

Buzzfeed Piece on "Men's Rights" Leader Discredits the Movement

Slate

What Women Really Think

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Divorce court is not really so unfair to men.

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The rise of feminism in mainstream culture has had the odd side effect of increasing media interest in a particular strain of anti-feminism: "men's rights activists," who argue that far from being the dominant class, men are actually the ones who are oppressed.

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Friday, Adam Serwer and Katie J.M. Baker of [Buzzfeed](#) published the most in-depth look at MRAs yet, an investigation into Paul Elam, the most prominent online MRA and the



founder of the popular website [A Voice For Men](#). Elam "preaches the gospel that men's failures and disappointments are not due to personal shortcomings or lapsed responsibility, but rather institutionalized feminism and a family court system rigged against dutiful fathers, as well as a world gripped by 'misandry,' or the hatred of men," they write.

But when they dug into Elam's history, a very different picture emerged. "For example, although Elam [compares](#) the family court system's treatment of fathers to Jim Crow, he abandoned his biological children not once but twice," they write. "Although Elam [says](#) that 'fathers are forced to pay child support like it was mafia protection money,' he accused his first wife of lying about being raped so he could relinquish his parental rights and avoid paying child support." Elam's first wife and daughter spoke on the record to *Buzzfeed*, though they used pseudonyms out of what they describe as fear of retaliation from the MRA community. His other two ex-wives refused to speak on the record at all, with his third ex-wife citing fear of retaliation.

[Elam has responded at A Voice For Men, writing](#) of that his first wife had an "unending string of affairs," which is why he disbelieved her claim to have been raped. He worried, "I was going to be saddled with the price tag for my exes cheating," which is why he went with terminating parental rights instead, he says. "I can only suspect that money or anger or possibly both have driven Bonnie to deceit," he writes.

In interviews with *Buzzfeed*, Elam rejects the idea that his personal history has any relevance to the larger issue of "men's rights," bluntly stating that it's "none of your business." But there is a larger value to all this, because it casts doubt on one of the most media-friendly claims that MRAs make, which is that the family court system is somehow prejudiced against men. Both [Vox](#) and [Mother Jones](#) ran pieces about "men's rights" recently that were largely skeptical of some of the sillier claims of oppression made by MRAs, but both, in an admirable effort at fair-mindedness, gave some credit to this idea that men get the shaft in family court. "Elam and his staff do, at the very least, engage in genuine advocacy on behalf of men," Emmett Rensin of *Vox* writes, citing paternity rights as an example of what they are supposedly trying to protect. "For some, the 'manosphere' offers a place to air real grievances about issues such as bias in family courts or sexual abuse suffered by men," writes Mariah Blake of *Mother Jones*.

But the *Buzzfeed* piece calls into question how much the got-screwed-over-by-family-court grievance is sincere, and how much it's a matter of MRAs blaming courts and ex-wives for problems they brought onto themselves. The ugly reality is that the evidence that men get the short shaft in family court simply isn't there, Baker and Serwer write:

Just because women have custody more doesn't necessarily mean the courts are biased against men. It likely just means that most divorcing couples choose, on their own, to arrange it that way. And actually, as my colleague Hanna Rosin [wrote last year in Slate](#), "the great revolution in family court over the past 40 years or so has been the movement away from the presumption that mothers should be the main, or even sole, caretakers for their children."

You have to give it to them: MRAs really did score a point with their branding. After all, who can be against "men's rights"? Of course men deserve rights. But really, what the phrase is implying is that men have rights that are being denied to them on the basis of gender, a claim that has no real evidence to support it.

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