

Research Brief: Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOWs)

S. Willis Shaw, Embedded Intelligence Analyst

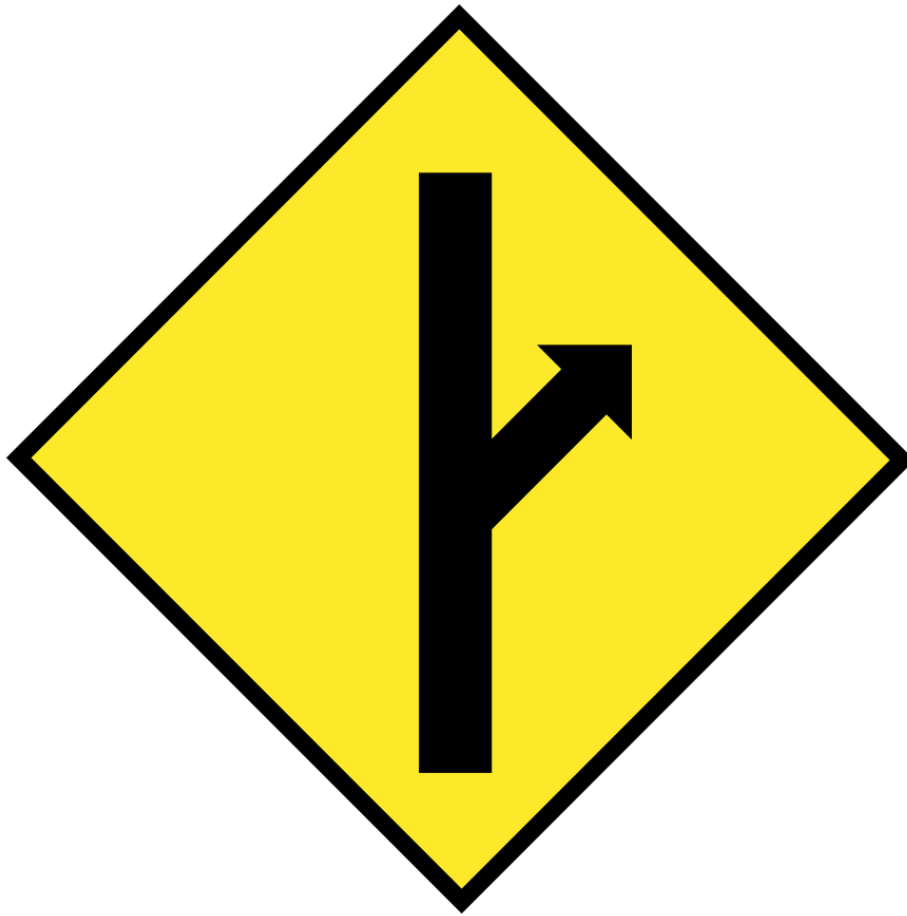
Maura's Voice Research Fund & ADL Center on Extremism

Created in cooperation with ADL Center on Extremism

Republished with permission



Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW): What You Need to Know



Part of the ADL Center on Extremism’s coverage of the misogynist manosphere and its subcultures, each of which impacts women’s experiences of safety and equity – online and offline.

Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) is a distinct faction of the “manosphere,” the broad set of male supremacist, anti-feminist, misogynist and sometimes violent extremist movements that exist largely online. The MGTOW movement began online in the early 2000s when bloggers drafted manifestos outlining their desire for men to separate themselves from women and form a single-gender society.

MGTOWs isolate themselves from all women as well as anyone else who advocates for or defends feminism. The primary threat posed by MGTOWs comes from their dangerous and disingenuous antifeminist rhetoric, including lies about the nature & consequences of feminism, the reality of discrimination faced by women and the impact of cultural feminism on men. This vitriolic and

separatist position reinforces men's existing misogynist beliefs, which contributes to existing cultures of misogyny and jeopardizes women's safety.

For decades, social scientists have studied the ways in which deviants and deviant subcultures respond to changes in social norms. One of the most popular frameworks used to evaluate and categorize subcultures is Thomas Merton's typology of deviance, [first published in 1938](#), which recognizes separatist movements like MGTOWs as a deviant response by a subculture whose values are fundamentally incompatible with the central (existing) culture.

Core Beliefs of the MGTOW Movement

The core tenets of the MGTOW subculture have been a popular object of study for social scientists since their emergence into the public consciousness in the mid 2010's. Scholars like Shawn Van Valkenburgh have focused their research careers on all [elements of the manosphere, including MGTOWs](#), whereas other teams of researchers, such as the team led by Scott Wright, focused their efforts exclusively on [understanding the MGTOW phenomenon](#). Their findings, and those of scholars like them, are summarized below:

- MGTOWs believe modern "Western" society has been corrupted by feminism. MGTOWs especially blame third-wave feminism, which is characterized by its attention to the intersectionality of misogyny, sex and body positivity, and its focus on redefining traditional gender roles for both men and women.
- MGTOWs argue that feminism ensures that men are either actively subjected to (or at serious risk of) discrimination, because modern society is too focused on women (versus men). Their "proof" is what they term double standards evident in the workplace, legal rulings and dating.
- In response to this perceived societal demise, MGTOWs advocate for men to withdraw completely from society, to minimally interact with women, men who do not share their positions, and any culture they perceive as feminist.
- MGTOWs perceive all people and cultures as feminist until proven otherwise- their separatist behaviors stem from a paranoid, defensive posture in which everyone who isn't with them is against them, and everyone who is against them poses a direct threat.

Stages and Degrees of Separatism

Individuals may adopt the MGTOW ideology for any number of reasons, but several common precursors include being rejected by women, being subjected to perceived discrimination or unrealistic male beauty standards, and shifting cultural norms. Those who embrace MGTOW culture often have increased anxiety around what they see as ever-changing "rules" around so-called "political correctness" or "woke" behaviors, which may be reinforced when they are reprimanded, shamed or otherwise punished for their misogynistic behaviors and/or comments.

MGTOW separation ideology is categorized into four distinct levels:

- The first level, known as "the red pill," signifies awareness of feminist "corruption" without necessarily changing one's opinions or behaviors.
- The second level, referred to as "the purple pill," involves rejecting relationships, cohabitation, and marriage with women while still participating in shorter-term relationships.
- The third level encompasses a complete rejection of all forms of social interactions with women.
- The final level involves complete detachment from society, including employment and all social interactions with non-MGTOWs.

Movement Growth and Popularity

MGTOW groups experienced substantial growth in the early to mid-2010s, driven largely by the proliferation of memes and testimonials by members, who criticized perceived "feminist corruption."

In 2014, prominent political commentator Milo Yiannopoulos wrote an article for Breitbart describing the behaviors associated with MGTOWs- individual men retreating from society and embracing digital socialization, substance abuse, video games, and internet pornography instead of culturally accepted pastimes and pursuits. Following the publication of the article, Google Trends data for terms like "MGTOWs", "Men Going Their Own Way" and "Sexodus" shows a strong correlation between the Breitbart piece and the rise in popularity of these terms online – leading to increased visibility and popularity of the MGTOW movement. Dr. Angela Nagle's 2017 book, ["Kill All Normies"](#), which explored the digital emergence of the alt right, cites the Breitbart article as an example of how a popular alt-right figure (Yiannopoulos) exposed a broad readership to a range of misogynist beliefs.

Simultaneously, social scientists in the 2010s began writing about MGTOW movements as part of broader academic exploration into the manosphere. By 2020, numerous academic papers had been published on MGTOWs and the manosphere, highlighting MGTOWs' presence on platforms like Reddit and as influencers on social media sites. Some of these communities and individuals were banned from these platforms, including the subreddit r/MGTOW, which was removed in 2021.

Current State

Despite these bans and the disappearance of many MGTOW websites and communities, a few continue to operate today, including the imageboard known as Wizardchan, where MGTOWs discuss their ideology, mental health, hobbies and more. Users in these communities frequently employ misogynistic language, including the use of derogatory terms to describe women, and engage in other forms of hate, including racism and homophobia.

There are no known incidents of violent extremism attributed to MGTOWs.

Influencers

While there is no singular voice representing MGTOWs on the internet, several alt-right and manosphere influencers produce content that promotes MGTOW ideology, including H. Pearl Davis, 21 Studios, SandmanMGTOW and ManospherePodcast. These creators wield significant influence, reaching millions of viewers and shaping public perceptions of feminism and the MGTOW ideology.