the sublation of the concrete positioning of the feminine and masculine for-itself and for-the-Other, actualizing a schema of sexual relation by which our hysterical subject might find himself inscribed in the symbolic order. It is by way of the image that the subject is fundamentally situated in the social field:

‘[I]n the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture. This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which—if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form—I am photo-graphed’ (Lacan 1998a, p.106, italics in original).

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16 The play on words which is present in ‘donner-à-voir’ lends further meaning to the phenomenon discussed here. Literally, this can be translated as ‘to give to see’, ‘to give so as to allow a viewing’, but, in its enunciation, this figurative can take the same phonetic form as placing the two infinitives for ‘to give’ and ‘to have’ side-by-side with no conjugation: donner avoir. A literal translation of this arrangement would yield: ‘to give to have’, which speaks perhaps more directly to what is going on in the positing of the image of the ideal-ego to the Other in a quest for knowledge of this Other, and of the self in relation to this Other: ‘I give my image so as to have knowledge’, or ‘I give my image so as to have my Being’.
This figurative used by Lacan, ‘photo-graphed’, is thus an indication of how, at base, in the social relation, the subject is received as a photo, an image, and is ‘graphed’. That is, accounted for and situated under a set of symbolic coordinates. The ‘effects’ that the subject ‘receives’ are the consequences of the reception of the image one posits to the Other. We can quite readily encounter an interaction with this mechanism in the PUA’s discourse and it is via this interaction that we might recognise a furthering of the mechanism by which our hysterical subject moves to answer the hysterical question, all the while questioning his relegation to a position of servitude in the master-slave dialectic that governs the hysteric’s discursive relation to S1. The curation of the image posited to the feminine Other is a recurring theme in the discourse of the PUAs analysed. This curation seems to straddle a distinction between being and showing-to-be. While some PUAs endorse a fundamental assumption of the identity of a seducer, such as in the ‘natural game’ schools that Hendriks (2012) distinguishes, others recommend a more straightforward approach in which one works to offer an altered image of the self to the woman encountered: one should appear as something that is known to be appealing to the feminine Other. Whether the subjects in question assume a modality of being, or instead go to the effort of performing a type of being, we should keep in mind that the hysteric’s question is posited through the image, for as Lacan asserts above, the image is the zero-point of interpersonal interaction, ‘the screen is here the locus of mediation’ (Lacan 1998a, p.107). One such example of this curation of the image is found in instruction from Richard La Ruina (Richard LaRuina 2015). In a discussion on the ineffective nature of the infamous neg, La Ruina, again questioning what was once seduction community convention, comments on the image that subscription to said convention presents:

‘It’d [negging] just come off as try-hard, calculated, and, ummm, it’s almost…She could say you’re an asshole or she could say…it– it’s not funny. Alright? So, it’s just an insult. It’s making her think you’re giving her a compliment and then taking it away. It’s just bad. What’s the point?’ (Richard LaRuina 2015, at 04:57).
Here, La Ruina speaks of the mechanism by which an image is presented, and how one might present an image that is not particularly conducive to seduction. This mechanism is, of course, the manipulation of signs, the use of signifiers. La Ruina states that offering a constellation of signifiers—composing and delivering the neg—itself places the speaker (the PUA) under a signifier for the Other; the particular attempt at signification ultimately results in a signification of the agent who enacted said attempt. Where the PUA attempts to signify his target in order to get her to question her social value and raise his own, the very act of doing so affects the image before the target of the seduction. The PUA is painted with the residual signification of his speech act; his image is affected. Just as La Ruina asserts, it ‘comes off’ as something. In this case, La Ruina posits that such a speech-act will signify to the intended seductee that the performer of said speech-act is ‘try-hard, calculated’, even ‘an asshole’. La Ruina warns against using negs for this reason. He continues:

‘There can’t be too many things going on. You have to show that you’re a nice guy and you will be good to her. You’re not— you can’t be an asshole, right?’ (Richard LaRuina 2015 at 28:08).

Warning against signifying that one is indeed ‘an asshole’ via one’s speech-acts, Richard is here recommending that one should, in keeping the interaction simple and straightforward (‘there can’t be too many things going on’) and signifying that one is indeed ‘a nice guy’, one will be more successful in these interactions. This quite simply demonstrates the donner-à-voir that is present in social interactions being especially emphasised in the practices of the seduction community. The PUA must curate his image so that in his positing of his hysterical questioning, he might receive an answer as to how he appears in the world and simultaneously be allowed further access to the knowledge of the feminine Other opposite: ‘If I present the correct image, an answer may be proffered, or I might be allowed access to the jouissance of the Other, where I might know woman, and thus know man’. Here the PUA assumes that by appearing to a woman in a manner that she might appreciate, he will be allowed access to knowledge relating to her femininity. He assumes
that if he were to gain this knowledge, he would be able to understand masculinity in relation to this femininity. The problem here, as discussed above, is that there is no single true femininity. There is only the particular femininity found in each particular woman. The hysteric’s belief in the existence of this true femininity, however, persists nonetheless. He needs to know what it is to be woman.

The PUA’s curation of the image is not confined, however, to this display, this crafted likeness-to-an-ideal that PUAs such as La Ruina would recommend. Since ‘[t]he issue here is a question that arises for the subject at the level of the signifier, of the to be or not to be’ (Lacan 1993, p.168, emphasis in original), the primacy of the image remains in place even at the level of Being. Instead of periodically appearing as a semblance of that which could be recognised as man by the Other, the ‘natural game’ schools of pickup recommend forgoing this intermittent performative approach and adopting a state of ‘ex-sisting’\(^{17}\) (Lacan 2016, p.10) as that which would elicit attraction. This approach endorses being a seducer over doing seduction. James Marshall (The Natural Lifestyles 2016b) exemplifies this approach to the accomplishment of the seduction community’s project. In discussing a particular seduction that he performed, he speaks about the assumption of the seducer’s identity:

‘This story, for me, marked a massive transition. And I wrote this at the time, the, you know, the thing that I wrote was uhhh: ‘The end of my most successful week of pickup to date in which I achieved my twelfth and thirteen scores for the year and graduate to true seducer.’ Which was what I wrote at the time. Because, this episode, for me, marked a massive internal shift. Leading up to that I had been still getting results. I’d been going out, meeting women, I’d been getting laid, umm, but, from that point I had a massive change in terms of my mentality and I really internalised the identity of a seducer. It was not something anymore that I was practicing. It was something that I was’ (The Natural Lifestyles 2016b at 01:46).

\(^{17}\) Ex-sistence is thus the modality of existence outlined by Lacan whereby, because the Other is the locus of the actualization of the subject’s being through speech, the subject’s existence is only made concrete by his Being-towards-the-Other. That is, disclosing his existence in the reception of his image, of his speech acts, by the Other to which he posits them – the Other towards which his being is oriented. The subject’s being is an extimate Being (see Lacan 1998b & Lacan 2016 for examples of this term’s use).
James Continues:

‘From this point on, I really realised that what I say is not nearly as important as how I feel and what is the message that I’m projecting to her. So as a result, she felt: ‘ok this is a sexual man, he’s powerful, he’s gonna get the job done so she responded very quickly and then we escalated from there’ (at 06:59).

Here we find James tarrying with the prospect of a static identity of seducer, as if this identity is occupiable, and where one assumes this identity, its effects are felt by the Other (‘the message that I’m projecting to her’) and a reflection of what our subject is in the symbolic is returned. James posits his image as a question—What is this before you?— and receives an answer: ‘this is a sexual man’. The first thing to note here however is a latent contradiction in James’ speech in the first quote above that goes as far as to demonstrate on the one hand the de-centeredness of the subject, and on the other hand, the ongoing nature of the project in question; that the buck has not stopped, so to speak, with James’ announcement that he has internalised the identity of a seducer. We hear the split subject speak here in his subversion of the normative understanding of the self that he has initially internalised. Firstly, it is obvious that James recognises that, in the first instance, he was not a seducer, and that he eventually came to represent the image of the seducer for the Other through a process. Secondly James recognises himself as one, he observes his Being. This reveals that despite his assertions of what he finds himself to be, there exists for him a position, from which he continues to speak, which is separate from the position of the ex-sistent seducer. As much as James asserts that he is, to do so reveals the remaining potentiality of the fact that he is not. James is again transgressing, speaking back, to the relegation of his masculine self to a subordinate status in which he did not have access to women, did not have access to the potentiality of a reference point by which he might know his status as man. He is questioning S1 in this discourse. This non-identity of the position from where he asserts his movement into the image of seducer for-the-Other and the position of the actual occupation of said image reveals the gap that the PUA must continually curate his image—how he appears for-the-Other—to traverse. There is no total occupation of the image of
seducer, there is only repeated estimate actualization of this image in its reception by the feminine Other. This is why the PUA repeats the encounter with the feminine. He must continue to approach woman so as to approach this potentiality of inscription into the sexuo-symbolic order, to be recognised as James finds himself to have been recognised above.

This management of one’s being is further demonstrated by Valentino Kohen (2017b). In Valentino’s speech however, we find that there is an instrumentalization of identity which is intended to locate the subject under a particular signifier that would facilitate more efficacious encounters with the feminine Other:

Valentino: ‘And you can also just tell yourself: ‘you know what? I’m this kind of guy’. An identity is the strongest force in the human psychology. Who you think you are will determine what you’re going to do and how you’re going to act. If you say ‘I’m a vegan’, it doesn’t take you any effort to not eat meat, because you’re not a vegan – you’re a vegan. Even if it tastes good and it tastes good at one point in your life, if you make that decision, you’re like: ‘that’s my identity. Done.’ If you make the decision of ‘you know what? I’m a giving person’, if there’s a [sic] opportunity to give, you give. If you say ‘I’m a person that takes action and if there’s a challenge I push through’, then any time that happens, you fuckin’ push through. Most people are kind of, like, in between, and they’re not even fuckin’ clear about what their identity really is. When you make a decision like: ‘I’m not a smoker’, you’re not gonna smoke. Done. If you’re: ‘I’m a smoker’, then you’re gonna keep smoking because you think you’re a smoker. So if you decide: ‘this is the kind of guy I am’, it doesn’t take any will power to do it.’

Student: ‘Yeah, it would be harder to not do it’

Valentino: ‘Exactly. Because then you would go against your identity and that’s one thing you would never do. The strongest force in human psychology. Make sense?’ (Valentino Kohen 2017b, at 01:24).

In Valentino’s tutelage, we find a more overt assertion as to the PUA’s hysterical questioning. It is clear that in identifying the contingency of one’s identity that the ‘What am I?’ in the PUA’s discourse emerges. Valentino’s recommendation to ex-sist as something, to be something-for-the-Other by way of an attempt at signification (recall Valentino’s ideas around the consequences of
identifying as vegan), makes more concrete this questioning. Where the injunction to appear as something in the symbolic field emerges, so is signalled an absence of a concrete appearance in said field. Valentino recognises that to ensure an encounter with the feminine Other, the locus to which one’s speech is addressed, in whom one might find the necessary site of knowledge (S2) of femininity, one must present an image about which the answer to the hysteric’s ‘*What am I?*’ can be offered. Valentino’s suggestions are yet another example of the compulsion to curate the image for-the-Other to whom the hysterical questioning is addressed.

**The Pickup Artist and the Don Juan Fantasy**

There is an obvious crafting then, of an image that I suggest goes beyond the facilitation of the hysteric’s questioning in the first instance. The answer that the hysteric seeks (what it is to be woman) unto his inscription into the sexuo-symbolic field is never enough. The knowledge produced out of the hysteric’s discourse is always insufficient, and so the PUA’s compulsion to repeat his characteristic acting out (approaching women in order to access their feminine *jouissance* via the sexual encounter) is entrenched. Gherovici (2014) explains the mechanism underlying such behaviour:

‘When the hysteric exposes the insufficiency of the answer offered by the Other (whatever the answer may be), the hysteric makes visible the place where the other is lacking, a lack that the hysteric is in fact occupying as the insurmountable enigma. Identified with the other’s lack, the hysteric can fantasize becoming the Other’s desire. This is a double gesture: on the one hand, it uncovers the Other’s lack, yet on the other hand, the hysteric offers [him]self completely as a plug to cover up the void in the Other. The hysteric reproach shows the Other’s failure, but if there is any room at all for reproach, it is because the other was expected to be complete, to have all answers, and so on’ (p.59).
And so the hysteric runs up against the absolute unknowability of the non-universalizable category of woman. Hampered by woman’s status as categorically incomplete, as an ideal unity, and by the impossibility of the sexual relationship, the hysteric’s questioning is never met with a satisfactory answer. Whatever knowledge of woman that our hysteric might glean from his encounter could only be of that one one before him, that one woman, and so he cannot acquire the necessary coordinates by which to orientate himself in the category of masculinity – a concrete unity, a universalizable category. As Gherovici explains above, the unsatisfactory answer that, for the hysteric, would have allowed him to locate himself in the schema of sexual difference exposes the lack in the Other. The hysteric, uncovering this deficiency by way of positing his question, seeks to compensate for this shortfall by—by way of curation of his appearance for-the-Other—becoming ‘all for the Other’ Gherovici (2014, p.59). Where the Other has fallen short of the hysteric’s expectations of being able to provide the basis upon which a knowledge that would answer the hysterical question might appear, our hysteric moves to nullify this deficiency so as to re-assert the potentiality of the appearance of the knowledge that would answer this question. Thus is the ongoing nature of the PUA’s masculine project further established. The repeated encounter must accomplish a two-fold objective: reveal knowledge of the feminine in order to locate the masculine, and compensate for the Other’s inability to reveal such knowledge.

This striving to appear as ‘all for the Other’ is readily identifiable in the discourse of our seducers. In discussing why one should readily approach women on the street, James Marshall (The Natural Lifestyles 2016c), recognises the deficiency in the Other and how the PUA might appear as a solution:

‘Most people’s lives are pretty, just, routine. Most people, unless they are deeply in love, and have the most satisfying career, and are in perfect health and their family life is awesome – which is not most people – ummm, are living in various levels of dissatisfaction and boredom. Most girls that are walking around – unless they are the chicks that have me or him [James gestures out of frame], or some amazing thing in their life are bored, lonely, horny. Bored, lonely, horny. Yeah? And they
may be just two of those things or one of those things but often they’re a combination of those things in the same way that you guys are when you’re not living your truth, when you’re not living the life that we are building the skills to live for the rest of your fucking lives in this week. So when you go up to a girl, for the most part, you’re giving her at least the opportunity to have something that’s more interesting than a normal day’ (at 03:30).

From the outset here, James acknowledges the deficiency in the Other. He articulates this scarcity by way of noting ‘dissatisfaction and boredom’, an absence of enjoymen
t, of jouissance, which is the locus of knowledge. He figures himself as one that would complete the Other as he notes that he would be enough to make up for her lack (‘unless they have me’). He asserts that by approaching woman, one presents to her the raw potentiality of that which would make her whole. But why would the PUA care if the Other was made complete in his interaction with her if his sole purpose, as scholars like Denes (2011) would suggest, is to manipulate women into bed? Surely no consideration of being something of such abundant completeness would be necessary if all that was at stake was a sexual encounter. The fact that such a suggestion is proffered speaks to the presence of a beyond of the manifest content of the PUA’s dealing with women. This figuring of the seductive self as all-for-the-Other, I suggest, retains its functionality on the side of our hysterical subject. It is so that the PUA can phantasmatically sustain an image of himself that might facilitate the more effective answering of his hysterical query as to what it is to be woman. To complete the Other—the feminine Other who is categorically not-all (pas tout), an un-knowable, un-universalizable particular—the PUA posits himself as that which would fill in the lack-in-the-Other. This would, for the PUA, render the Other knowable, and by knowing this feminine Other, the PUA would then—so far as he is concerned—find a reference point in the schema of sexual difference by which he could situate himself as man.

This conception of the self as that which would abate the Other’s lack and render her able to answer the hysteric’s question goes further however. Debriefing his students, after he himself was rejected by a woman, Valentino Kohen (2015) explains:
‘Coz I got rejected, my state went up, skyrocketed. Ok? A girl told me to fuck off and I felt ten times better than before the approach. How in the world is that possible? Right? Because I focus on what’s positive, what’s funny about this. If a girl tells me like: ‘go away’, in my mind I’m just like: ‘you don’t even know. Like you’re so retarded, you have no idea what kind of life I’m living and if you would be part of my life, umm, like, your experience of everything would just be magnified in every area. If you have any problem I’ve probably read, like, three books about that thing. I can help you with anything’ (at 39:24).

Here, Valentino is blatantly denied access to that which would facilitate his location in the sexual field. He is rejected, and in the face of this inability of the feminine Other to provide him with his required answer, he immediately asserts to himself that he is what would allow her to answer, that he is that which would compensate for the lack that underpinned her ability to provide him with the coordinates of a categorical concrete unity of woman that would address his hysterical questioning. In the woman in question’s demonstration of her deficiency in Valentino’s eyes, he reflexively launches into assertions that figure him as all-for-her. He even goes so far as to point out her deficiency (‘you’re so retarded’) and, in turn, proclaims the relative value of his lifestyle in turn. Such a response directly demonstrates the hysterical conceptualisation of the self that would, for the hysteric, assist in his quest for instrumental knowledge of the Other. The hysteric, of course, can never access this knowledge (Lacan 1998b), and his question cannot be answered. Such are the underpinnings of the way in which his project is one of repetition, an ongoing process of the self.

This continual repetition then, speaks to the fantasy of the PUA, the Don Juan fantasy that sustains the constellation elucidated above. As Lacan explains, ‘The hysteric separates [him]self from and turns away from the Other and from the signified of the Other so as to come to locate [him]self in a certain ideal type by means of an image with which [he] identifies’ (Lacan 2017a, p. 461). He wishes to be all-for-the-Other, to know woman, and it is in his repeated encounter with this pas tout that he enters into the Don Juan fantasy in which the solution to this problem presents itself: the ‘myth of Don Juan is that he has them one by one (une par une)’ (Lacan 1998b, p.10). To
enact the Don Juan fantasy would be to overcome the non-universalizability of woman by addressing each particular imaginary site wherein the PUA might recognise the potentiality of the ‘true’ feminine. It is only by ‘building his case’, as it were, of the true feminine, that the PUA might etch out his place in sexual difference. Lacan (2017c) explains the notion of the Don Juan fantasy:

‘The Don Juan fantasy is a woman’s fantasy because it corresponds to a woman’s wish for an image that would fulfil its function, a fantasmatic function, that there be one of them, one of these men, who has it – which, from experience, is clearly a misrecognition of reality – better still, that he always has it, that he can’t lose it. Precisely what is implied by the position of Don Juan in the fantasy is that no woman may take it from him, and that’s the crux of it. That’s what he has in common with women, whom one cannot take it from, of course, because they don’t have it’ (p.201).

Thus, the crafting of the image discussed above meets the seducer’s compulsion to repeatedly come up against woman unto instrumentally knowing her. It is obvious in the quote above, however, that Lacan characterizes the Don Juan fantasy as a feminine one; a fantasy of a man that woman could possess that would not be marked by the castration that is formally characteristic of man (it even circumscribes him). This does not necessarily exclude man from sustaining the Don Juan fantasy from his side. Indeed, his lack marks him as subject and compels his desire to attain that which was lost: object a, in whatever forms that may take. The fact that man’s ‘anxiety is linked to the possibility of not being able’ (Lacan 2017c, p.189), and that his desire is compelled by his internalised deficiency, speaks to the notion that, as his desire functions, he would strive to be whole, to reach the ‘state of zero tension’, to nullify his constitutive lack by attaining that towards which object a orients his desire. Lacan (2017c) qualifies this Don Juan fantasy’s existence across the boundary of sexual difference:

‘For the woman, it is what initially she doesn’t have that constitutes the object of her desire at the start, whereas, for the man, it is what he is not, and that’s where he falters’ (p.189, emphasis in original).
And so, again in relation to the constitution of the seducer at the level of the imaginary, in offering an image of himself for-the-Other, man offers what he is, in relation to what he understands the Other to want to have. It is from this side that the PUA, in the enactment of his masculine project, can enter into the Don Juan fantasy, a fantasy that is there to be found by him in the cultural milieu in which he is situated (Kray 2017). Enacting his project through the Don Juan fantasy facilitates the crafting of the image for the Other in which he has ‘it’, that is, the phallus. He offers that he is not marked by castration and is a man who is equal to himself, meeting the requirements of the feminine side of the Don Juan fantasy. It is by way of curating his image thus that he can better access the jouissance of the Other. That is, her knowledge (S2): ‘If I am all that she desires, I will gain access to her Other enjoyment and thus locate my modality of enjoyment, my sexual positioning, therefrom’. It is this curation of the image for-the-Other, underpinned by the hysterical Don Juan fantasy that shapes the dimensions of the PUA’s praxis.

The ongoing, repetitive nature of the PUA’s project to locate himself in the schema of sexual difference then, emerges in the unknowability of woman as such. His hysterical questioning is repeatedly deprived of a definitive answer. He must keep repeating the seduction community’s fundamental act: the approach. He must take woman one-by-one unto attaining the necessary sexual coordinates by which he might locate himself as man; coordinates that were lost to him in his past masculine subordination (Almog & Kaplan 2015; O’Neill 2015b; 2016; 2017), a subordination, a waywardness, that stands as the antagonism that compels $ to speak to $1.
Chapter 5 | Last Minute Resistance: Conclusions

Having taken account of the PUA’s speech-acts via Lacan’s theory of discourse, we find that his gendered project, one that takes place by way of the feminine, is one whereby our PUA seeks to locate himself within the schema of sexual difference. The PUA exists in a state of sexual ambivalence. He enacts his project in the hope of abating this ambivalence. This state of dislocation that the PUA experiences comes by way of a failure of inscription of his enjoyment in the symbolic register, in which sexual difference is actualized, as a masculine or feminine jouissance. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, this failure occurs at the symbolic level through the presence of the function of the phallus qua object of primordial lack. The subject’s Being, as masculine or feminine, is actualized in-the-world by an alignment with gendered modalities of enjoyment. The masculine subject enacts an object-oriented enjoyment, however because of woman’s categorical constitution as non-universalizable, she ‘turns out to be superior in the domain of jouissance, on account of her bond with the knot of desire being much looser’ (Lacan 2017b, p.183). She enacts a transcendental jouissance which is radically Other, which is not necessarily object-oriented. This non-identity in the categorical formulation of sexual difference results in an impossibility of communication between sexed subjects and undermines our subject’s ability to enact his project of sexual—that is, gendered—identification by way of an encounter with the feminine; a feminine which he seeks to know via his repeated encounters, so that he might come to recognise his own sexual classification.

This seeking to know is identified in our placement of the PUA in the hysteric’s discourse. By finding in his speech a recurrent questioning, and transgression, of social—and even seduction community—convention, I was able to situate the PUA’s speech in the discourse of the hysteric, where he questions the social context which relegates him to a position of gendered servitude (without the practice and techniques of seduction, he would not have access to woman or
enjoyment). Recalling the structure of the hysteric’s discourse, where the discursive product is knowledge ($S_2$), we can observe that the knowledge that is ideally produced by the PUA is knowledge of the feminine Other. This is demonstrated in the repeated instances of gynocentric speech found in the PUA’s discourse, along with the occurrence of feminine legitimation of said speech. It is through the questioning of the Other that the hysteric produces his knowledge, however, as Lacan urges us to ask: what is it that underpins and compels the originary questioning in the first instance?

The answer to this question is found by inquiring as to what occupies the position of $a$ in the hysteric’s discourse. What resides in this position, the truth that compels the agent’s ($S$) speech, is itself a question: ‘*Am I a man or am I a woman?*’ (Lacan 1993, p.171). It is here that the failure of the aforementioned symbolic location of the subject in the arrangement of sexual difference comes to underpin the symptomal manifestation of our hysteric’s speech. This hysterical question is asked in the discourse of the PUA. He repeatedly makes claims as to the idea of feminine subjectivity and endorses the repeated encounter with woman. He seeks to know woman. If one knows woman, if one encounters this Other’s *jouissance* (that is, knowledge), he might better characterize his own *jouissance*; he might better characterize his own sexual position and answer his hysterical question. The problem for our PUA, however, is that the question can never be answered due to the non-existence of the sexual relationship, and to the fact that there is no knowable, universalizable category of woman as such. Woman exists as a non-universal ideal unity. To know her, like Don Juan, he must take her one by one.

The entrance into this Don Juan fantasy that underpins the manifestation of the PUA’s project however, is instigated by the uncovering of a lack in the feminine Other. Our hysteric posits his question to the feminine Other by way of putting forth an ideal image, the *donner à voir*. He asks: ‘*What am I?*’ The Other, by way of her very interaction with the hysteric offers an answer: ‘*You are this!*’ This answer is always found wanting by our hysteric. Where the Other was supposed
to offer an answer that would put an end to the hysteric’s questioning, she exposes her lack of knowledge. Knowledge of this lack, this incompleteness, is produced out of the hysteric’s questioning: a knowledge of the incompleteness of knowledge. The questioning must continue.

To continue his questioning though, our hysteric must find a subject who would be complete; who would be whole enough to offer an actionable answer. The feminine, always *pas tout*, must be made complete. This is where the Don Juan fantasy emerges. Don Juan is that which would make woman whole. Don Juan is the subject who negates the phallic function and is equal to himself before woman. The PUA seeks to be all-for-the-Other so as to render her complete enough to answer his question. If he, as this Don Juan, encounters woman so as to know her as a concrete unity, he might find the coordinates by which to know himself in the graphing of sexual difference. He curates his image, he undertakes his ‘ascetic hedonism’ (Hendriks 2012, p.1) through which he seeks to actualize his being as all-for-the-Other; as the image of which the Other will desire and introject so as to make her whole, to render her competent in answering his question. This answer never comes, and so is the PUA’s project locked in a repetitious loop: to posit an image of the self *qua* question, and to receive an answer that is wanting – to only posit the self again to effect a more efficacious answer to the hysteric’s question.

It is here, then, that we identify the antagonism that accompanies the PUA’s social practice as one that is structured and mediated by market rationalities. While this formulation of the seduction community’s practices is established in current literature on the subculture, what is found by way of this discourse analysis is a primordial discord of sexual ambivalence in the PUA. His fundamental non-location within the schema of sexual difference is what compels him to undertake his project, and is what secures him within its repetitious loop. While his social practice may reproduce conditions of domination, in the first instance, one cannot posit that it is a male seeking of dominance or power that originally compels the PUA to enact his project. I claim that it is firstly a fundamental deficiency in the PUA (a deficiency to which they readily allude) that underpins his
identification with a subculture that serves to reproduce gendered power differentials in a society driven by market forces. Against the established understanding of the PUA’s project as one that emerges from capitalist instrumental rationality wherein he instrumentalizes the Other towards a production of domination and mastery, I claim that he instrumentalizes woman so as to produce knowledge; to know himself as man, as one who is inscribed in a concrete unity in the schema of sexual difference. Ultimately, in the first instance, woman is instrumentalized from a standpoint of emancipation, not domination; a standpoint which only when embedded in the capitalist instrumental rationality, results in the gendered power imbalance that is identified today.

This research, besides developing claims as to the nature of the PUA’s enterprise, has demonstrated the efficacy of LDA as a research methodology in the social sciences. LDA has been applied here to a living social object and has aided in the production of unique conclusions as to the PUA’s subjective understanding of himself as sexed. It has been in the speech-acts of the PUA, where transgression, questioning, identification with the subjectivity of the feminine Other, and the pursuit of knowledge have been located. By applying Lacan’s discursive structures, we were able to employ tools to interrogate the PUA’s sexual subjectivity and realize that the seduction community’s endeavour is underpinned by a particular sexual contingency; a contingency whose resolution is sought in the repeated encounter with woman that the PUA endorses.

This research has also revealed the potential utility of the psychoanalytic category of hysteria for the field of men’s studies. By locating the masculine subject in the hysteric’s discourse, I was able to identify a symptomal deficiency at the heart of his praxis. Diverging from narratives of male compulsions to dominate and subjugate, we have uncovered the possibility of an inimical kernel that produces the concrete circumstances of such domination in the first instance. Such findings have direct implications for intervention strategies, where messages that operate around a management of transgressive masculine attitudes, may be modified to engage this deficiency more directly, towards an encouragement of a reconceptualization of masculinities as sites of
vulnerability and potential for positive self-development, undermining categories of ‘traditional’
manhood.

These findings reveal that the PUA’s praxis is fundamentally grounded in ambiguity around
one’s sexual position. This alludes to possible future directions for both research and practice. The
findings here intimate that it is because man is fundamentally less-than, castrated and subject to the
phallic function, that his compensation for such deficiency results in the gendered power imbalance
whose presence is well established today. This indicates that further fruitful inquiry may be
undertaken, and initiatives formulated, that work towards removing, or universally negating the
phallic function, pointing to the formulation of ideas relating to the deconstruction of categories of
fatherhood and masculinity as possible approaches that should be re-adopted from a psychoanalytic
standpoint towards engineering gender equality.

Identifying the PUA as hysterical lends further knowledge to the ongoing discussion
concerning the PUA’s embeddedness within political economy and its technological rationality. In
taking up the current vein of research wherein the PUA is situated within broader constellations of
economic ideology (see Almog & Kaplan; Baker 2013; Clift 2007; Hendriks 2012; O’Neill 2015b;
2015c; 2016), we find that the seduction community’s praxis is a technologization of knowledge
unto inscription in sexual difference. The PUA ultimately instrumentalizes existing knowledge in
evolutionary psychology and social science so as to question his relegation to a place from where he
was once unable to access the feminine.

The psychoanalytic methodology deployed here has shown that the PUA’s project is
ultimately formulated from his gendered dis-location and commences by transgressing and
questioning this dis-location via an encounter with the feminine. The PUA’s masculine project is
ultimately dependent on the recognition of the feminine Other as a locus of potentiality; a
potentiality of inscription of the PUA as a masculine—or at the very least, gendered—subject. The
recognition of this potentiality in the feminine Other goes beyond the established notion that gender
exists in a purely categorical relation, but goes as far as to suggest that it is in the interlocution of genders that subjects seek to establish their sexual difference. It is not in pure difference that the gendered subject exists, but rather in the knowledge of a gendered Other through which to plot one’s gendered coordinates.

Because of the non-functioning of the sexual relationship however, the potentiality recognised in the feminine Other by the PUA remains as such: a potentiality. As demonstrated in the repetitious loop that constitutes the form of the PUA’s project, there can never be an actualization of the inscription that the PUA seeks; an inscription into the sexuo-symbolic, being recognised as man. It is this impossibility of resolution that allows the seduction community to exist as a subculture, one that organises and circulates information that would facilitate a more competent encounter with woman; knowledge that would promote a more effective production of the coordinates that would allow for gendered signification in the symbolic order. By locating the PUA in the hysteric’s discourse, it is apparent that he effectively cannot resolve his understanding of himself as gendered. It is in his identification with his subculture’s practices that he seeks to enact a solution to this confusion and it is against woman-as-Other that he seeks to do so. The PUA does not know whether his enjoyment marks him as man. He continually asks woman if it does.
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