# **Controversial Reddit communities**

The <u>social news</u> site <u>Reddit</u> has occasionally been the topic of controversy due to the presence of communities on the site (known as "subreddits") devoted to explicit or controversial material. In 2012, <u>Yishan Wong</u>, the site's then-CEO, stated, "We stand for free speech. This means we are not going to ban distasteful subreddits. We will not ban legal content even if we find it odious or if we personally condemn it." However, numerous subreddits have since been banned on the basis of ideology.

The subreddit r/jailbait, devoted to suggestive or revealing photos of underage girls, was one of the most prominent subreddits on the site before it was closed down in October 2011 following a report by CNN. The controversy surrounding r/Creepshots, devoted to revealing or suggestive photos of women taken without their awareness or consent, occurred a year after r/jailbait's closure. The r/Creepshots controversy prompted a Gawker exposé of one of the subreddit's moderators by Adrian Chen, which revealed the real-life identity of the user behind the account, Michael Brutsch. This started discussion in the media about the ethics of anonymity and outing on the Internet. [4]

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# Quarantining

In 2015, Reddit introduced a quarantine policy to make visiting certain subreddits more difficult. Visiting or joining a quarantined subreddit requires bypassing a warning prompt. Since 2018, subreddits are allowed to appeal their quarantine. Some subreddits are banned after unsuccessful quarantines.

### **Banned subreddits**

### **Beatingwomen**

On 9 June 2014, a subreddit called r/beatingwomen was closed by Reddit. The community, which featured graphic depictions of <u>violence against women</u>, was banned after its moderators were found to be sharing users' personal information online, and collaborating to protect one another from sitewide bans. Following the ban, the community's founder rebooted the subreddit under the name r/beatingwomen2 in an attempt to circumvent the ban, but was banned afterwards. [7][8]

#### **Braincels**

r/Braincels was the most popular subreddit for <u>incels</u>, or "involuntary celibates", after <u>r/Incels</u> was banned, gaining 16,900 followers by April 2018. The subreddit's leaders decided to ban individuals advocating for murder. However, the subreddit promoted rape and suicide. The subreddit was banned on 30 September 2019, after violating Reddit's Content Policy with respect to bullying and harassment.

## ChapoTrapHouse

r/ChapoTrapHouse was a subreddit dedicated to the leftist podcast <u>Chapo Trap House</u> which is associated with the term <u>dirtbag left</u>. The community had 160,000 regulars before being banned on 29 June 2020 because they "consistently host rule-breaking content and their mods have demonstrated no intention of reining in their community." Previously, the community had been quarantined for content that promotes violence. The community of the subreddit later migrated to an instance of Lemmy, a Reddit alternative.

### CreepShots

A year after the closure of r/jailbait, another subreddit called r/CreepShots drew controversy in the press for hosting sexualized images of women without their knowledge. In the wake of this media attention, u/violentacrez was added to r/CreepShots as a moderator, and reports emerged that Gawker reporter Adrian Chen was planning an exposé that would reveal the real-life identity of this user, who moderated dozens of controversial subreddits as well as a few hundred general-interest communities. Several major subreddits banned links to Gawker in response to the impending exposé and the account u/violentacrez was deleted. Moderators defended their decisions to block the site from these sections of Reddit on the basis that the impending report was "doxing" (a term for exposing the identity of a pseudonymous person), and that such exposure threatened the site's structural integrity.

When Chen informed u/violentacrez about the impending exposé, the user pleaded with Chen not to publish it because he was concerned about the potential impact on his employment and finances, noting that his wife was disabled and he had a mortgage to pay. He also expressed concern that he would be falsely labeled a child pornographer or anti-semite because of some of the subreddits he created. Despite u/violentacrez's offer to delete his postings and leave Reddit, Chen insisted he would still publish the piece. [4][21]

#### Gawker exposé

Chen published the piece on 12 October 2012, revealing that the person operating the u/violentacrez account was a middle-aged programmer from Arlington, Texas named Michael Brutsch. [4][22] Within a day of the article being published, Brutsch was fired by his employer, and the link to the exposé was briefly banned from Reddit. [23][24] He stated on Reddit after the article was published that he had received numerous death threats. [25]

Reddit CEO Yishan Wong defended the content Brutsch contributed to the site as free speech and criticized efforts to ban the Gawker link on the same basis. Wong stated that the staff had considered a site-wide ban on the link, but rejected this idea for fear it would create a negative impression of the site without getting results. Brutsch later briefly returned to Reddit on a different account and criticized what he stated were numerous factual inaccuracies in the Gawker exposé. [28]

A week after the exposé, Brutsch held an interview with CNN that aired on *Anderson Cooper 360*°. In the interview with journalist <u>Drew Griffin</u>, Brutsch was apologetic about his activity on Reddit. He explained that he was most fond of the appreciation he got from other redditors, and that Reddit helped him relieve stress. Brutsch also described the support he had from administrators, stating that he had received an award for his contributions. Reddit noted that the award was for winning a community vote for "Worst Subreddit", and stated that they regretted sending it, as well as claiming the u/violentacrez account had been banned on several occasions. [29][30] Brutsch subsequently noted on Reddit that he regretted doing the interview and criticized the accuracy of the statement Reddit gave to CNN. [31]

Chris Slowe, a lead programmer of Reddit until 2010, said of the relationship between Brutsch and the Reddit staff: "We just stayed out of there and let him do his thing and we knew at least he was getting rid of a lot of stuff that wasn't particularly legal." [4]

### **Ethics of outing**

Gawker's outing of Brutsch as u/violentacrez led to contentious discussion about privacy and anonymity on the Internet. [32] Such discussions included claims that outing, or "doxing", was necessary to draw attention to objectionable content so it could be removed, while others claimed that it impeded the ability for people to exercise their right to legal free speech online due to fear of public retribution. [33][34]

Sady Doyle, writing in *The Guardian*, compared it to the outing of the alleged blackmailer of Amanda Todd and suggested that such outings may be justified, but that they may also unduly focus attention on individuals without confronting the underlying problems by engaging in "sensationalism" at the expense of cultural reform. In  $\underline{PC\ Magazine}$ , Damon Poeter stated that, while he has defended protecting anonymity on the Internet, he still supported Brutsch being outed because he felt the various subreddits he contributed to as u/violentacrez were serious invasions of privacy, regardless of legality, and that it was therefore justifiable to reveal his personal details. [34]

The public outpouring of hostility towards Brutsch following the exposé prompted commentators such as  $\underline{\text{danah boyd}}$  of  $\underline{\textit{Wired}}$  and Michelle Star of  $\underline{\textit{CNET}}$  to question the morality of outing as a way to enforce societal standards online. Several commentators have expressed concern that the  $\underline{\text{public shaming}}$  of Brutsch to serve as an example to others is legitimizing  $\underline{\text{online vigilantism}}$  and exposing individuals such as Brutsch to mass retribution. Several Commentators have expressed concern that the  $\underline{\text{public shaming}}$  of Brutsch to mass retribution.

### CringeAnarchy

r/CringeAnarchy was a subreddit themed around "cringe" and "edgy", politically incorrect content, featuring far-right content. Originally an uncensored (hence "anarchy") spinoff of r/cringe, it later shifted to the far-right, with anti-transgender and anti-"SJW" content taking over. The subreddit was quarantined in September 2018, at which point it had over 400,000 subscribers. [44][45][46]

Following the <u>Christchurch mosque shootings</u> (15 March 2019), more <u>anti-Muslim</u> posts were made on the subreddit. The subreddit was banned on 25 April 2019 for violating Reddit's content policy regarding violent content.

#### **DarkNetMarkets**

The subreddit r/DarkNetMarkets, a <u>darknet market</u> discussion forum, featured participation from their owners, causing US authorities to request personal information behind several accounts. This subreddit was banned on 21 March 2018. [50][51]

### **Deepfakes**

Deepfakes was a controversial subreddit that superimposed famous female actresses onto pornographic videos, made using FakeApp, without the consent of the actresses. Such actresses included Emma Watson and Daisy Ridley. After the subreddit was given notoriety from the press, videos from the subreddit were banned from Gfycat and Discord. On 7 February 2018, the day after Pornhub banned the videos, the subreddit was banned as well.

# **FatPeopleHate**

On 10 June 2015, Reddit banned five subreddits, citing an anti-harassment policy. [55][56] The largest of the banned subreddits, r/fatpeoplehate, had an estimated 151,000 subscribers at the time of its banning. [55] The other four subreddits were r/hamplanethatred, r/neofag, r/transfags, and r/shitniggerssay. [55] A Reddit admin said, "We will ban subreddits that allow their communities to use the subreddit as a platform to harass individuals when moderators don't take action". [55]

Because of the ban, Reddit users flooded the site with pictures of overweight people and Reddit's interim CEO <u>Ellen Pao</u>. Due to the decision to ban these subreddits, some users moved to <u>Voat</u>, a social aggregation website similar to Reddit.

#### **GenderCritical**

The subreddit r/GenderCritical had 64,400 users, self-described as "reddit's most active feminist community" for "women-centred, <u>radical feminists</u>" to discuss "gender from a gender-critical perspective". Described by <u>Jillian York</u> of the <u>Electronic Frontier Foundation</u> as "a subreddit where <u>transphobic</u> commentary has thrived", the subreddit frequently hosted posts asserting that transgender women are not women. On 29 June 2020, the subreddit was "banned for violating Reddit's rule against promoting hate". [59][60][61][62] After r/GenderCritical was banned, several of its users migrated to Ovarit, a <u>trans-exclusionary radical feminism-centered</u> website based on Reddit. [15]

#### Gore

Related to the <u>Christchurch mosque shootings</u>, r/gore was banned for "glorifying or encouraging violence"  $\frac{[63][64][65]}{[65]}$  at approximately 17:35 UTC on 15 March 2019.

### Greatawakening

The subreddit r/greatawakening was a subreddit for the QAnon conspiracy theory, which argues the Trump administration is investigating a widespread child sex trafficking movement. The subreddit was banned on 12 September 2018 due to violating Reddit's content policy regarding violence and personal information. [66] A previous subreddit for the conspiracy theory, r/CBTS\_Stream, was banned on 14 March 2018 for violating Reddit's content policy against violence. A backup for the subreddit, r/The\_GreatAwakening, was also banned.

#### **GunsForSale**

In January 2014,  $\underline{Mother\ Jones}$  published a story describing the sale of guns on the site. The report suggested that sellers were doing so to exploit a loophole in U.S. federal law. [67] Nearly 100 AR-15s were engraved with the Reddit logo as part of a licensing deal made with the page in 2011. [68] This subreddit was banned on 21 March 2018.

#### **Incels**

A subreddit founded for "involuntary celibates", r/incels, was a forum wherein members discussed their lack of romantic success. [69] The definition of an incel on the subreddit was someone who has unintentionally gone at least six months without a romantic partner and is at least 21 years old; self-described incels are largely heterosexual men. [70] Many members adhered to the "black pill" ideology, [71][72][73] which espoused despondency often coupled with misogynistic views that condoned, downplayed, or advocated rape, while

referring to women as "femoids" and "sluts". [70] Notable black pill posts included "reasons why women are the embodiment of evil" and "proof that girls are nothing but trash that use men". [74][75] Users deemed too female-friendly, or who claimed that women experienced inceldom to the same extent as men, were banned. The subreddit's users intermittently either revered or hated "normies" and "Chads" for their courtship abilities, and some admire murderers such as Elliot Rodger, perpetrator of the 2014 Isla Vista killings, who identified as an "incel". [76][77][78]

In the summer of 2017, a petition on <u>Change.org</u> called for r/incels to be banned for inciting <u>violence against</u> <u>women</u>. Following the October implementation of a new Reddit policy that prohibited the <u>incitement</u> of violence, the subreddit was banned on 7 November 2017. At the time of its banning, r/incels had around 40,000 subscribers.

r/Braincels subsequently became the most popular subreddit for incels, gaining 16,900 followers by April 2018. The subreddit's leaders disavowed the <u>Toronto van attack</u> and deleted some posts by members who praised Alek Minassian's alleged actions. In September 2018, the subreddit was quarantined and on October, it was banned.

#### **Jailbait**

Reddit's staff was initially opposed to the addition of obscene material to the site, but they eventually became more lenient when prolific moderators, such as a user named Violentacrez, proved capable of identifying and removing illegal content at a time when they were not sufficiently staffed to take on the task. [4] Communities devoted to explicit material saw rising popularity, and r/jailbait, which featured provocative shots of underage teenagers, became the chosen "subreddit of the year" in the "Best of reddit" user poll in 2008 and at one point making "jailbait" the second most common search term for the site. [4] Erik Martin, general manager of Reddit, defended the jailbait subreddit by saying that such controversial pages were a consequence of allowing free speech on the site. [81]

r/jailbait came to wider attention outside Reddit when Anderson Cooper of CNN devoted a segment of his program to condemning the subreddit and criticizing Reddit for hosting it. [82][83] Initially this caused a spike in Internet traffic to the subreddit, causing the page to peak at 1.73 million views on the day of the report. [84] In the wake of these news reports, a Reddit user posted an image of an underage girl to r/jailbait, subsequently claiming to have naked images of her as well. Dozens of Reddit users then posted requests for these nude photos to be shared to them by private message. [85] Other Reddit users drew attention to this discussion and the r/jailbait forum was subsequently closed by Reddit administrators on 11 October 2011. [85] Critics, such as r/jailbait's creator, disputed claims that this thread was the basis of the decision, instead claiming it was an excuse to close down a controversial subreddit due to recent negative media coverage. [3] Others claimed that the thread believed to have prompted the closure was created by members of the Something Awful forum in an attempt to get the section shut down, rather than the regulars of the forum.

Following the closure of r/jailbait,  $\underline{\textit{The Daily Dot}}$  declared the community's creator, u/violentacrez, "The Most Important Person on Reddit in 2011", calling the r/jailbait controversy "the first major challenge to the site's voluntary doctrine of absolute free speech". [87]

### **Jakolandia**

In January 2019, a <u>Philippine</u>-based subreddit, r/jakolandia, was accused of "distributing" posts of photos of women, including celebrities, apparently without their consent, similar to "a number" of secret <u>Facebook</u> groups that had been engaging in illegal activity of <u>sharing "obscene" photos of women</u> and possibly <u>child pornography. [88]</u> r/jakolandia was later banned as a result. [89]

#### MillionDollarExtreme

The subreddit r/MillionDollarExtreme was a subreddit for the comedy group Million Dollar Extreme. It was banned on 10 September 2018 for violating Reddit's content policy regarding violent content. Content on the subreddit was often racist, homophobic and transphobic in nature. Million Dollar Extreme Presents: World *Peace*, a television show created by the group, was cancelled in 2016 following coverage of the group's connections to the alt-right. Million Dollar Extreme's YouTube channel had been terminated earlier in  $2018.^{[90]}$ Associated subreddits r/ChadRight, r/BillionShekelSupreme, r/TrillionRubleRegime, r/TrillionRubelRegine, r/GorillionYuanDream, r/HydeNationalism, r/tha pit, r/OuadrillionEuroDream. r/HundredPesoPipedream, r/SextillionEuroSupreme, r/13451452251849519 and several others were subsequently banned.

### **Pizzagate**

"Pizzagate" is a <u>conspiracy theory</u> that emerged from social media and <u>fake news websites</u> in early November 2016 which falsely alleged the existence of a <u>child trafficking</u> ring that involved officials in the <u>Democratic Party</u> and restaurants such as <u>Comet Ping Pong</u>. The r/pizzagate subreddit, which spun off from <u>r/The\_Donald</u>, was dedicated to discussing this conspiracy theory and had over 20,000 subscribers. [91] This subreddit was banned on 23 November 2016, for violating Reddit's policy against <u>doxing</u>, as users would post the personal details of people allegedly connected to this conspiracy.

### Physical\_Removal

r/Physical\_Removal was banned on 15 August 2017, for inciting violence. The subreddit's name stems from a quote by right-wing libertarian philosopher Hans-Hermann Hoppe, who wrote: "There can be no tolerance toward democrats and communists in a libertarian social order. They will have to be physically separated and removed from society" (referring to ostracism), and, by extension, their advocacy for forced deportation or physical removal of political leftists from the United States. It was controversial for its promotion of violence against leftists and other groups. For instance, users would make reference to throwing people from helicopters, an execution method used by Augusto Pinochet. Physical\_Removal attracted further attention in 2017 after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, due to mockery of the death of Heather Heyer, who was struck and killed by a car driven by a far-right terrorist at the rally. [93][94]

#### **SanctionedSuicide**

r/SanctionedSuicide was a subreddit that approached the topic of suicide from a pro-choice perspective. It included both discussions surrounding the ethics of suicide and posts containing rants from Reddit users. [95] This subreddit was banned on 14 March 2018.

### **SonyGOP**

On 15 December 2014, Reddit took the unusual step of banning a subreddit, r/SonyGOP, which was being used to distribute hacked Sony files. [96]

## **Shoplifting**

The subreddit r/Shoplifting was devoted to stories, tips, and questions for the purpose of shoplifting at large commercial retail chains. It dissuaded people from shoplifting from smaller stores which were presumed to suffer greater losses from theft. It also heavily featured pictures displaying items that its users had supposedly "lifted". Near the end of its existence, over 77,000 people were subscribed to the subreddit. It was banned on 21 March 2018 due to violating an amendment to the Reddit User Agreement added that same day which states: "Users may not use Reddit to solicit or facilitate any transaction or gift involving certain goods and services, including: ... Stolen goods" [100][101]

### The "Chimpire"

The term "Chimpire" refers to a collection of subreddits and affiliated websites that promote anti-black racism, including frequent use of <u>racial slurs</u>. In June 2013, the subreddit r/niggers was banned from Reddit for engaging in vote manipulation, incitements of violence and using racist content to disrupt other communities. Reddit general manager Erik Martin noted that the subforum was given multiple chances to comply with site rules, noting that "users can tell from the amount of warnings we extended to a subreddit as clearly awful as r/niggers that we go into the decision to ban subreddits with a lot of scrutiny". Following the ban of r/niggers, the subreddit r/Coontown grew to become the most popular "Chimpire" site, with over 15,000 members at its peak. Many of the posters on these subreddits were formerly involved with r/niggers. 104][105][106]

One of these subreddits, r/shitniggerssay, was banned in June 2015 at the same time as fatpeoplehate. [107] In the midst of changes to Reddit's content policy, r/Coontown was banned in August 2015. [108]

### The Donald

The subreddit r/The\_Donald, which was intended for supporters of <u>Donald Trump</u>, was originally created for his <u>2016</u> presidential campaign. Due to harassment of Reddit administrators and manipulation of the site's algorithms to push content to Reddit's front page using the "sticky" feature of subreddits, Reddit banned many of the sub's users who were described as "toxic". [109] This occurred after Reddit's CEO <u>Steve Huffman</u> (known as Spez on Reddit) admitted to silently editing comments attacking him made by the community's users. This caused the term "spez" to be used instead of "edit" in The\_Donald's terminology. [110] The CEO modified the site's algorithms to specifically prevent the sub's moderators from gaming the algorithms to artificially push the sub's content to Reddit's front page. [111] Additionally, the CEO introduced a filtering feature which allowed individual users to block content from any sub. While this feature was being worked on prior to the problems r/The\_Donald were causing, it was suggested that it was introduced specifically to allow users to block them. [111] Huffman referred to r/The\_Donald's user's complaints of harassment "hypocritical" because of their harassment of others.

After the <u>Christchurch mosque shootings</u> in 2019, many posts appeared in the subreddit arguing that the shootings were justified, filled with anti-Muslim hate. [113]

The sub was quarantined by Reddit admins in June 2019 for "threats of violence against police and public officials". [114][115]

On 29 June 2020, Reddit banned the subreddit for frequent rule-breaking, for antagonizing the company and other communities and for failing to "meet our most basic expectations". [116]

## **TheFappening**

In August 2014, Reddit users began sharing a large number of naked pictures of celebrities stolen, using phishing, from their private Apple iCloud accounts. [117][118] A subreddit, r/TheFappening, was created as a hub to share and discuss these stolen photos; the situation was called CelebGate by the media. [119] The subreddit contained most of the images. [120][121] Victims of "The Fappening" included high-profile names such as Jennifer Lawrence, Kate Upton and Mary Elizabeth Winstead. [122][123] Some of the images may have constituted child pornography, as the photos of Liz Lee and McKayla Maroney from the leak were claimed to have been taken when the women were underage, though this remains controversial. [124] The subreddit was closed by Reddit administrators in September 2014. The scandal led to wider criticisms concerning the website's moderation, from *The Verge* and *The Daily Dot*. [125][126]

### WatchPeopleDie

After the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings, Reddit banned the "Watch People Die" subreddit, dedicated to uploading media depicting real-life deaths of people, after it disseminated links to video of the shooting. The subreddit r/gore was also removed on 15 March 2019. [63][64][65] Although previously quarantined for over half a year, the subreddit was totally banned at approximately 17:09 UTC on 15 March 2019, less than a day after the events for violating Reddit's content policy, specifically the policy against "glorifying or encouraging violence." Moderators of the subreddit had initially allowed the video to be shared. [127]

r/WPDTalk, a subreddit for discussion on what went on in the r/WatchPeopleDie subreddit, was also taken down. [128]

### **Active subreddits**

### **FindBostonBombers**

Following the 2013 <u>Boston Marathon bombing</u>, members of the subreddit r/findbostonbombers wrongly identified a number of people as suspects, including a 17-year-old track athlete and a 22-year-old <u>Brown University student missing since March. [129]</u> A body reported to be that of the missing Brown student misidentified as a Boston bomber suspect, who had been missing for a month before-hand, was found in <u>Providence River in Rhode Island</u> on 25 April 2013, as reported by the Rhode Island Health <u>Department. [130][131]</u> The cause of death was found to be suicide. The subreddit was later made private. [133]

Reddit general manager Erik Martin later issued an apology for this behavior, criticizing the "online witch hunts and dangerous speculation" that took place in these investigation-oriented communities. [134] In September 2013, a similar subreddit dedicated to finding the Navy Yard shooter(s) was banned by the Reddit admins. [135] These events were dramatized in TV shows *The Newsroom* [136][137] and *The Good Wife*. [138]

### **KotakuInAction**

In 2014, the subreddit r/KotakuInAction, whose name mocks <u>Kotaku</u>'s perceived liberal bias, [139] was created as one of the main online hubs for participants of the <u>Gamergate controversy</u>. [140][141] Users are warned that by joining KotakuInAction, they will be banned from other subreddits such as r/OffMyChest (a subreddit based around expressing opinions, as well as confessing personal thoughts), r/NaturalHair and r/Rape, the latter of the three being a support forum for survivors of rape that had been targeted for brigading by r/KotakuInAction users. [142]

<u>BuzzFeed</u>'s Joseph Bernstein reported that many of KotakuInAction's moderators also moderate other subreddits "devoted to either the physical and emotional degradation and humiliation of women, or in subreddits devoted to mocking and delegitimizing the arguments and appearances of feminists and "<u>social</u> justice warriors"."[139]

In 2016, KotakuInAction became the subject of an academic study done by three members of the  $\underline{\text{Georgia}}$  Institute of Technology.  $\underline{^{[143]}}$ 

On 12 July 2018, the creator and head moderator of KotakuInAction removed all of the moderators and set the forum to private, alleging that it had become "infested with racism and sexism". A Reddit employee restored the forum and its moderators an hour later. [144][145]

### **MensRights**

#### **SPLC listing**

Reddit's <u>men's rights</u> subreddit (r/MensRights) was included in a list of 12 websites in the spring 2012 issue ("The Year in Hate and Extremism") of the <u>Southern Poverty Law Center</u>'s *Intelligence Report* in a section called "Misogyny: The Sites". The SPLC reported that "Although some of the sites make an attempt at civility and try to back their arguments with facts, they are almost all thick with misogynistic attacks that can be astounding for the guttural hatred they express". [146]

More specific claims were made about r/MensRights in particular, saying that it showed anger "toward any program designed to help women", and that the subreddit "trafficks in various conspiracy theories", using a moderator's statements as an example of this behavior. Outlets such as *The Huffington Post* interpreted the report as saying the subreddit was a hate group. [148]

In late March 2012, Mark Potok (the *Intelligence Report*'s editor) was asked in an interview if the SPLC had formally classified r/MensRights as a <u>hate group</u>. His response was that "We wrote about the subreddit Mens Rights, but we did not list it as a hate group" and expressed doubt that the SPLC would ever designate the community as a hate group, noting that "it's a diverse group, which certainly does include some misogynists—but I don't think that's [its basic] purpose". [149]

Later that year, the SPLC published a statement about the reactions to their report, saying it "provoked a tremendous response among men's rights activists (MRAs) and their sympathizers", and "It should be mentioned that the SPLC did not label MRAs as members of a hate movement; nor did our article claim that the grievances they air on their websites – false rape accusations, ruinous divorce settlements and the like – are all without merit. But we did call out specific examples of misogyny and the threat, overt or implicit, of violence." [150]

#### **Doxing incident**

In April 2013, the subreddit was threatened with a shutdown by Reddit admins after r/MensRights subscribers gathered personal information on a supposed blogger of feminist issues, and the subreddit's moderators advised members of the subreddit on how to proceed with this 'doxing' without running afoul of site rules. Later on it was discovered that they had identified the wrong woman, and it has been reported that many death threats had been sent to her school and employment. Georgetown University confirmed that she was not the same person as the blog's author after receiving threatening messages. 151

### Rape report spam

In mid-December 2013, users from r/MensRights as well as <u>4chan</u> spammed the Occidental College Online Rape Report Form with hundreds of false rape reports, following a user's complaint that the form was vulnerable to abuse because of the submitter's ability to be anonymous. [152][153] Around 400 false rape accusations were made by men's rights activists against members of the college, feminists and fictional people. [152]

## **Technology**

In April 2014, it was made apparent that moderators of r/technology, a subreddit with 5 million subscribers, were using automatic filters to remove submissions that contained certain keywords, such as "<u>Aaron Swartz</u>", "<u>Tesla</u>", [154] "<u>Comcast</u>", "<u>NSA</u>", and "<u>Snowden</u>". [155] This ultimately led to community protests, claims of censorship from users, and r/technology losing its default subreddit status. [156][157]

### **TheRedPill**

**r/TheRedPill** is a manosphere-oriented subreddit that promotes male supremacy and misogyny. Named after the former of the <u>red pill and blue pill</u> concept, it was profiled by the <u>Southern Poverty Law Center</u>. [158] It has been associated with several right-wing movements and the alt-right because of its attacks on <u>feminism</u> and mockery of rape. [159]

It was discovered that a New Hampshire legislator created the subreddit and posted demeaning comments about women. After this discovery, he resigned from office. [160] *The New Statesman* has described this subreddit as one of the most misogynistic subreddits on Reddit, which aims to radicalize men. [161] Currently, the subreddit is quarantined. [162]

### BlackPeopleTwitter

In October 2019, r/BlackPeopleTwitter started requiring users to prove their race before allowing them to comment on links. In order to prove they were not white, a user would have to take a picture of their forearm together with their username. In addition, users who had proved themselves to be black were given a special flair on the subreddit. This policy was reported by online news media. [163]

## **FemaleDatingStrategy**

r/FemaleDatingStrategy has been accused by r/AgainstHateSubreddits of promoting <u>transphobia</u>, <u>misandry</u>, and discrimination against <u>sex workers</u>. <u>The Verge</u> has described the advice given to women as socially and sexually conservative, and oppressive to women. [164]

### NoFap

According to <u>The Daily Dot</u>, "The NoFap model is nothing more than a breeding ground for racism, misogyny, and whorephobic violence. It's time we take it seriously and close up its pipeline into violent behavior once and for all." The Daily Dot linked NoFap's ideology to recent murders. [165]

<u>Der Spiegel</u> discussed several NoFap adepts in relationship with hate crimes and terrorist murders, noting the potential for radicalization of the members of the <u>manosphere</u>. The Texas Department of Public Safety states about <u>Incels</u> "coupled with extremely violent online rhetoric, suggests that this particular threat could soon match, or potentially eclipse, the level of lethalness demonstrated by other domestic terrorism types".

# Free speech rationale

In accordance with the site's policies on free speech, Reddit's admins say that they do not ban communities solely for featuring controversial content. Reddit's general manager Erik Martin noted that "having to stomach occasional troll [sub]reddits like r/picsofdeadkids or morally questionable [sub]reddits like r/jailbait are part of the price of free speech on a site like this," and that it is not Reddit's place to censor its users. [167] The site's former CEO, Yishan Wong, stated that distasteful subreddits would not be banned because Reddit as a platform should serve the ideals of free speech. [1][168] Critics of this position have argued that Reddit has not been consistent in following its free speech philosophy. [169][170]

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