



Elliot Rodger, And The Dark Heart Of Men's Rights Activism

By Chad Parkhill (<http://junkee.com/author/chad-parkhill>) 26/5/14

20 8471

[Share](#) 1.9K [Tweet](#) 89 [Reddit](#) 3 [Share](#) 2.2K [Email](#) 6

Last Friday night in Isla Vista, California, a young man named Elliot Rodger stabbed his three flatmates to death before driving through the streets in his black BMW, shooting randomly at members of the public. This rampage was put to a halt when Rodger, trapped in a shootout with the local police force, shot himself in the head. Excluding himself, Rodger killed six people: his flatmates Cheng Yuan Hong, George Chen, and Wei-han Wang, and, on the streets, Katherine Breann Cooper, Veronika Weiss, and Christopher Ross Michaels-Martinez. Thirteen others were injured.

Events such as these are, if not exactly commonplace, then at least depressingly familiar in the United States: in the past few years they've seen similar events in Sandy Hook, Aurora, Virginia Tech. As ever, this latest killing spree will stir up a debate in the US about both gun control and mental illness. But what separates this year's Isla Vista killings from other massacres is that Elliot Rodger not only appears to have had serious mental problems, but also subscribed to a virulent form of misogyny currently known in general as "men's rights activism". Rodger's internet activities and the message boards he frequented (<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/05/24/1301671-Elliot-Roger-Gunman-in-California-Mass-Shooting-was-influenced-by-the-Men-s-Rights-Movement>) demonstrate that this "activism" played a key role in Rodger's rampage – even though the majority of his victims were men.

Who Are These Men's Rights Activists?

Given that most positions of power and influence in contemporary society are occupied by men – nearly every position in the current Australian government's cabinet (<http://junkee.com/things-that-have-more-women-in-them-than-tony-abbotts-cabinet/19819>), for example – it seems weird that there even is such a thing as a men's rights movement. What rights are men currently denied?

The historical genesis of the movement makes it clear that men's rights activists are not so much arguing *for* a coherent position but, instead, are arguing *against* another position – namely, feminism. One of the

first men's rights movements, the *Bund für Männerrechte* or 'League for Men's Rights', was founded in Austria in March 1926 (<http://ernestbelfortbax.com/category/mens-rights-2/>) with the explicit aim of counteracting the 'excesses' of post-World War I women's emancipation movements. The strength and popularity of men's rights movements since then seems to have closely tracked the growing influence of feminist movements, such as the great flowering of second-wave feminist thought in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Now, thanks to the internet and its own corresponding explosion of feminist voices, men's rights activists from across the globe can come together online to share their grievances about the modern world.

The key assertion of men's rights activists is that men do not have power or privilege over women. Rather, they posit, men are victimised by a social structure that favours women. Men's rights activists point to a number of facts that, they claim, support this central tenet: the fact that men are more likely to die while working than women; the fact that men are more likely to be the victims of violent crime than women; and the fact that women are more frequently awarded full custody of children in divorce proceedings than men. (They also point to some 'facts' that are not facts at all, such as the risible claim that 50% or more of rapes reported to police did not happen (<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2012/spring/myths-of-the-manosphere-lying-about-women>), when in fact sexual assault is vastly under-reported (<http://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/24.%20Sexual%20Assault%20and%20Family%20Violence/prevalence-sexual-violence>.) These, they argue, prove that contemporary Western societies are structured to favour women at the expense of men.

Men's Rights Activists And Pick-Up Artistry

A recent development in men's rights activism is its connection with another social movement: that of pick-up artistry. The central idea of pick-up artistry is that women can be seduced by applying certain techniques (<http://www.puatraining.com/blog/pick-up-artist-techniques-you-need-to-master>), including 'negging' (a compliment with a back-handed sting in its tail, designed to make a woman feel insecure), 'peacocking' (wearing one outlandish accessory that will draw women's attention) and 'kino' (touching a woman casually during conversation to establish a precedent of physical contact). Of course, pick-up artistry is creepy as fuck because it's so overtly rape-y: what it says to men is that if women aren't interested in you, you can use 'this one weird old trick' to make them have sex with you. It basically treats dating as a video game rather than an interaction between two equal adults, with sex as the reward for mastering complex manoeuvres of button-pushing, just like the fatalities in *Mortal Kombat*.

Pick-up artistry, which reached the mainstream thanks to the popularity of Neil Strauss's 2005 best-seller *The Game*, also comes packaged with its own evolutionary theory. This theory argues that certain men are 'alphas' who can effortlessly dominate other men and have their pick of women, while nice-guy 'betas' will supply women with their emotional and material needs without ever getting any nookie. Men who cannot demonstrate their physical or social attractiveness will become 'incel', or involuntarily celibate. When you combine this pseudoscience with men's rights activism, a toxic worldview emerges: women are seen as parasites who feed off men and don't even have the decency to sleep with them to return the favour.

Not All Mass Murderers ...

Rodger clearly viewed his lack of sexual success with women as a form of torture. In a YouTube video he ~~up-~~
~~loaded before embarking on his crimes, he claimed, "I've been forced to endure an existence of loneliness,~~
rejection and unfulfilled desires, all because girls have never been attracted to me".

As Rodger wrote in a 137-page memoir-cum-manifesto (<http://www.smh.com.au/world/elliott-rodger-manifesto-outlines-plans-for-santa-barbara-attack-20140525-38wkc.html>), the first phase of his spree "will represent my vengeance against all of the men who have had pleasurable sex lives while I've had to suffer. Things will be fair once I make them suffer as I did. I will finally even the score." He would then move his attention to the people he saw as the authors of his torment: women. "I cannot kill every single female on earth, but I can deliver a devastating blow that will shake all of them to the core of their wicked hearts." He planned to target a certain sorority full of "spoiled, heartless, wicked bitches"; "the kind of girls I've always desired but was never able to have because they all look down on me."


Although his plans were foiled before he could kill more women than men, it is clear that Rodger's attack was primarily motivated by an intense hatred of women, one stoked by his membership in several online groups dedicated to advancing male privilege such as PUAhate.com (<http://splcenter.org/blog/2014/05/24/shooting-suspect-elliott-rodgers-misogynistic-posts-point-to-motive/>). (Some of these were so-called "anti-Pick-Up Artistry" groups, but it's important to understand that these groups are not so much critical of the idea that women can be tricked into having sex with an otherwise unattractive man (<http://jezebel.com/5906648/the-angry-underground-world-of-failed-pickup-artists>) as they are critical of the burgeoning pick-up artist industry that they see as having stolen their money.)

One of the great, and very tragic, ironies that has emerged from this massacre is that many people – and not just men (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kashmirhill/2014/05/24/the-disturbing-internet-footprint-of-santa-barbara-shooter-elliott-rodger/>) – are lining up to dissociate Rodger from the world of men's rights activism and anti-pickup artistry. Men's rights activists absolutely *hate* the idea of women generalising their experiences with men, so much so that the phrase "not *all* men" has become something of a humorous trope (<http://www.listen-tome.com/save-me/>) amongst internet-connected feminists. In the wake of the killings, there is concerted effort on social media and elsewhere to portray Rodger as an outlier, someone who does not represent the attitudes of men's rights activists or those in the pick-up artist or anti-PUA communities. (These communities have responded to the shooting by diving for cover: one bodybuilding forum where Rodger had an account has deleted all trace of him (http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/05/24/elliott_rodger_the_pick_up_artist_community_s_predictable_horrible_response.html), and PUAhate.com is currently offline.) They point to the fact that Rodger killed more men than women; they argue that he was clearly mentally ill, and talk about the issue of gun control. Mental illness and gun control, they believe, have more of a bearing on what happened than Rodger's rampant misogyny.

There is certainly some truth to the idea that Rodger was mentally ill – by definition, anyone who would plan a killing spree is mentally disturbed. Similarly, *of course* Rodger was an outlier in these communities, since not every men's right activist has resorted to murder. And absolutely there should be further discussion about gun control in the United States, because these massacres keep happening. Take away his mental health issues and his easy access to guns, and this tragedy could well have been prevented.

But why are we ignoring the fact that Rodger's immersion in this online subculture very clearly had a bearing

on his selection of victims, and his warped persecution complex? A warped worldview where men are the ultimate victims because women don't put out enough seems to have been the catalyst for this tragedy. And that's something members of the men's rights and pick-up artist communities should be soberly reflecting on.



overgamer13 2 hours ago

Well girls, keep that in mid the next time you friedzone somebody!

Reply · 9 · 1 · 1

Hide replies ^



Rodney Jones 12 minutes ago

See girls this is what you get for treating nice guys like shit.

Reply · 1 · 1 · 1



Dan Neuenswander 2 seconds ago

I don't blame guns. I blame blondes for this one.

Reply · 1 · 1 · 1



SlippaE619 14 seconds ago

I hope you women see this as a lesson stop being so stuck up and give that one kid some pussy who never gets shit and you might save a life smdfh this nigga couldve saved his life if only one of you dumbs cunts could of given him some sweetness

Reply · 1 · 1 · 1



GiveAFuckOMeter= 0 1 minute ago

what a boss, but he should be more smart by being a serial killer, raping and killing girls way more smart and torture them until martyr state

Reply · 1 · 1 · 1



Dan Zhukov 8 seconds ago

And I really feel bad for him, rejection is agony

Reply · 1 · 1 · 1



Caitlin Welsh
@Caitlin_Welsh

Remember, ladies: fuck a creep, save a life.

8:37 PM - 25 May 2014

10 RETWEETS 10 FAVORITES

Follow

Men's Rights Activism and Feminism

I have often thought in the past that men's rights activism is, to purloin Gayle Rubin's phrase (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gayle_Rubin%23.22The_Traffic_in_Women:_Notes_on_the_.27Political_Economy.27_of_Sex.22), a feminism *manqué* — that is, that its practitioners could be feminists, but have missec the vital link between their laundry list of complaints and a coherent social theory. After all, the first English-

language men's rights groups came about in response to feminist theory, and some of them focused not on ~~how wrong feminists were, but on developing a full picture of how much patriarchy damages men as well as~~ women. And, as Lindy West has noted (<http://jezebel.com/5992479/if-i-admit-that-hating-men-is-a-thing-will-you-stop-turning-it-into-a-self-fulfilling-prophecy>), many of the issues that stick in the craws of men's rights activists are being worked on, right now, by feminists. Don't like that working-class male bodies are considered a disposable commodity, capable of being worked to death, by industrial capitalism? Neither do feminists. Don't like that custody arrangements have turned divorced men into 'Disneyland dads'? Neither do feminists. Don't like false rape accusations? Neither do feminists.

The difference is that feminists understand you can't address these issues in isolation. You can't meaningfully address men doing all the "dirty and dangerous" work without also looking at gender pay gaps, workplace cultures, and the way women's work is systematically undervalued. (As far as dirty and dangerous goes, have you ever seen what nurses, who are predominantly female, put up with?) You can't look at changing the perception that women should be primary caregivers without addressing the gendered division of home labour, the affective labour of motherhood, and male workplace cultures that encourage men to spend time away from their children. You can't address the way a very, very small number of women have filed false rape claims without also looking into the number of rapes that go unreported, and the judiciary's abysmal track record at convicting rapists.

Men's rights activists, by contrast, don't want to do the work that would actually address their complaints because it would mean they'd lose a bunch of male privileges that they are desperate to keep: the expectation that women exist solely for sex and motherhood, the fact that their labour is more handsomely rewarded than women's, and so on. The men's rights worldview wants to enforce the burdens of equality on women without men taking on their own responsibilities; it's a worldview that wants women to pay for their own dinner because women shouldn't be 'leeches', but still expects a blowjob at the end of the night because the men's rights activist is a 'nice guy' who followed all the rules of 'the game'.

One of the many terrifying things about Rodger's shooting rampage is that it demonstrates that some of these feminists *manqué* have missed the point of feminism by a very, very large margin. But I hold out some hope that at least some men's rights activists and pick-up artists out there are now strongly reconsidering their attachment to the poisonous stew of anti-women ideology and male entitlement that constitutes their current culture. It's a worldview that values men's comfort and libidinal urges above women's lives, as Rodger has demonstrated in the most terrifyingly literal way. But as demonstrated by the fact that several members of these 'manosphere' communities found Rodger's revenge fantasies unnerving (<http://mashable.com/2014/05/25/elliott-rodger-profile/>), some shreds of human empathy remain in this world despite the corrosive effects of men's rights rhetoric.

If nothing else comes of this tragedy, I hope that the sheer brutality of it gives pause to those men who joined this noxious online subculture because they have been given a raw deal by patriarchal society. I hope it makes them realise that there is something truly toxic at the root of this subculture, one that has contributed to seven people's deaths. I hope it makes at least a few of them realise that women and feminists are not the enemy, but their allies.

Chad Parkhill is a Melbourne-based writer and editor. He is the Program and Production Coordinator for the Emerging Writers' Festival, and has written for The Australian (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/>), The Lifted Brow (<http://www.theliftebrow.com/>), Killings (<http://www.killyourdarlingsjournal.com/blog>) (the blog of Kill Your Darlings ()), Meanjin (<http://www.meanjin.com.au/>) and The Quietus (<http://www.thequietus.com/>) amongst others.

Feature image of a candlelight vigil to honour the victims, via ABC7 Eye Witness News (<http://abc7.com/news/photos-mass-shooting-in-college-town-of-isla-vista/76470/>).

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE

You Might Also Like



(<http://junkee.com/everyone-hates-ryan-goslings-new-film>)



(<http://junkee.com/lena-dunham-live-tweets-kim-kanyes-wedding>)



(<http://learni.st/users/Klondike/boards/51403-the-women-of-dawson-city>)



(<http://junkee.com/neko-case-slams-playboy-dont-peggy-olsen>)



(<http://junkee.com/recap-was-last-nights-game-of-thrones-the-sexiest-episode>)



(<http://www.irishcentral.com/roots/food-drink/gilligans-gourmet>)

Recommended by

Tags: anti-PUAs (<http://junkee.com/tag/anti-puas>) / Elliot Rodger (<http://junkee.com/tag/elliott-rodger>) / gun control (<http://junkee.com/tag/gun-control>) / men's rights activism (<http://junkee.com/tag/mens-rights-activism>) / mental illness (<http://junkee.com/tag/mental-illness>) / pick-up artistry (<http://junkee.com/tag/pick-up-artistry>) / The Game (<http://junkee.com/tag/the-game>)

Share

1.9K

Tweet

89

Reddit

3

Share

2.2K

Email

6

20 Comments

Junkee

 Login

Sort by Best

Share  Favorite 

Join the discussion...

**Nicole Arby** • 2 days ago

Such a great article. Thank you Chad.

Misogyny is indefensible.

Allowing people to hold misogynistic viewpoints as valid opinions is indefensible.

17 | • Reply • Share ›

**poopydoopy** ➔ Nicole Arby • 21 hours ago

You can't legislate opinions, though. When people's views and opinions are legislated we end up in a totalitarian state.

| • Reply • Share ›

**poopydoopy** • 21 hours ago

This was an excellent article. The young delusional man that carried out this crime had obviously picked up some of his view from MRA sites, such as this part of his manifesto:

"The ultimate evil behind sexuality is the human female. They are the main instigators of sex. They control which men get it and which men don't. Women are flawed creatures, and my mistreatment at their hands has made me realize this sad truth. There is something very twisted and wrong with the way their brains are wired. They think like beasts, and in truth, they are beasts. Women are incapable of having morals or thinking rationally".

(from Elliot Rodger's Epilogue to his Manifesto).

No further comment necessary.

10 | • Reply • Share ›

**Sally** • 2 days ago

They couldn't get a woman to write this? When did feminism find it's voice under a white-knighting dude?

3 | • Reply • Share ›

**Caitlin Welsh** ➔ Sally • 2 days ago

I have no problem with a feminist man discussing men's responses to feminism. It's a bit insulting to Chad to say he's white-knighting (a term often used by MRAs to disparage male feminists by suggesting they too just want to get laid but are trying to do so by agreeing with and supporting the women). He's not displacing a woman's voice here. He had something insightful and constructive to say from a man's perspective.

45 | • Reply • Share ›

**trixtah** ➔ Sally • 2 days ago

Wow, I missed the bit where he said, "Don't worry, little ladies, I got this."

MORE READS IN NEWSLETTER

music (<http://junkee.com/category/music>) news

VICE'S 'BRO GUIDE TO GETTING LAID' OFFERS MASTERCLASS IN BAD TIMING ([HTTP://JUNKEE.COM/VICES-BRO-GUIDE-TO-GETTING-LAID-OFFERS-MASTERCLASS-IN-BAD-TIMING/34974](http://JUNKEE.COM/VICES-BRO-GUIDE-TO-GETTING-LAID-OFFERS-MASTERCLASS-IN-BAD-TIMING/34974))

(<http://junk>

By Edward Sharp-Paul (<http://junkee.com/author/edward-sharp-paul>) 27/5/14

3 1443

tv (<http://junkee.com/category/tv>) feature

IS HOMOSEXUALITY STILL TABOO IN SURFING? ([HTTP://JUNKEE.COM/IS-HOMOSEXUALITY-STILL-TABOO-IN-SURFING/34976](http://JUNKEE.COM/IS-HOMOSEXUALITY-STILL-TABOO-IN-SURFING/34976))

(<http://junk>

By Nic Holas (<http://junkee.com/author/nic-holas>) 27/5/14

1 443

Brought to you by The Feed (<http://junkee.com/partner/thefeed>)

news (<http://junkee.com/category/news>) junk

CHICAGO'S LATEST SIGHTSEEING ATTRACTION IS A VERTIGO SUFFERER'S WORST NIGHTMARE ([HTTP://JUNKEE.COM/CHICAGOS-LATEST-SIGHTSEEING-ATTRACTION-IS-A-VERTIGO-SUFFERERS-WORST-NIGHTMARE/34961](http://JUNKEE.COM/CHICAGOS-LATEST-SIGHTSEEING-ATTRACTION-IS-A-VERTIGO-SUFFERERS-WORST-NIGHTMARE/34961))

(<http://junk>

By Steph Harmon (<http://junkee.com/author/stephjunkee-com>) 27/5/14

715

NEXT

tv (<http://junkee.com/category/tv>) review

JOE HOCKEY WAS UTTERLY DESTROYED ON LAST NIGHT'S #QANDA ([HTTP://JUNKEE.COM/JOE-HOCKEY-WAS-UTTERLY-DESTROYED-ON-LAST-NIGHTS-QANDA/34508](http://JUNKEE.COM/JOE-HOCKEY-WAS-UTTERLY-DESTROYED-ON-LAST-NIGHTS-QANDA/34508))

(<http://junk>

By James Colley (<http://junkee.com/author/james-colley>) 20/5/14

9 37972

tv (<http://junkee.com/category/tv>) feature

**WHY WENTWORTH IS THE BEST AUSTRALIAN SHOW ON TV
([HTTP://JUNKEE.COM/WENTWORTH-RETURNS-TOMORROW-NIGHT-AND-YOU-REALLY-SHOULD-WATCH-IT/34406](http://junkee.com/wentworth-returns-tomorrow-night-and-you-really-should-watch-it/34406))**

(<http://junkee.com>)

By Camilla Pepper (<http://junkee.com/author/camilla-pepper>) 19/5/14

1221

tv (<http://junkee.com/category/tv>) junk

JENNIFER LAWRENCE PLAYS 'A BOX OF LIES' WITH JIMMY FALLON, IS PREDICTABLY HILARIOUS ([HTTP://JUNKEE.COM/JENNIFER-LAWRENCE-PLAYS-A-BOX-OF-LIES-WITH-JIMMY-FALLON-IS-PREDICTABLY-HILARIOUS/34376](http://junkee.com/jennifer-lawrence-plays-a-box-of-lies-with-jimmy-fallon-is-predictably-hilarious/34376))

(<http://junkee.com>)

By Steph Harmon (<http://junkee.com/author/stephjunkee-com>) 16/5/14

3063



thought (<http://junkee.com/category/thought>) feature

**Learn How To Write For The Web At The Emerging Writers' Festival
(<http://junkee.com/learn-how-to-write-for-the-web-at-the-emerging-writers-festival/34872>)**

(<http://junkee.com>)

By Edward Sharp-Paul (<http://junkee.com/author/edward-sharp-paul>) 26/5/14

307



thought (<http://junkee.com/category/thought>) opinion

**Elliot Rodger, And The Dark Heart Of Men's Rights Activism
(<http://junkee.com/elliott-rodger-and-the-dark-heart-of-mens-rights-activism/34885>)**

(<http://junkee.com>)

By Chad Parkhill (<http://junkee.com/author/chad-parkhill>) 26/5/14

20 8471



thought (<http://junkee.com/category/thought>) opinion

Australian Political Satire Doesn't Go Far Enough (<http://junkee.com/australian-political-satire-doesnt-go-far-enough/34096>)

(<http://junkee.com>)

By Liam McLoughlin (<http://junkee.com/author/liam-mcloughlin>) 13/5/14

10 3213

[Read More Thought \(http://junkee.com/category/thought\)](http://junkee.com/category/thought)