

The Rise of Male Supremacist Groups

How age-old misogyny morphed into an explicit ideology of hate



JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

Stephanie Russell-Kraft / April 4, 2018

When Marc Lépine murdered 14 women at Montreal's École Polytechnique in 1989, he claimed that he was "fighting feminism." When Anders Breivik murdered 77 people in Norway in 2011, he was in large part motivated by his hatred of feminism, which he considered a poison and threat to the future of European men. And when Elliot Rodger killed six people in Isla Vista, California, in 2014, he said he did it to punish young women for rejecting him and sleeping with other

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These massacres were painted as the acts of lone mad men, but they have a clear common thread: a desire to dominate women and a conviction that society oppresses men in favor of women. Those misogynistic beliefs, so depressingly familiar and widespread, have hardened into a more distinct force in recent years, and have been fueled by the election of Donald Trump and the resurrection of white supremacist groups in American political life.

In February, the Southern Poverty Law Center added two male supremacist websites to its list of hate groups, for the first time categorizing male supremacy as an explicit ideology of hate. The ideology of male supremacy, according to the SPLC, represents all women as “genetically inferior, manipulative, and stupid” beings who exist primarily for their reproductive and sexual functions. Gender-essentializing male supremacists rely on cherry-picked science and anthropology to bolster their claims that men are inherently dominant. Not only do women owe men sex, they believe, but men are entitled to take it from them.

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“You want to reach a point where you have high expectations of a woman but she has little expectations of you,” wrote Daryush “Roosh” Valizadeh, founder of Return of Kings, in a recent blog post. “She must give you submission while you do as you may.”

Return of Kings is one of the two male supremacist organizations listed by the SPLC. A Voice for Men, founded by Paul Elam, is the other. While Elam’s “men’s rights” movement has enjoyed some favorable media coverage, and he has managed to present himself as a moderate voice for men’s equality, he is no less dangerous, having advocated for both physical and sexual violence against women.



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complain about rape because no one wants to have sex with them, wrote one Return of Kings contributor whose bio says he hopes for the “re-birth of tribal-minded men with the core tenants of masculinity.” White women make themselves “unsuitable for handing on Western civilization” when they are “promiscuous,” get tattoos, pursue careers, or enjoy black culture, wrote another.

These groups don’t limit their activities to the virtual realm. A Voice for Men organizes an annual International Conference for Men’s Issues, and Return of Kings arranges meet-ups and sells branded gear.

Keegan Hankes, an analyst for the SPLC, called male supremacy a “fundamental foundation” of the alt-right and said the SPLC decided to create the new category because “male supremacy had become impossible to ignore.”

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“The vilification of women by these groups makes them no different than other hate groups that malign an entire class of people,” he said.

It’s useful to call these groups male supremacist because words like misogyny can be more easily deflected, according to Britney Gil, a Ph.D. graduate from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute who wrote her dissertation on the Red Pill community. “These men specifically say, ‘We don’t hate women, we just understand their nature and develop ways to deal with them,’” said Gil. “Boiling it down to women-hating men is oversimplifying. Because they do want women in their lives.”

Though the aftermath of the 2016 election has brought public attention to these hate groups, they have been festering for years. Male supremacist groups have been involved in large part by feminist going, which is especially relevant at a



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structural oppression. They have their roots in the 1970s, when the women's movement began to deconstruct the concept of gender. "I think that was a huge change and it did provoke enormous backlash," said Linda Gordon, professor of history at New York University.

A recent Voice for Men article on the history of feminism tells the same story. Until the 1970s, the author writes, feminists "didn't have much impact on mainstream culture." Before second-wave feminism, "America was a happy place." These new feminists, he writes, were "angry, extremist militants who zeroed in on America's post-war relaxation to begin an uprising built on hysterical and irrational logic that would shake the Western world."

What is seen among many feminists as a revolutionary turning point is, for male supremacists, the beginning of the end. According to Alex DiBranco, a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Yale University who has studied male supremacist groups, these ideologies began to consolidate and institutionalize in the 1990s, in response to campus anti-rape activism, the Anita Hill controversy, and the rise of Hillary Clinton. As women have made greater gains, real and imagined, these groups have grown. "When they see women making advances, that's something they can mobilize off of," DiBranco said.

In fact, nearly all of the contemporary American right-wing, from white nationalists to conservative Christians, is united in its antipathy towards feminism, according to Sophie Bjork-James, an anthropology professor at Vanderbilt who studies conservative movements. "I have been surprised how often feminism becomes the bogeyman representing what they hate, and it really speaks to the importance of gender norms across conservative social movements in the U.S.," she said.

Other notable advocates for male supremacy, including Matt Forney, Mike Cernovich, and Milo Yiannopoulos, have become famous through their online writing against feminism. Cernovich and Yiannopoulos rose to national prominence through the virulent misogyny they displayed in the 2014 Gamergate harassment campaign, which targeted women in the video game and media industries with doxxing and threats of rape and death.

Many male supremacist groups began in the gaming and pick-up-artist spaces,



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community, dating advice, or a soothing balm for their class anxieties, before they are radicalized via male supremacy.

As the SPLC notes in its file on male supremacy, there is a strong correlation between male supremacy and white supremacy. Most white supremacist groups are male supremacist groups. The two ideologies are not the same, but we don't yet talk about male supremacy in the way we talk about white supremacy, as if the latter is a greater threat than the former. Too often, "versions of sexism or misogyny perpetrated by various actors are seen as secondary to the problem of white supremacy," according to DiBranco.

Male supremacy is also too often chalked up to the acts of individuals, when these dangerous ideologies, which have not only tolerated but encouraged violence, stem from gender and culture norms that affect everyone. "One of the things that happens when we focus on extreme examples of hate groups online is that we forget the hate groups are just examples of hate that exists broadly," said Adrienne Shaw, an assistant professor in Temple University whose research focuses on gender and online culture. "When we just point at them and say those groups are bad, we forget that those groups came out of the same society we're critiquing them from."

"In focusing only on the far far ugly right, [the SPLC is] letting all kinds of other groups, people, strata, off the hook," said NYU professor Linda Gordon. "People who have analyzed inequality and discrimination for decades, for centuries, have understood that male supremacy is a structural matter, it is not a matter of individual hate."

These prejudices have deep historical roots that are continually reproduced through gender norms and inequalities in the labor market, the law, and education. It is not surprising that men believe women should be subservient to them, when, less than 100 years ago, women in this country still did not have the right to vote. In many ways, explicit male supremacists are merely advocating for a return to what they believe to be the historic, natural order of gender relations.

And while male supremacy may manifest itself in nasty forms on the right, it is not a uniquely right-wing phenomenon. "If you look at the #MeToo movement, a huge proportion of the alleged harassers are liberals," said Gordon. "This sense of



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The male supremacist groups named by the SPLC thrive in the most extreme corners of the internet, but their ideology has also found sanctuary in the White House. When the news broke in February that Trump aide Rob Porter had physically abused two ex-wives, the president lamented that it was “obviously a very tough time” for him. It’s hard to find a better example of a powerful man feeling victimized by the simple request that he recognize a woman’s humanity.

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