

## **“The New/ "Alt" Right, Toxic Masculinity, and Violence”**

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### **Introduction**

The politics of masculinity are now front and centre in mainstream society to a degree that is unprecedented. Donald Trump’s U.S. presidential campaign and election victory in 2016 were key events in positioning the topic of masculinity publicly in new and unprecedented ways. Much of the media coverage of Trump’s campaign and election victory highlights masculinity as a significant element in analyzing his political successes as well as potential sources of weakness. The Trump campaign has been credited with exposing a “cult of toxic masculinity” (*The Telegraph*, October 2016) as well as evidencing the need to rebuke and reject the “toxic masculinity” he represents through protest actions like the women’s marches (*Cosmopolitan* January 2017, *The New York Times* October 2017).

Alongside Trump we are witnessing many other invocations of manhood. Some, such as the “Proud Boys”, reflect a similar kind of toxic masculinity symbolized by Trump—that is, a narrow and constraining understanding of masculinity primarily characterized by dominance, aggression, strength, sexual conquest and the rejection of any traits or behaviors associated with femininity. At the same time, we are witnessing men in politics challenge traditional notions of masculinity. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his unapologetic (if largely symbolic) feminism have been lauded internationally for promoting a new kind of masculine strength on the world stage. Trudeau’s gender presentation is also central in the discourse of his political opponents. “The Conservative attack ads with tag lines like ‘nice hair though’ and ‘he’s in way

over his head' were designed to make Trudeau the butt of a masculine joke" (Sabin 2016). As Sabin argues, "these attacks made both implicit and explicit connections between Trudeau's masculinity and his fitness for government" (n.p).

Clearly, masculinity *matters* in politics. Yet, while sociologists like Connell (2005) and Kimmel (2012) have been researching the societal impact(s) of various masculinities over the last two decades, the discipline of political science has been relatively silent on the complex ways that masculinities impact the political sphere. This omission is a significant gap in the political science scholarship and is particularly problematic for feminist political scientists and feminist political praxis. As Hebert (2007) argues, "Empowering individual women through building a sense of personal efficacy and independence may be possible in the absence of attention to men, but transforming the social structures that sanction and sustain masculinism and its damaging manifestations is not" (41). Hebert's position highlights a harsh reality for contemporary feminists; feminism(s) will be limited in both reach and impact if feminist theory and praxis fail to engage with the complexities of men and masculinities.

This chapter explores the politics of masculinity and masculinism by considering and reflecting on the complex interplay between dominant notions of "being a man" and far right political movements, most notably those associated with the "new" or "alternative" right.<sup>1</sup> While it is important to recognize that there are women involved in alt-right organizations this does not undermine the foundational role masculinism plays in alt-right ideology. While many new right women would eschew a feminist identity in most contexts, those who do publicly identify as "conservative feminists" typically advocate a politics based on some kind of return to a "traditional" socio-political order founded on a masculine public sphere and a feminized private sphere.

We regard far right or alternative right movements as deeply and regressively populist. Our depiction of populism reveals it to be the predominant political vehicle for masculinity, while masculinity stands as a quotidian expression of populism. It follows that masculinity is central to understanding how men become involved in alternative right movements and it is equally central in understanding how they might get out. In particular, we focus on the dominant and protest masculinities that coalesce in the alt-right. Providing a convincing counter-narrative to these masculinities is central to diminishing the popularity of the alt-right. Doing so contributes to an immediate political goal of reducing two kinds of violence: the violence that members of the alternative right commit upon others – both women and men – and the violence they commit upon themselves to keep their version of masculinity intact.

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<sup>1</sup> Brittan (1989) provides a useful distinction between masculinism and masculinities that is consistent with our approach: "While 'masculinity...is always local and subject to change...what does not easily change is the justification of and naturalization of male power; that is, what remains relatively constant is the masculine ideology'" (quoted in Nicholas and Aguis 2018, 5).

## What is the Alt-Right?

The alternative right is reshaping much of our current political landscape and discourse. Defining the alternative right is a complex task both epistemologically and ethically because the foundation of contemporary alt-right movements is racism. It is possible that by using the innocent-sounding term “alt-right” rather than a more politically explicit term like “white supremacist movement,” we inadvertently grant legitimacy to the innocuous framing of the movement’s politics. Hawley (2017) discusses these and other complexities in his book, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*. Hawley argues:

Although I understand and appreciate this argument [...] I will use the term ‘Alt-Right.’ At this point the racist nature of the Alt-Right is well known, and [...] I am not using the term to downplay this element of the movement. Relying exclusively on the umbrella term ‘white supremacist’ would furthermore mask the ways the Alt-Right differs from other manifestations of the racial right. The Alt-Right is unlike any racist movement we have ever seen. It is atomized, amorphous, predominantly online, and mostly anonymous. Although it remains small, it is growing. And it was energized by Donald Trump’s presidential campaign. (3)

Like Hawley we claim that there is good reason to study the alternative right as a distinct entity in contemporary politics. At the same time, it is important to underline that the alt-right is neither monolithic nor static. There is no reliable survey data available on membership or affiliation and given the alt-right’s use of anonymity, irony, trolling and misinformation it is difficult to truly know the size, demographics, or the full landscape of alt-right political positions.

Despite the absence of membership numbers the significance of the alt-right is not only evidenced by the Trump presidency but also in other political events both domestic and international. For example, the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, between alt-right groups and anti-fascist protestors; the U.K.’s 2016 “Brexit” referendum and the racist contributions of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP); the increasing electoral success of Marine Le Pen in France in 2017; the continued rise of alt-right media personalities such as Ann Coulter, Katie Hopkins and Ezra Levant; and the increasing publicity of “incels,” or “involuntarily celibate” men who respond with an intense misogyny toward all women and especially those who have relationships with men regarded as strong or powerful.

These developments cannot simply be understood as more extreme versions of conservatism. In fact, the rejection of mainstream or “establishment” conservatism is a central tenet of the alternative right. “Whereas earlier right-wing critics of the conservative movement wanted a seat at the conservative table, the alt-right wants to displace conservatism entirely

and bring a new brand of right-wing politics into the mainstream (Hawley 2017, 7). Nagle (2017) also argues for the *newness* of the *new* right, particularly its online “culture war” tactics:

Those who argue that the new right-wing sensibility online today is just more of the same old right are wrong. Although it is constantly changing, in this important early stage of its appeal, its ability to assume the aesthetics of counterculture, transgression and nonconformity tell us many things about the nature of its appeal and about the liberal establishment it defines itself against. It has more in common with the 1968 left’s slogan ‘It is forbidden to forbid!’ than it does with anything most recognize as part of any traditionalist right. (28)

Thus, the new right is indeed new in many ways. Still, while there is much that is distinct about today’s alt-right politics these movements also draw on a sense of threat to status and belonging that is consistent with older white supremacist movements. At the core of this anxiety and perception of threat is a kind of “American Identitarianism” defined by the Southern Poverty Law Centre as, “a version of an ideology popular in Europe that emphasizes cultural and racial homogeneity within different countries” (n.d.).

One way that the alt-right’s white nationalism is different from older white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan is that its racism can be more subtle (Neiwart 2017, 220-21). Without disappearing altogether, direct physical attacks like lynching have been replaced by arguments about the racial and cultural superiority of whites. The immediate implication, which is often made explicit anyway, is that the inferiority of non-whites is the leading cause of everything from social and moral decay to economic struggles. Much of the alt-right identifies the only permanent solution as an “ethno-state” populated exclusively by whites of a particular cultural background. Hence its opposition to any immigrants who do not fit a very narrow profile, to virtually all refugees, to non-Christians (especially Muslims and Jews), and its desire to “secure its borders,” including by building walls. In addition to its xenophobia, other prominent alt-right political positions include: strong support for free-market capitalism domestically, tempered by skepticism toward free trade and dislike for multinational corporations, especially foreign ones; love of the nation in the form of unwavering patriotism; antipathy toward supporting international organizations like the United Nations or NATO; and a strong law and order agenda including harsh prison sentences and the death penalty.

### **Conceptualizing Hegemonic Masculinity**

Masculinity is often referred to as a singular thing despite that many masculinities exist. Analytically, we treat masculinity and femininity as the same: sets of practices and norms that involve our bodies and what is done with and to them, without those practices and norms being reducible to our bodies and especially not to biology. As Connell rightly puts it: “Gender

exists precisely to the extent that biology does *not* determine the social” (2005, 71). What distinguishes masculinities and femininities is how they fit into our overall system of gender and its ordering of our social practices. Complex gender hierarchies exist that are historically durable on the one hand while being open to contestation and change thanks to shifting ideas and material circumstances on the other hand. Thus, it is correct to say that systems of male privilege have dominated in the West for hundreds of years *and* that struggles to rewrite the gender system are destabilizing the straightforward reproduction of those privileges. What does this general historical reality mean for contemporary masculinities and the alt-right?

One of the ongoing controversies in gender studies is whether something called “hegemonic masculinity” is a useful concept and, indeed, whether it exists in the real world at all. Hegemony refers to the dominant social position occupied by a specific group of people, a position that is enjoyed thanks to a significant though not unlimited degree of cultural legitimacy. To possess hegemonic power means being able to rely largely on non-coercive means to sustain that power. Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (2005, 77). In Connell’s view, hegemony combines cultural dominance with institutional power, so that the top echelons of business, government and the military are most likely to house hegemonic masculinity. Elsewhere, she takes “transnational business masculinity” (defined by egocentrism, conditional loyalties, limited responsibilities to others, and libertarian sexuality) as the hegemonic form in the late-20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries (2000, 51-52).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has benefits. By offering analytical specificity regarding what version of masculinity is most dominant, it allows for a focused challenge to hegemonic assumptions. However, the potential drawbacks are considerable. Connell admits that we risk turning hegemonic masculinity into an inflexible stereotype that resists investigating how every man’s masculinity involves compromises and tensions between different masculinities (2000, 23, 219; Garlick 2016, 35-39). Moreover, hegemonic masculinity should not be conflated with patriarchal rule or “masculinism” generally speaking. The latter refers to the dominance of men over women in general, whereas with the former it is a very specific group of men that are dominant not only in comparison to women, but to all other men and their subordinate masculinities as well. In our view, then, if the concept of hegemonic masculinity is to be helpful, it should be used more loosely than Connell would like. Beyond acknowledging that multiple masculinities will contribute to every man’s identity, this involves seeing masculinity as a hybrid product that is context dependent: the dominant form of masculinity can and will change depending on the setting, which means that there is no one dominant version.

Our loosening of the strict boundaries that accompany the concept of hegemonic masculinity is not meant to downplay the existence of the “patriarchal dividend” that most men enjoy to one degree or another. The typical benefits that men enjoy simply thanks to being men rather than women, include higher wages and lower unemployment rates, increased chances of reaching positions of institutional power (government, economy, military, media), the ability to rely on women’s labour in the home, superior cultural regard, and the expectation of sexual access to women, any and all of which can rely on the threat of violence. The patriarchal dividend is distributed unevenly, however, and groups like gay or non-white men (in North America) receive fewer benefits on the whole. This is particularly interesting in the context of the alt-right because it views the patriarchal dividend as having more or less disappeared, and it would say the same thing about what we can call the “cultural dividend,” namely the intrinsic benefits to being white. It is essential, then, to investigate how real material and cultural changes in people’s lives are combined with *perceptions* of such changes, along with their implications for masculinities and the alt-right.

### **Masculinities and the Alt-Right**

In addition to hegemonic masculinities, other categories include subordinate, marginalized, complicit and protest masculinities. None of these masculinities exists independently of the others; rather, they are products of the interaction between different men (Connell 2000, 30). For example, gay men will often be regarded (by others and themselves) as possessing a subordinate masculinity, one that does not measure up to the stereotypical masculinity of a heterosexual man. In a white-dominant context, non-white men will often possess marginalized masculinities – ones that are not palpably different from those that are more dominant, except that a clear social marker (in this case race) symbolizes why such men are not worthy of the same status. Complicit masculinities are those that are non- or sub-dominant, yet still benefit from the existing gender system without being inclined to offer significant vocal support for it or resistance to it. Often these are “average” men who are non-violent, assist their wives with housework and contribute to parenting, and enjoy “manly” activities (e.g. sports) without being particularly good at them (Connell 2005, 79-80). Finally, recall the importance of context: within the gay community there will be dominant and marginalized masculinities, just as there will be in various racial communities and within different economic classes.

The masculinities we find in the alt-right are better understood if we consider some of the long-term social trends that have changed Western societies in the post-Second World War era. They include the following: 1) the evolution of the family structure; 2) women’s increased participation higher education (both as students and teachers) and in the workforce; 3) the growing commitment by government (still very much a work in progress) to treat people equally, which takes a variety of forms from rights legislation and multiculturalism to

affirmative action plans and anti-discrimination laws; 4) increasing acceptance of the idea that women's sexuality is active rather than passive; 5) increasing acceptance of gay, lesbian, queer and trans sexuality; 6) growing influence of women and non-whites in cultural fields / activities, such as the media, sports and music industries; 7) movement toward a post-industrial economy.

Whether individually or collectively, none of these changes have put an end to male dominance. What has happened is that the taken-for-granted legitimacy of white male domination and privilege is questioned more often. This is confirmed by the very existence of the alt-right and its growing resistance toward what it sees as the illegitimate loss of white male privilege. We can turn to the 2016 US presidential election voter behaviour literature to see this impact. As Schaffner, MacWilliams and Nteta (2017) demonstrate, voter behaviour was strongly influenced by attitudes of sexism and racism. Despite much political rhetoric and media framing to the contrary, the gap in voting behaviour between whites with college education and whites without college education is not well explained by economic differences or anxieties (i.e. the "left behind" thesis) but rather best understood as the outcome of sexism and racism. The "left behind" thesis is also debunked by Mutz (2018), who documents overwhelming evidence that the central motivation behind Trump support was a perception of status threat among dominant or "high-status" groups, which in her research includes those who fall into one or more of the following categories: white, Christian, and male (2018, 1). Similarly, Bartels and Cramer (2018) document a longer-term trend (their data is from 1965-1997) showing how white Americans become more conservative as their economic well-being increases rather than when it decreases. The perception of a status threat fuels a politics of "aggrieved entitlement," a reactionary perspective Kimmel describes as, "that sense that those benefits to which you believed yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by unforeseen forces larger and more powerful" (2013, 18). Even hegemonic masculinities are drawn toward this view when developments like the #MeToo movement confront illegal sexual behaviour that has been long-unchallenged.

These insights about the significance of social status compared to economic well-being mean that the alt-right cuts across economic class. As Kimmel puts it, white anger "knows no class nor originates in a specific class" (2013, 13). As a consequence, the alt-right stands as an uncommon example of protest masculinities overlapping from multiple class locations, especially middle and upper-class positions where men are much more likely to possess dominant or hegemonic masculinities. In other words, dominant masculinities and protest masculinities can not only co-exist, they can be one in the same thing depending on the circumstance. In this instance there is no choice but to depart from Connell's description of the political contradictions that define protest masculinity: "[I]t builds on a working-class masculine ethic of solidarity. But this is a solidarity that divides the group from the rest of the working class. The loss of the economic basis of masculine authority leads to a divided

consciousness – egalitarianism *and* misogyny – not to a new political direction” (2005, 117-18). We assert two important differences: the declining economic basis of masculine authority is not a dominant explanatory factor; and, contrary to Connell’s view about protest masculinity in general, the alt-right *does* lead to a new political direction, one that arrived most obviously with Donald Trump’s electoral success and aspects of his political agenda.

The alt-right’s masculinist outlook is fundamentally one of emasculation and loss. The following quotation from *National Vanguard*, an American neo-Nazi magazine, captures the extent to which emasculation is thought to have occurred:

As Northern males have continued to become more wimpish, the result of the media-created image of the “new male” – more pacifist, less authoritarian, more “sensitive,” less competitive, more androgynous, less possessive – the controlled media, the homosexual lobby and the feminist movement have cheered. . . . [T]he number of effeminate males has increased greatly . . . legions of sissies and weaklings, of flabby, limp-wristed, non-aggressive, non-physical, indecisive, slack-jawed, fearful males who, while still heterosexual in theory and practice, have not even a vestige of the old macho spirit, so deprecated today, left in them. (quoted in Kimmel 2013, 256-7)

We contend that these sentiments are widely shared within the alt-right and among wider conservative circles; what matters is the degree to which they are held, which goes some way to determining how militant one’s political response will be. Additionally, those responses can be both aspirational (restoring what has been lost) and protective (guarding what remains). Nothing prevents either of those sentiments from including economic concerns, though cultural grievances play a greater role. The passage from *National Vanguard* does not mention immigrants (and particularly non-white and illegal immigrants) or increased cultural diversity, but they too are central to the alt-right’s story of cultural antagonism and loss. More generally, we can add America’s defeat in the Vietnam War, the terrorist attacks on American soil against the World Trade Centre on September 1, 2001, and its long-running difficulties in the Middle East and Afghanistan (both pre- and post-9/11) to explain a more general sense that America’s masculine traits of power and control are in decline.

The alt-right’s narrative is powerful on its own. What makes a movement is its ability to offer solidarity and a sense of belonging to those who are open to alt-right views. It brings people together (more often virtually and in their own heads rather than physically) for a common cause. Aggrieved entitlement underpins that cause and it is easy to imagine that the result is a very simplistic and nasty kind of politics. The reality may not be far from this, but it is also more complex. Consider Kimmel’s insight: “Masculinity is not . . . the experience of power; it is the experience of entitlement to power” (2000, 241; 2013, 41). Deep down, some members of the alt-right know that not every man can achieve their masculine ideal; but they feel entitled to have the opportunity to do so and that the lack of opportunity constitutes the



widespread emasculation of American men and America more generally. Members of the alt-right can even defend egalitarian views – an equal playing field for everyone with no special treatment for women or minorities or foreigners – that in turn are used to justify hatred toward those same groups. For example, the problem is not necessarily with women or blacks or immigrants per se (though it is for some), but with feminists, advocates of affirmative action, and immigrants with cultures incompatible with America’s cultural legacy. They are the ones who have changed America and American masculinity along with it. This alt-right view is why we think the connection between the alt-right and populism is such a strong one.

### **The Alt-Right and Populism**

For members of the alt-right, one of the functions that its toxic masculinism serves is to disguise or cover up the fact that these men are, variously, *unsure* of their own masculine qualities; uncertain about what masculinity requires of them; and insecure about their present social standing and future hopes. Toxic masculinity is thus itself split between its outward presentation of uniform strength and dominance and its motivating (and hence unresolved) core of uncertainty, doubt, suspicion and resentment.

What forms of politics are associated with alt-right masculinity? We think that the alt-right has encouraged a toxic form of populist politics that in turn has supported the alt-right’s growth. The literature on populism is vast and cannot be summarized here. The most basic feature of populism is that it privileges “the people” and its will as the most authentic features of politics. Populists wish to reassert the primacy of that will, which they believe has been thwarted by a variety of other actors such as political and economic elites, minority groups, international political organizations and multinational corporations. Consequently, populists happily include those people who are devoted to its vision of the people, their culture and the nation to which they belong, while readily wish to exclude those who fail such a test. Some scholars have associated populism with progressive movements (Grattan 2016) but the dominant position, which we support, is that populism almost always breeds regressive politics (Urbinati 1998). For us, populism is also symptomatic. In times when its strength is on the rise, we should be able to identify trends associated with increased narratives of social stress.

The alt-right and populism share affinities regarding their views of the past and the present, along with how to secure their desired future. The past is recalled with great reverence as a time of natural social order when success was available to all who would work for it. Whether such a time ever existed scarcely matters – it is the *perception* of an uncorrupted past that does the work. Present-day nostalgia stems from the loss of that past, of the disappointment and hurt that it is no longer available. Populist and alt-right politics are reclamation projects: they aim to restore a past that has been lost.

Populism offers a natural political vehicle for toxic masculinity, while toxic masculinity provides an everyday home for populist sentiments. More specifically, the populist vision of the people and the alt-right's conception of masculinity and the gender system mirror one another in three explicitly political ways. First, the idea of "the people" as an organic and homogenous body mirrors the alt-right view, not just of masculinity, but of gender itself as a set of natural features that must be kept in tact. Second, the idea of an "authentic" people generates populism's moralism, which is what it uses to decide who counts as the people and who does not. The gendered reality of populism and the alt-right is especially noticeable here. Certain individuals (white, non-elite, non-immigrant) who would normally belong to "the people" can end up being excluded if they are regarded by populists as being too liberal, too inclusive and too tolerant of people's identity choices. In short, they are too "feminine" to qualify as defenders of the people and its culture.

Finally, populists wish to establish an "identity-lock" between themselves and the state. The aims of the people and the actions of the state should be identical. In contrast, there are those who think it is politically attractive (and potentially unavoidable) for a tension to exist between the state and the people who live in it. A non-institutionalized, heterogeneous people give authority to the state to act in their interests. Because those interests are diverse, just like the people themselves, the state is subject to contrasting political demands that cannot be brought together into a cohesive, singular political program that suits everyone. What exists is a dialectic of indeterminacy where the people and the state engage in a relationship of mutual support *and* opposition. These contrasting outlooks map onto two competing views of gender. The essentialism inherent in populist identity-lock (there is but one legitimate, true, "natural" position to occupy) is the same lens that leads to the alt-right's unbending views on gender. Whereas the dialectic of indeterminacy that ensures distance is maintained between the people and the state can be aligned with understandings of gender that accommodate aspects of social construction. On this view, gender, like the people-state relationship, changes according to circumstances and resists being reduced to a singular essence that persists throughout time.

### **Toxic Masculinity and Violence**

The masculinist politics of aggrieved entitlement exemplified by contemporary alt-right politics is deeply violent on multiple levels both physical and psychological. As Anolain, Cahn and Haynes observe, "Violence may literally 'make the man' in many societies" (2013, 131). While a comprehensive overview of toxic masculinities and violence is beyond the scope of this chapter, the complex connections between the two are well evidenced by the hypermasculine role of the military in many contexts. The underlying philosophy and actions of the military are fundamentally constituted by an ideology of male toughness and the establishment and

maintenance of manhood through dominance and/or conquest. “Violence on the largest possible scale is the purpose of the military; and no arena has been more important for the definition of hegemonic masculinity in European/American culture” (Connell 2005, 213). The impact of this ideology goes far beyond the military per se as the violent enactment of masculinity does not end with the completion of one’s military duty whether at home or abroad. “Once the official conflict ends, men who have acted militarily and the (generally) male political elite are deeply enmeshed in this cultural vision of manhood” (Anolain, Cahn and Haynes 2013, 130). While it is difficult to confirm claims (Kimmell 2013, 243) that a significant portion of the alt-right are military veterans, we know that the number of armed far-right militia chapters is on the rise, up by as much as 65% (165 to 273) in 2017 (Beirich and Buchanan 2018). As Johnson, explains, far right movements specifically target both military and law enforcement personnel for a variety of reasons including “their training experience (particularly weapons and explosives training), their disciplined way of life, leadership skills, and access to weapons, equipment, and sensitive information” (2012).

This militant reactionary politics is evidenced not just by alt-right rallies, marches, and other political events but also in various acts of violence that transgress the public-private divide, including gay-bashing, domestic violence and rape. As Connell argues, men involved in these acts of targeted violence often perceive themselves as “avengers on behalf of society” who are “punishing betrayers of manhood” and in so doing working to return society to its proper order (2005, 213). Central to understanding these phenomena is the relational nature of gender. From this perspective, the crux of gender injustice lies in the relations between various gendered agents who are asymmetrically constrained and/or enabled by their gender. Change in any one particular dimension creates tensions that impact other dimensions. This relationality explains why women and marginalized men “often bear the brunt of the flux in masculine roles” (Connell 2005 132; Connell 2012, 1677).

Threats of physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological violence via tactics such as online trolling and cyber-bullying also dominate the so-called “mansphere”. This term is used quite broadly in popular discourse and refers to a variety of groups and organizations including men’s rights activists focused on issues of fathers’ rights or men’s health to blatantly misogynistic groupings of “pick up artists”, “incels” and “red pill” revolutionaries (Nagel 2017, Nicholas and Agius 2018). These groups may or may not be directly linked to alt-right organizations but they share the same roots and much of the same anti-feminist and misogynist worldviews.

Some of the most high-profile actions taken up by various mansphere actors were the events of “#GamerGate” in 2014. These events started with a blog post by Eron Gjoni in which he accused his ex-girlfriend and game developer Zoe Quinn of cheating on him. This post resulted in intense cyberbullying and abuse against Quinn and her family including threats of rape and death. Quinn was also “doxxed” — her personal information was shared widely online

(Nagel 2017, 22). The attacks soon went beyond Quinn to include other feminist gamers and scholars including game developer Brianna Wu and feminist cultural critic Anita Sarkeesian. Both Wu and Sarkeesian received numerous rape and death threats and were also doxxed. In October 2014 Sarkeesian made international headlines after she cancelled a speaking engagement at Utah State University due to an anonymous threat of a mass shooting unless the event was cancelled (Todd 2015).

In many ways these events foreshadowed the 2016 election. Proponents of #GamerGate framed their actions as “a defense of free speech and journalistic ethics and against political correctness” (Lyons as cited in Nicholas and Aguis 2018, 48). The same discourses, tactics, and public figures also came to dominate in Trump’s campaign and provided much of the foundation for his alt-right support. The mansphere is thus a central space for the development of toxic masculinist ideology and the practice of symbolic and physical violence both of which have become central in the growth of the alterative right. As such, the mansphere has proven a significant site for contemporary politics.

It is important to acknowledge that toxic masculinity is also a key factor in understanding men’s violence(s) directed at the self. Men suffer psychological harm when they continually fail to live up to the expectations of masculinity and the narrow masculinities that remain dominant in society. Masculinity is increasingly recognized as an important factor in understanding many contemporary social issues that reflect a kind of violation of the self. In British Columbia for example, men accounted for 80% of the 935 fatal opioid overdoses in 2016 (Kassam 2017). Men also have a high rate of reported death by suicide when compared with women in almost all parts of the world. The male suicide rate is about three times that of women with the suicide rate for Canadian men peaking in the 40-50 age range (Bilkser and White 2011). These statistics suggest that men’s expectations for themselves to be strong, unemotional, risk takers have many social and political costs that have yet to be fully explored or understood. These findings also support the notion that many men will benefit from a de-centering of masculinity. From this perspective, the evolution and broadening of women’s social roles need not contribute to increased anxiety and anger among men. Instead, it offers a shared opportunity to contest hegemonic “breadwinner” or “strong silent type” understandings of manhood. In their place, alternative understandings and practices of masculinities can accommodate greater focus on care work and service to others for example.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting recent scholarship that challenges the widely accepted premise that social spending in care services, welfare and social development is a “drain” on the economy. Cohen’s (2017) analysis suggests the opposite. In the Canadian case, it is the reduction in government social spending as a proportion to GDP that puts a drag on the economy (309).

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have highlighted some of the most significant impacts masculinism and various competing and contradictory masculinities are having on contemporary politics. While our primary focus has been on the complex interactions between the alt-right, toxic masculinity, and violence we hope to have offered some insight into how the politics of masculinity is also central to challenging these current political developments. Political science is only just beginning to engage with these topics and we hope to have demonstrated the need for more work on men as gendered in our discipline, particularly feminist work that is centred on the relational and intersectional nature of gender.

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