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At the corner of internet and interesting



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Inside the 'manosphere' that inspired Santa Barbara shooter Elliot Rodger

BY CAITLIN DEWEY May 27 at 4:07 pm



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Elliot Rodger will forever be known as [the 22-year-old who murdered six people](#) in Santa Barbara on May 23. But Rodger's extensive digital footprint, as well as his stomach-turning YouTube send-off and 137-page manifesto, suggest that he may have identified himself differently: as an "incel," or involuntary virgin; as an aspirational, if frustrated, pick-up artist; and as an adherent of the so-called "manosphere" — that corner of the Internet where boys will be boys, girls will be objects, and critics will be "feminists," "misandrists" or "enemies."

If you're not familiar with these terms, you're not alone: The manosphere and its various components tend to only make mainstream news over tragedies (like this one) and controversies (like one "activist's" [opposition to date-rape](#) seminars on college campuses). But to thousands of men across the Internet — including, apparently, Rodger — they're home.

Rodger has personally been linked to an account on the pick-up site PUAhate.com, where he advocated an overthrow of "this oppressive feminist system" and envisioned "a world where WOMEN FEAR YOU." On YouTube, he followed a number of accounts that claimed to teach pick-up artistry — a skill that's equal parts pseudoscience, manipulation and objectification. In his last YouTube video, in which he chillingly announces the start of his killing spree, Rodger even cops some classic pick-up lingo:

The Washington Post



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“You will finally see that I am, in truth, the superior one. The *true alpha male*.”
(Emphasis mine.)

Let's be clear: None of this suggests that (a) the manosphere is somehow to blame for Rodger's killing spree, (b) that other factors like mental health or gun laws are less critical, or (c) that every would-be “pick-up artist,” or PUA, is one rejection away from mass murder. Making those kinds of sweeping conclusions would be, as critics have pointed out, really irresponsible and dumb.

That said, Rodger's misogynistic rhetoric seems undeniably influenced by the manosphere, and his manifesto has kicked off a loud debate about how modern society treats women, online and off. If there was ever a time to take a closer look at online misogyny, it's now.

Alas, even from a distance, it doesn't look too pretty.

Mapping the manosphere

When [people talk about the “manosphere,”](#) they're basically talking about a vast, diverse network of blogs and forums that take a certain antagonistic stance toward women and dating. Not all branches of the manosphere are overtly appalling; not all of them are even run by men. That said, their core philosophy basically boils down to this: (1) feminism has overrun/corrupted modern culture, in violation of nature/biology /inherent gender differences, and (2) men can best seduce women (slash, save society in general) by embracing a super-dominant, uber-masculine gender role, forcing ladies to fall into step behind them.

This philosophy plays out differently in different places. Hundreds of Web sites are dedicated to teaching “game” to hapless daters. But often, if not always, “game” involves reducing women to sexual targets, rating their attractiveness on a scale of 1 to 10, and deploying techniques like “negging” to get a girl to notice you. (“Negging” = insulting a woman to throw off her confidence. For instance: “Your hair is hideous. Is that a wig?”)

The blog Chateau Heartiste, one of the forerunners in the manosphere/PUA scene, even publishes quizzes for men and women to determine their “dating market value.” The questions [for men](#) include, “What is your occupation?” and “Have people besides your family called you funny?” The questions [for women](#) include, “How long are your legs in relation to your height?” (Long: +1 point; average: 0 points; short: -1 point.)

It's rude, of course. And it's a painfully cynical way to interpret interpersonal relationships. But taken to extremes, that belief in retro gender roles has fueled a whole system of sites that denigrate women and advocate for a socio-cultural regression that puts ladies back in the kitchen and bedroom. Sometimes these sites brand themselves as dating sites; others proudly fly the “Men's Rights” flag, in solidarity with a movement that essentially claims guys have it rough, too. (Important note: MRA sometimes, though not always, describes a push to reform divorce, visitation and alimony laws — clearly separate issues from what we're addressing here.)

In either case, the “manosphere” is frequently enough to make any progressive lady — or guy! — choke back bile. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which identifies hate groups, even went so far as to [publish a report](#) on it in 2012. (“Although some of the sites make an attempt at civility and try to back their arguments with facts,” the report

The Washington Post 



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read, “they are almost all thick with misogynistic attacks that can be astounding for the guttural hatred they express.”) The very next year, the comically named Return of Kings — which has, among other things, talked up eating disorders and hitting women — topped [our list of the most-hated sites](#) on the Web.

Manosphere doctrine, in a nutshell

To most people, it’s probably not difficult to see why the manosphere offends. At the most basic level, much of that community advocates for inequality between men and women, a problem called out by the SPLC report. In the U.S., at least, that’s not generally a value that the mainstream rallies around.

The manosphere doesn’t just preach inequality between men and women, however. I’ve spent more than a year observing several large sites within this community, and its ideology regarding the “right” kinds of men and women is pretty inflexible, too. Gay, lesbian or transgendered people are, needless to say, completely out. “Masculine” women (i.e. women with short hair, women with high-powered jobs, women with outspoken opinions) also earn the manosphere’s derision. But the community reserves a special kind of disdain for “effeminate” or “beta” men — men who either do not have “game” or who are still taking what believers call the “blue pill.”

Per the [blog Red Pill Room](#) — where, needless to say, betas aren’t welcome — the blue pill is like a metaphor for the mainstream mindset:

The subconscious pattern of behaviors, often informed by feminism, feminists and mainstream society, that encourages men to forego traditionally and truly masculine behavior and attitudes in favor of those in which capitulation to female whimsy.

In other words, red-pilled men are alphas who have seen the light and seized the sex/power/glory owed to them by their biology. Blue-pilled guys are the hapless, sexless dummies still treating women as equals and asking them out in conventional, non-pushy ways.

This distinction, while it sounds ridiculous, is actually pretty critical to understanding Rodger and his place in the manosphere ... such as it was. While Rodger evidently followed a number of pick-up sites and YouTube channels, his most notable postings were on a site called PUAhate — a forum for malcontents complaining that the “game” didn’t work. There, and on other forums, Rodger identified as an “incel, or “involuntary celibate” — a virgin who couldn’t get girls, even after taking “the red pill.” On the manosphere totem pole, there’s nothing quite so pathetic. Besides women, anyway.



The Washington Post

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The manosphere reacts to Rodger

And so, while some of Rodger's companions on PUAHate have praised his gruesome spree — Josh Glasstetter at SPLC [points out that](#) he was almost seen as some kind of “incel revolutionary” — the rest of the manosphere has worked [hard to distance themselves](#) from him.

“Rodger pings some operational gaydars,” mocks Heartiste.

“A lot of loney beta males will identify with him,” Roosh [followed up](#). (Notice that he calls Rodger a beta, despite Rodger's videotaped insistence that he was “an alpha male.”)

Rodger blames women. Women blame misogyny. Misogynists blame feminists. This is a fascinating, weird cycle — and it actually repeats after most national tragedies in which a man kills a woman or women. In 2009, when George Sodini killed three women at an L.A. Fitness outside of Pittsburgh, Heartiste was quick to postulate that, had Sodini “learned game,” he never would have developed negative feelings toward women or become violent.

Meanwhile, a [guest blogger](#) on Return of Kings theorized in December that 18-year-old Karl Halverson Pierson killed a girl at his school because he was “sexually frustrated.” Another [post on the site](#), published about the same time, blamed a “lack of game” for brutal murders everywhere from Baltimore to Southern California.

But Return of Kings' latest post really takes the cake. “No one would have died if PUAHate killer Elliot Rodger learned game,” [promises](#) the ever-aggrandizing Roosh V, who then goes on to promise that “if Rodger came to me, he would have received actionable and effective advice.” (A sampling of recent advice from the site, presented without comment: “all women are nymphomaniacs who crave rough sex”; “if your girlfriend insists on a big wedding, dump her.”)

A moment of awakening for the manosphere, this incident is not. And in some ways, that should be just as disturbing as Rodger's videotaped rant.

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Caitlin Dewey covers social media, digital culture and other online phenomena for the Post. Sign up for her daily web culture email [here](#) or follow her on [Twitter](#).

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CoreyinSavannah

Looks like Jay's foot is lodged in his mouth

10:47 AM EST (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-ins...>)

[Like](#) | [Reply](#)

CoreyinSavannah

Lets all give Jay a hand for demonstrating some real live misogyny for us.

10:22 AM EST (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-ins...>)

clap clap clap

[Like](#) | [Reply](#)

4

Fat_Cat

10:36 AM EST

Agreed.

[Like](#) | [Reply](#)

SeriousLee

Time for some reverse Taliban: prohibit men from the social, political, and economic spheres until they can demonstrate acceptable behavior.

10:12 AM EST (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-ins...>)

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1

Senjata

Man, I'm glad I'm married and don't have to worry about stuff like this.

10:10 AM EST (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-ins...>)

To anyone who feels as lonely as this guy did: grab a friend and go overseas -- Eastern Europe, Asia, South America, whatever you preference is -- get some, get some confidence, get some peace. Come back when you feel better.

And if that fails, just stay there, okay?

[Like](#) | [Reply](#)

3

EQ factor

10:09 AM EST (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-ins...>)

The Washington Post

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Can the human mind and behavior be fixed? Our solutions...prison or medicate. What about frontal lobotomies like in the movie Cuckoos Nest?

Like | Reply

CoreyinSavannah

10:10 AM EST

This kid most likely suffered from a personality disorder which can not be medicated because it is not a chemical problem.

Mental illness on the other hand is totally treatable by rebalancing the chemicals of the brain.

Like | Reply

Cossackathon

I don't subscribe to any of these groups, but that doesn't stop me feeling that the entire discussion of gender issues in WaPo and the mainline media is dominated by a 'womanosphere' that is prepared to castigate or marginalize any manifestation of male primal behavior. Which doesn't stop you from questioning our manhood if we can't hang drywall or plumb a new bathroom.

Like | Reply

1

CoreyinSavannah

10:07 AM EST

poor whittle baby. I am sorry life is soooo hard for you.

As a single mother I take the bulk of societies derision before they even take the time to learn the facts about me.

so all I can say is someone call the Whambulance.

Like | Reply

Jay in DC

10:14 AM EST [Edited]

You use the whittle and whambulance quite well as a devout feminist usually does. PRO TIP- You are a single mother because why? Like now over 1/3rd of women in America you have utterly poor decision making skills. The ghetto culture that spawned single mothers has moved into the mainstream. I bet baby daddy really pushed your buttons didn't he?

The smart by somewhat nerdy kid that would have stuck with you until you both died of old age? Not so much.

You have a "Broken Picker", and you are 100% responsible for your insanely poor choices in this life just like every other single mother that is currently decimating the infrastructure of this country by buying into feminist lies. But you go GRRRLL, enjoy your invisibility to high value single men now that you have a kid. Used Goods, then, innit?

Like

1

CoreyinSavannah

10:20 AM EST

My husband had a heart attack at 35 years old.

The Washington Post



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Like |

CoreyinSavannah

10:28 AM EST

and I will point out that it is precisely because I am not a woman of loose morals that I have not dated to snag a new one.

Like |

Jay in DC

10:57 AM EST

Congrats-- you are literally .01% of the statistics then if what you say is true. The other 99.99% are exactly as I described. Broken pickers, selecting cads and charlatans because they are "turned on" by them. Then confused and destroyed when left with a child whilst he moves onto the next one...

This is the way a civilization dies. Link, by broken link, and it all starts at home. I'm sorry if this painful truth hurts.

Like |

lexi82

10:32 AM EST [Edited]

I'm a feminist (and by feminist I mean I believe that men and women are equal - no gender is better than the other) and I prefer manly men. I like strong and capable men who are confident in the abilities they do have. If you can't put up drywall or do plumbing, I really don't care. Not being talented in home repair does not make you less manly in my view.

Like | Reply |

1

Old_Flying_Goat

The only "game" a man needs is to learn is how to be a true gentleman, treat women with respect, be confident without being too cocky or arrogant, and know how to have fun and be low-key and relaxed.

9:46 AM EST

(http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspi...

Like | Reply |

2

Jay in DC

10:18 AM EST

If you actually watch this kid's disturbing videos you will find he was a "perfect gentleman". His words, not mine, didn't work out so well for him... Not disagreeing with the confidence part which is ultimately important, or the fun, low key, etc. but the first part won't get you quite as much mileage in 2014 as it back in the day old guy.

Like | Reply |

lexi82

10:21 AM EST

This kid was also living in his own completely different reality, one in which a "gentleman" can debase women if he so chooses. A true gentleman treats everyone, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., with respect.

Like |

CoreyinSavannah

10:21 AM EST

oh please, you are just mad because women are no longer forced to marry marginally desirable men.

Like |

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SuzieTampa

9:25 AM EST (http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspi...
The "manosphere" is the equivalent of web sites in which whites consider themselves superior to people of color and constantly put them down. Wouldn't we consider a group racist if it gave tips on how whites could dominate African-Americans by saying negative things to them, for example?

Like | Reply

Cossackathon

10:01 AM EST

Suzie, I hope you can put your hand on a Bible and swear that you've never bought a magazine or book that promised to tell you how to 'dominate' men.

Like | Reply

1

CoreyinSavannah

10:08 AM EST

someone call the whambulance. We have a poor baby over here not getting his part of his white male entitlement.

Like

OrionsCat

10:25 AM EST

There is no need for that, Cossack. We women can think for ourselves. Maybe you should respect that.

Like

marctrain1

9:19 AM EST (http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspi...
I gotta say that I never knew any of this existed. What a sick society we have become. The internet certainly hasn't helped. Now all the sickos can find each other and support each other.

If you want to be a retro male then be a gentlemen, treat women with respect and curtesy and don't be an a-hole.

Like | Reply

2

CapCurrent

9:57 AM EST

I didn't know these sites existed either. Takes my depression about the human race to another not so pleasant level.

Like | Reply

1

msmithny

9:05 AM EST (http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspi...
First time I have heard of the "manosphere." Correct me if I am wrong but wasn't this particular mass murderer mentally ill and/or mentally disabled and in therapy since 8 years old? Like others before him

he saw the world through the eyes of a very disturbed person. A particular movie and/or a certain song have been the inspiration behind previous mass murderers. So shall we censor all songs and all movies? Will that stop these murderers? The father of one of the victims said "When will the Insanity stop." The answer is never because in many cases these acts are committed by a person with a genetic disorder and a certain very small percentage of populations become paranoid or have uncontrollable urges from the use of drugs and others from being victims of abuse. Banning songs and movies or kitchen knives like the one this murderer used to kill his three roommates is not going to stop these deranged killers. It is not a political problem other than when states pass laws like Calofornia that do not allow parents/guardians to urgently institutionalize these killers for a period of time for treatment for fear

The Washington Post



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of violating the would be killers civil rights.

Like | Reply

3

CalypsoSummer

9:16 AM EST [Edited]

This particular young man was apparently mentally unbalanced, yes. He had also been feeding heavily on the women-are-objects-I'm-entitled-to-own-one trough sponsored by, and filled by, these "manosphere" misogynists. I'm surprised you missed that point.

Like | Reply

2

msmithnv

10:16 AM EST

Didn't miss that point. I am saying there are a myriad of images, pictures, words, smells, songs and experiences that deranged killers choose from as their muse.

Like

1

Jay in DC

10:24 AM EST

You are literally, wholly, and excruciatingly painfully misinformed. I could write 10 paragraphs about your complete lack of understanding but it is like trying to convert an atheist to religion. An utter waste of time.

Like

CoreyinSavannah

10:25 AM EST

says a man who goes around called widows s--ts before taking five minutes to ask.

Why do you hate 50 percent of America Jay?:

Like

Moderator1

9:03 AM EST <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspi...> Whatshisname, the Aruba killer. (Now happily married, with a child, in prison) apparently was a follower of women hate websites.

Like | Reply

redbird7

9:01 AM EST <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspi...> This "Manosphere" nuttiness seems to track with the steady rise of women in our society (in independence, education, politics, earnings, overall success, etc) and the corresponding loss of the same among men. Boys are falling behind girls in almost every way success can be measured.

Get used to it, guys. Modern women won't be going back into barefoot-in-the-kitchen mode ever again.

Like | Reply

tweedburst

9:51 AM EST

Speaking of red herrings....Rodger killed FOUR MEN and two women because he was insane. Period. Not because women are allegedly entering some feminist thousand year reich of superiority. He was a nut who'd been in psych counseling since he was eight freaking years old. It's not men's fault any more than it's women's fault.

Like | Reply

2

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CoreyinSavannah

9:59 AM EST

it is not all men's fault but it is time for all men to realize all the ways they treat us like public property.

You can start by not asking strangers to smile for your pleasure.

Like | Reply | 1

Jay in DC

10:30 AM EST

You speak very confidently like a psychic or fortune teller. Are you -100%- certain about your theory? Because #1 issue) We are currently living in an unsustainable society. Go talk to lesbian feminist, but 100% realist Camilla Page about possible futures. When all men "opt out" en masse, which may happen sooner than you realize. Who is going to pick up your garbage? Service your engine? Repair your plumbing? Keep the electricity on in your cozy office whilst you keep yourself occupied with a paper pushing makework occupation? Let me know when you find out who...

#2 Issue) If something catastrophic happens before that, you will -marvel- at how fast women will seek out these undulating brutes who can protect them. In spite of everything you've been brainwashed into reality is thus--- You are NOT going to undo 50,000 years of human evolution in 50 years of feminist dogma. Period. -End of Line. So continue with your "strong, independent self" and let me tell you reality- 1st World Problems....

If the wheels ever come off, you will be shocked at how fast nature reverts to the mean.

Like | Reply | 1

CoreyinSavannah

10:32 AM EST

wow, no wonder you are so sexually frustrated and miserable. You are a horrible person and a one man woman repellant.

Like | Reply |

keaggy220

8:45 AM EST <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspi...>
Amazing how a tragic shooting can garner more articles in a single day than all the articles combined for our veterans being slaughtered by our own government VA Department. The template, must always

follow the liberal template - deflect things that make government look bad, highlight areas that will give government more control.

BOTH issues deserve enormous exposure.

Like | Reply | 4

redbird7

8:52 AM EST

Red herring alert!!!!

Like | Reply | 5

Moderator1

8:42 AM EST <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspi...>
Was he really a virgin? Maybe he was a nancy boy. Who says killers always tell the truth in their manifestos?

Like | Reply | 1

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DEFishback

Jargon-laden pop culture criticism strikes me as a trivializing response to this tragedy.
8:35 AM EST (http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspi...
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