

R — RELATIONSHIPS

The Emotional Epistemology of the Red Pill

by **Alexander** · March 16, 2023 · 13 comments · 14 minute read

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Epistemology refers to the theory and philosophy of knowledge and belief. It explores questions such as what knowledge is, how it is acquired, and how we can justify our beliefs. Epistemology also examines the limits and validity of knowledge claims, and the relationship between knowledge, truth, and justification.

When psychologists research relationships they operate under a certain epistemology: the scientific method. The scientific method relies on empirical evidence to develop and test hypotheses, which are then evaluated based on their explanatory power and ability to make accurate predictions. This is the epistemology of the scientific method. It makes some assumptions about how to acquire and test knowledge.

There are other epistemologies: feeling, intuition, and subjective experience for example. These constitute the primary epistemologies of the red pill. We will explore them below.

What is the epistemology of the red pill?

The red pill is one of our sub-cultural *folk psychologies*. "Folk psychology" refers to beliefs commonly held about the psychology and behavior of others (usually popular beliefs, often wrong). An example of a folk psychology is the refrain "opposites attract." Is it true? In fact, research indicates the opposite: *assortative mating*. Rather than opposites attracting, similarity attracts.

Nonetheless, “opposites attract,” like most folk psychology, is a widespread belief. Why? For one, it’s a meme. It is simply passed around. It’s also intuitive. *It feels right.*

Ultimately, this is the basis for a great deal of red pill folk psychology as well: it feels right.

There is a phrase used in the red pill: *female solipsism*. Solipsism, in philosophy, refers to the belief that one’s own mind is the only thing that can be known or verified to exist. Female solipsism is used to mean that women are emotional, subjective, and unable to take abstract positions of thought independent of their own personal experience.

Yet, this describes precisely how the red pill works.

About one year ago I had no social media. I made this website, a YouTube, and a Twitter account. It has grown more than I expected and during this time I have interacted with many denizens of the red pill subculture, positive and negative. A common refrain I have seen is “*don’t trust statistics bro, trust your own experiences.*” Very little is more “solipsistic” than this.

“*Don’t trust statistics bro*” is an example I will use to illustrate how two epistemologies collide. I have seen members of the incel subculture claim that 80% of men are not having sex. However, representative statistics indicate a much smaller number: a full 70% of men are in relationships and sexlessness across the population (even in cohorts where it is high – let’s say 18-30) is only about 30% at a high estimate.

Where might they form such a belief? Well, for one, it’s pretty hard to form a probabilistic belief about a population based on personal experience. You can’t experience 80% of men not having sex. They might get the impression that most people around them aren’t having sex and assign it a number. This is what we do, cognitively, when we don’t really know the likelihood of something. We just guess. Pure vibes. It actually isn’t a horrible decision-making strategy, because it’s all you’ve got when real probabilities are unknown.

Great — now you have a prior probability that is subjective. It’s your best guess. At that point, you’re presented with statistics. This means someone took the time to count the numbers. The numbers have been counted and they say: 30%. Do you therefore shift your belief away from 80% (that was based on basically nothing) or just maintain it indefinitely?

If you think that your subjective feelings, intuitions, collections of anecdotes, and limited experiences are all that matters, then you probably don’t shift it. You probably just maintain it.

This is the epistemology of the red pill. It is the belief that knowledge is best accumulated through one's own experiences and intuitions. Further, that knowledge accumulated through one's own subjective experiences is as valid as any other empirical evidence — maybe even more valid!

This is also reminiscent of a current trend in academia: support for *alternative ways of knowing*. In fact, it's the same thing. It is an appeal to individual subjectivity and emotion. Fundamentally, a rejection of the "Western" method of knowledge acquisition and epistemology. Many in the red pill would take exception to being compared with this "woke" trend. And yet, the epistemology of both is the same.

Of course, both "*trust your feelings, not data bro*" and "*alternative ways of knowing*" are riddled with limitations. First, there is no degree of freedom between you and your own experiences. Second, it rejects the experiences of others — most of whom do not share the experiences of men in the red pill, nor your experiences more generally. Third, your experiences will always be shaped by your own behavior. This will usually make the people you interact with unrepresentative of "normal" people. Fourth, it offers no real predictive power.

Third is crucial, so let's talk about that. The red pill contains overlapping subcultures that say "all women are sluts," while at the same time encouraging men to "spin plates," or pursue promiscuous sexual strategies. Men who have highly negative attitudes toward women end up having repeated bad experiences with women — and then report "all women are like that." Might the pursuit of a promiscuous sexual strategy put them in contact with promiscuous women that shape their perceptions? Might their own hostile attitude toward women determine the quality of women that they attract?

Well, obviously.

Assuming they have any success at all and don't fall into the PUA-to-incel pipeline (the observation that pick-up and red pill community members have gone over into incel and MGTOW communities), most of these men end up having bad experiences with women. Every single experience they (or you, or me) have with women passes through the filter of who they are as a person. Why does Person A have consistently good experiences with women and Person B has consistently bad experiences? Individual differences between Person A and Person B. Differences in your personality, your behavior, perhaps your physical appearance, and maybe even your brain.

This is why our own experiences end up being a bad estimate of the experiences of others.

Anecdotes, emotion, and imbecile empiricism

If the issue were limited to the debate between subjectivity and empiricism that would be one thing. What's even worse is that the epistemology of the red pill mostly doesn't rely on personal experience at all. The epistemology of the red pill relies more on third-person anecdotes. We could call this *imbecile empiricism*.

A great number of red pill denizens don't actually have much first-hand experience with women. Many of the top influencers within the subculture rely on TikTok videos, sex workers, and porn stars as examples of "female nature." You can build a successful online media presence by inviting the least intelligent women you can find onto YouTube and humiliating them with basic questions. This is a tried-and-true formula for success within the red pill. A whole genre of this exists. Young men with little relationship experience will lap it up, because they don't know any better, and because they have no frame reference to compare it with.

Social media is the Zoomer version of what we had in the 90s: reality TV. You might as well believe that professional wrestling or Jerry Springer is real. It's the empiricism of imbeciles. You are letting an algorithm feed you information that has been shaped by multiple layers of systematic bias, and in many cases is a deliberate performance.

This is not "real-world experience" either, by the way. It may seem obvious that second-hand anecdotes are not the same as actual experiences you have had in the real world. These are clearly two different ways of acquiring knowledge. However, many people seem to struggle with distinguishing between the two. When I have asked red pill denizens to recount their personal experiences with women, it is not uncommon at all that it turns out there is no personal experience. A shockingly large number of men have developed beliefs about women, dating, and relationships based entirely on what they have seen online.

Given this, it's also not surprising that so few men in relationships hold red pill ideological beliefs. It's almost as if having actual good experiences with women inoculates you against this ideology.

What second and third hand data can you really trust

People who center emotions and anecdotes in their epistemology are not simply naive buffoons. They are capable of skepticism and critical thought. You can see how quickly the spirit of strong

empiricism returns to their bodies in the “survey” and “self report” discourse. *“You can’t trust surveys bro, people can lie on those.”*

You know who really has an incentive to lie? An anonymous PUA account on Twitter selling a “seduction hacks” guide. A shock-outrage TikTok account that says wild shit and gets paid for every view. The tabloid that spins a story about divorce designed to wind you up. Every guru selling a membership in their secret club.

If even half of the motivated skepticism for actual research was applied to the red pill’s wild tales no one would believe a single tidbit of the discourse that takes place within it. The only reason why someone might believe “guy on Twitter who told me all women will cheat,” but not statistics that show most women do not cheat on their husbands, is because that is what they want to believe. This is a sad fact about human cognition — *people believe what they want*. It is called *motivated reasoning*. There are individual differences here, too. Some people are better at keeping this in check. Others are completely unable to even recognize it.

Setting aside that the anecdote-fueled red pill has a flat out financial incentive to lie to you, consider the less nefarious effect of selection bias.

Selection bias occurs in research when a selection of participants for a study is not representative of the target population. This means that the behavior of your participants is not generalizable. You can’t conclude anything about the population from the people you are looking at. This doesn’t just affect surveys. This affects imbecile empiricism, or the use of anecdotes, even more.

A woman who goes on TikTok to show her labia through a sheer dress illuminated by a ring-light (yes this was a real viral clip) was not randomly picked and is not representative of the general population of women. A woman who goes on the Daily Mail to talk about how she cheats on her husband through the Ashley Madison hook-up website (yes this is a real article) chose to do that *because her psychology is different from all of the women who did not*. They self-selected into it. These are noteworthy and become viral precisely because they are rare behaviors. No one is writing an article about how a wife didn’t cheat on her husband for the last six years. “Girlfriend makes a bagel for her boyfriend” will never get a million views on TikTok. Typical and mundane behaviors don’t get clicks because they are the norm.

This is what a lot of what psychology is, by the way: learning to understand how individuals are different from one another. Further, learning in which ways individuals are different and how to predict those differences. “AWALT,” the red pill acronym “all women are like that,” is the antithesis of having a good understanding of human behavior.

Evolutionary psychology is science-y

A fun fact I learned studying neuroscience is that people love anything with “brain” in the title. There are papers on this. When a publication mentions the brain, or mentions neuroscience, news outlets are more likely to pick it up. People judge the same news stories as more trustworthy when neuroscience or the brain is mentioned. The brain is science-y.

This is despite a fact well known within neuroscience — the best data in neuroscience about behavior is behavioral data, not brain imaging. It is the *reverse inference problem*. You cannot assume anything about mental states, thoughts, behavior, or personality from looking at a brain. You can only correlate brain activity with behavior. If you want to measure actual behavior, you’re best off using classical psychology paradigms. If you want to measure attention, you use an attention test. If you want to measure intelligence, use an intelligence test. Brain imaging tells you remarkably little about real world behavior or psychological states.

Within the red pill, the phrase “evolutionary psychology” has this effect. This is not a critique of actual evolutionary psychology, which has produced an enormous amount of good data on relationship behavior. It’s a critique of *just-so stories*. Red pill influencers regularly invent, out of thin air, evolutionary explanations for observed phenomena. Then they call this evolutionary psychology. It is not.

What is a just-so story? The term was coined by the author Rudyard Kipling to describe a fanciful or speculative explanation for something, often presented as if it were factual. Just-so stories are typically used to explain the origins of customs, beliefs, or natural phenomena, and are often based on little or no evidence. They are often told in a way that makes them sound authoritative or convincing, even though they may have little basis in empirical observation. The term “just-so” comes from Kipling’s book of the same name, which contained a series of fanciful stories intended to amuse and entertain children.

Here is an example of an evolutionary just-so story:

“Women love the color pink. Why? In our ancestral environment, men were hunters and women were gatherers. As gatherers, women who were better at spotting berries

were able to acquire more food. This increased their reproductive fitness. The genes of women who loved pink were passed on. A love for pink is now hard-wired in the female brain. This is why women love the color pink."

This story is plausible enough. It could be true. I made sure to include phrases from actual evolutionary psychology, such as "ancestral environment," "reproductive fitness," "genes," and of course our beloved "brain" which is "hard-wired" for the love of pink. The bullshit story I just made up, which is actually untestable and unfalsifiable, sounds very science-y.

Of course, actual evolutionary psychology has never denied the role of environment and culture. That we associate pink with women and blue with men could be entirely social. There is no reason to believe it is "hard-wired" in the female brain. It's rare that you'll ever hear such a thing described in such black-and-white terms in evolutionary psychology. This should raise a question: when evolutionary psychologists talk about evolutionary psychology, why does it sound so different from when "evolutionary psychology" is used in red pill discourse?

A key difference between real evolutionary psychology and a just-so story you find in the red pill is the use of statistics. The very same statistics the red pill encourages men to discard in lieu of vibe, subjectivity, and anecdote. All hypotheses are testable. The test itself is statistical. You must recruit a large group of people, ask them questions or observe their behavior, and run the stats.

For example, one of the more well-replicated sex differences in behavior that evolutionary psychology has revealed is that men cheat more than women. How do we know? Men report cheating more than women. Women report being cheated on more than men. When divorces are initiated, women cite infidelity more than men. Consistent with this, men score higher in the personality trait of sociosexuality, an individual's willingness and desire to engage in sexual relationships outside of a committed partnership, and the extent to which they pursue such relationships. Men also report a desire to have more sexual partners. Men and women have a "libido gap" as well. In experiments where men are asked for casual sex by an attractive stranger, most men say yes, while virtually no women say yes. More recently, we have dating apps dedicated to having extramarital affairs — more men than women sign up to these. Women report more fear of new dates and casual sex partners than men do, as well.

Note how this is different from a just-so story. Every point is quantifiable. "Men/women do/say x more" is a statistical statement. There is no vague appeal to "hard-wired male/female nature." Every point is an empirical statement based on the collection of data. A sex difference in personality is observed (sociosexuality; fear) that is consistent with a behavior that is observed (infidelity; signing up to affair-oriented dating apps). Together, across the research, the data come together to support a hypothesis.

I selected male infidelity as an example because men in the red pill hate it. Despite being one of the most well-replicated sex differences in relationship behavior, and despite the red pill's superficial love of evolutionary psychology, sex differences in infidelity are somehow very controversial. Indeed, you can make up evolutionary just-so stories for why women cheat more:

"Women are hypergamous, meaning they seek mates up in status. Seeking higher status mates drives female infidelity. As soon as a better partner comes along they will leave their current partner. This is why women cheat more."

Here I have invented a plausible story for why women should cheat more than men. But do they? The data clearly indicates that they do not, regardless of how you measure it. This example shows how easy it is to craft a bullshit evolutionary story for a behavior that we do not actually observe. But this is not science, nor evolutionary psychology. It is evolutionary story-telling. You might as well believe Jurassic Park is real.

This is also the epistemology of the red pill: story-telling. Remember when I said the epistemology of the red pill is that it *feels right*? This is part of it.

Who really studies human behavior

I have had people ask me: "what does the red pill get right?" Indeed, it would be strange if the red pill got nothing right. No ideology is wrong 100% of the time. You'd have to deliberately try to be wrong 100% of the time. Even a stopped clock is right twice a day. But as Jordan Peterson likes to say, it is not a good question. A better question than "what does the red pill get right" is "what has the red pill discovered." The answer is, frankly, nothing.

Every tidbit and factoid the red pill occasionally gets right is drawn from mainstream psychology. This is why the red pill often relies on citing “evolutionary psychology” for authority. Incidentally, when the stars align they are also happy setting aside their motivated skepticism of statistical research and accepting the findings of studies that are *conducted in the exact same way as any other in psychology*. There is not one single true thing you could learn from the red pill subculture that you could not have found within mainstream psychology (but, there are many false things). At best, what you get is pure ideology with some psychology mixed in.

Here are talking points common in the red pill:

1. Hypergamy. Women show a preference for men higher in status.
2. Women initiate most divorces.
3. The dual-mate hypothesis: women trade off “good genes” in a mate for providership.
4. Sex differences in male and female psychology are biological.
5. “Alphas” and “betas;” or, the existence of a social dominance hierarchy.

Did the red pill discover or invent any of these? Not a goddamn one. Every single one is plucked from mainstream psychology (some now obsolete, unreplicable, or otherwise called into question). No one in the red pill has ever made a single discovery or contribution to human psychology. What they have done is craft a folk psychology derived from tidbits of mainstream psychology mixed with pure ideology.

Another good question is “what doesn’t the red pill tell you.” Well, a great deal about human psychology. For relationships specifically, here are some well-replicated observations:

1. A large majority of people in relationships report high levels of happiness with them.
2. Promiscuity is relatively low.
3. Most sex occurs within committed relationships.
4. People form “positive illusions” about romantic partners and view them highly favorably.
5. Prosocial behavior is attractive to women.

Why does the red pill love list A but not list B? The two are not incompatible; I have written about all of these topics. So why does the red pill go to such lengths to hide facts about relationships that are not negative? It’s because the red pill is cynical narrative storytelling. It’s a charcuterie board of the least flattering elements of behavior spun into a catastrophizing yarn. At best you will get an incomplete picture of human psychology. At worst, pure and destructive fiction.

TAGS: Epistemology Evolutionary psychology Ideology Red pill Relationships

Statistics

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13 COMMENTS

Pancake Mouse says:

March 16, 2023 at 6:46 pm

If you wish to know the truth, look towards guys with verified 100+ (preferably more) laycount. Their observations tend to line up quite nicely with statistics. And they'll be able to tell you things that haven't even yet been studied (like the archetype-pill and media frame).

REPLY

angry says:

April 1, 2023 at 6:21 am

Hello, Pancake Mouse, I have been following your blog for a few months. Would you be interested in joining a blackpill adjacent server on discord and/or being interviewed? I think a lot of the guys would be skeptical of your results and it would make for an interesting conversation.

REPLY

Lisa Fenwick says:

April 18, 2023 at 11:01 am

Verified? Like how? Are the women leaving them Yelp reviews?

REPLY

Siege says:

March 17, 2023 at 3:20 am

I feel like the version of the Red Pill you're polemicizing against (and I agree with everything you wrote, I just don't know of a better word than "polemic"). Is a kind of bastardized, ultra-pop version of it. I consider myself semi-red pill, but I specifically shed the beliefs about "alphas and betas" and "alpha fucks/beta bucks/ovulatory shift" a long time ago because they have been disproved/failed to replicate. There's a lot of good experience gained by men "comparing notes" from hookup and long relationships though, things like congruency testing and various PUA strategies that are very helpful with dealing with women. And a lot of Red Pill and MGTOW content creators have very valuable insights into the legal system. I'm a man who has been the victim of domestic abuse in a marriage, my lawyer literally confirmed everything every Red Pill divorce guru and MGTOW firebrand ever told me: don't go to the police, they will assume you're the bad guy, get your financials together and move out because there are no shelters for men and no one is going to help you. The legal system has been screwed to hell against men, and it's not even a matter of men vs women evo psych, if you give people (who are on some level all rational agents) incentives to act badly they will. I feel like your critique misses these points. None the less I absolutely love your work, please don't stop.

REPLY

hotdogman says:

March 17, 2023 at 4:50 am

Good article but to play devil's advocate for a moment... I think red pill had a positive impact in at least one respect: making it possible to even address these topics. A decade ago it was completely impossible to discuss any gender differences without framing it in terms that reaffirmed tired old feminist shibboleths. However clumsily it may have been, red pill guys did create space for this.

REPLY

Alex says:

June 26, 2023 at 4:07 pm

If anything I think toxic male subcultures made it harder to get biological essentialism back on the menu, since it became so easy for anyone who wished to smear the idea's adherents to taint them by association with the incels.

REPLY

House says:

March 26, 2023 at 4:36 pm

What you describe is radical/extreme redpill. Any ideology, belief, or theories taken extreme without context yields catastrophic results. Perhaps it's the name but for me, "redpill"-ed people are just average folks who wants to understand how modern hypergamy is played and navigate around it. The goal is truth, not hating women. Thus most "redpill"-ed people I know agree with both list A and B (except the alpha/beta crap perhaps) and don't try to invent any psychology. From this frame, "redpill" is simply men adapting their mating strategies to a dating market that significantly favors women. Redpill is probably not the right name anymore since this term has been tarnished to infer to the radical extreme.

REPLY

Chio says:

April 16, 2023 at 11:16 pm

What you describe is common experience with redpillers. They swear women cheat more but at the same time they say men and women are different and they prefer to ignore that women have less sexual desire than men, and they talk about "observable logic/reality" that only them see. If you read their own studies and explain it to them, they say "but is self reported uwu", so only themselves know the truth: women are serial cheaters, they are only in love with chad, blah blah blah and the proof? A tiktok video or something. It's ridiculous.

And is worse if you are a woman, redpill men have told me that I am a dog for having an opinion, that I only want attention, that I try to manipulate them(? or that (in mgtow case) I'm so interested in stranger men romantic lifes, like: "You are criticizing us because we are not dating". And is IMPOSSIBLE to make them realize that I'm criticizing the bullshit they say about women.

REPLY

Kyfho Myoba says:

May 15, 2023 at 12:05 am

I gotta call b.s. from the very beginning. I have been immersed in the Manosphere for the past 8 years. I've seen every channel. I know all the players AND their game. Rollo Tomassi is the Godfather of the Red Pill. All. He. Does. Is cite studies. Reproducible, published studies.

Now, there are many "advisors" that will say, "In your individual instance, or even in all instances, you should trust your gut." But they are saying that about the subject's individual woman/women, not all women everywhere. MOST OF THE TIME, I see a response like, "The statistics say that a male stripper at a bachelorette party will bang the bride-to-be a bit over 90% of the time, ymmv. So, after knowing this stat, trust your gut. Trust, but verify."

Also, I have never, NEVER seen any red pill "authority" claim that women cheat more than men, with the exception of younger women/most recent studies are showing that reported female infidelity is, at this point, almost that of male, and it could, COULD be that due to self reporting it COULD now be a bit higher.

5. Prosocial behavior is attractive to women.

Please explain hybristophilia, then. And while certainly not universal in women, why is it COMPLETELY ABSENT IN MEN?

I'm going to guess that your paragraph on podcasts that get a bunch of "the least intelligent women you can find onto YouTube and humiliating them with basic questions. (This is a tried-and-true formula for success within the red pill. A whole genre of this exists.)" is a [straw-man] attack on Fresh 'n' Fit. If you replace "least intelligent" with "more attractive" and "basic questions" with "logic" then you'd be accurate, but your straw-man argument/article falls flat for anyone that knows anything about the Red Pill. I suppose that your target audience isn't that group, but those that know nothing about it and you want to prejudice them with your nonsense.

You have confused AWALT, All Women Are Like That, with something that is not a "thing", All Women Do That. They don't. But they ARE and they COULD.

Be advised.

REPLY

Chio says:

June 22, 2023 at 12:35 pm

How emotional you have become.

You haven't cited any studies to back up your nonsense.

You say AWALT doesn't mean that all women do that, but a paragraph earlier you imply that women are not attracted to prosocial traits because some women are attracted to antisocial behavior. That is, AWALT, it is impossible for you that there is a subgroup of women attracted to prosocial men and another subgroup attracted to antisocial men. For you there is only one possibility: "all women do that".

And Rollo Tomassi does not cite studies that can be reproduced. He himself invented a graph pulled out of his ass about sexual market value. No study concludes that men see 15 year old girls prettier than women over 30. (Yes, look at the graph well, look at the ages).

And Alex has had a lot of fun with Rollo on Twitter, since Rollo can no longer argue that women have a dual sexual strategy.

REPLY

Chio says:

June 22, 2023 at 12:42 pm

Your emotional interpretation of AWALT still makes no sense, not all women are the same way because they have different inclinations and personality traits. Not all women have the same strategy and behavior.

And you can't prove otherwise. You can't provide studies that prove that half of the human population has the same traits and the same way of being. So no, it's not even "all women are that way" or "all women could be that way".

REPLY

Kyfho Myoba says:

May 15, 2023 at 1:10 am

One more thing. Just because something is very difficult or impossible to measure doesn't mean that it's not important. It certainly doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.

REPLY

Kevin says:

August 14, 2023 at 5:04 pm

You're confusing the redpill with the blackpill for starters. I agree the redpill is bullshit because redpillers are in denial about being genetically inferior, while we incels admit it.

Also, pure scientific facts do not always lead to actionnable advice, and the redpill is a (failed) attempt at extracting actionnable advice from science. (Although, as an incel, the only actionnable advice I can deduce from the science is "I should put a bullet in my skull because my genes suck too much for me to ever have a gf")

REPLY

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