

On Social Media's Fringes, Growing Extremism Targets Women | The New York Times

By Amanda Taub

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Extremism has always existed, but until recently its spread was limited. To begin with, there was the basic challenge to any collective action: how to find and gather like-minded people dispersed across great distances. Beyond that, there was the social stigma against any ideas perceived as outside the mainstream.

Social media has lowered both of those barriers.

Now, men looking for a way to explain — and justify — their anger need only a few clicks to encounter entire communities built up around promises to restore male power and control. In the past, those might have been relegated to a few bars or living rooms, but now they exist in darker corners of some of the most popular social networking sites.

Even though these men may never meet in person, they can still derive a powerful identity. Men who previously felt disconnected and lost may now feel a sense of belonging and importance.

"These online communities serve a very important function in that respect," said Michael Kimmel, a sociologist who runs the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities at Stony Brook University. "People encourage you to feel more, and deeper. And then value what you say that's more and deeper."

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