

# Countering Male Supremacist Ideology and Violence: Challenges and Recommendations

*Part 2 in the Series, Rethinking Approaches to Male Supremacism and Violence Prevention*

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## **Countering Male Supremacist Ideology and Violence: Challenges and Recommendations**

*Part 2 in the Series, Restructuring Thought Around Male Supremacism and Violence Prevention*

### ***Series Introduction***

*Male supremacism is “a cultural, political, economic, and social system in which cisgender men disproportionately control status, power, and resources, and women (including trans women and femmes), trans men, and nonbinary people are subordinated.”<sup>1</sup> It is not a fringe ideology. In its broadest form, male supremacism is the belief that cisgender men are superior and more deserving. The pervasive ideology is grounded in dehumanization and entitlement. Like many contemporary forms of supremacism, it underlies not only what are termed “extremist” movements but is also a central structuring element of global society.*

*Male supremacists are committed to defending the status quo when it is defined by cisgender men’s dominance (patriarchy). When that long-standing dominance is threatened by movements for gender justice, male supremacists amp up their work to eliminate recently gained rights, freedoms, and liberties from systematically oppressed groups; for instance, attempts to remove legal abortion, gender-affirming medical care, and even voting rights for anyone who is not a cisgender man. Mainstream politicians and leaders in the United States often use disinformation to obscure their supremacist motivations, for instance, using claims about voter fraud to advance their attempts targeting women and transgender/nonbinary people to restrict suffrage. The increasing challenges to male supremacism over the past half-century thus correspond with greater activity and public violence by supremacists seeking to reassert the prior status quo.*

*Male supremacism comprises a consistent and foundational element of far/extreme-right and authoritarian ideologies, movements, and governments worldwide.<sup>2</sup> In addition, male supremacism appears in forms normalized by society, common across every part of the globe to varying degrees. Male supremacism appears not only in occasional acts of mass violence that grab headlines, but underlies everyday gender-based violence (or “everyday terrorism”), such as domestic / intimate partner violence and sexual assault.*

*This two-part white paper series, developed with collaborative contributions from experts at the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism (IRMS), explicates the elements comprising male supremacism, discusses current barriers to effective interventions, and offers guidelines for approaches to prevention through the lens of long-term cultural and structural change. While this series was designed to approach the subject in as streamlined a way as possible, IRMS offers the expertise to elaborate on the content in this paper in more depth.*

About the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism:

IRMS is committed to exposing and challenging common narratives that provide shelter to male supremacist movements, advancing new theoretical understandings and practical analyses of contemporary threats, and providing resources for media and activists to improve their ability to challenge male supremacism and misogyny, including transmisogyny and misogynoir. *This research is supported by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.*

## Countering Male Supremacist Ideology and Violence: Challenges and Recommendations

This white paper identifies key limitations to current approaches to understanding and challenging male supremacy that create barriers to effective communication and practice in research, news, practice, and policy. For each limitation, we recommend alternative approaches to shape future work. This white paper acknowledges and builds on foundational research, practice, and journalism, with significant insight drawn from groups with systematically marginalized voices. Researchers, journalists, and practitioners are the primary audience. This white paper speaks particularly to the interrelated fields of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), radicalization and extremism studies, right-wing and far-right studies, and (counter)terrorism studies. These fields contribute to the interdisciplinary work challenging supremacy and authoritarianism. However, their efficacy has been limited by common approaches. This white paper identifies these issues and recommends alternatives to more effectively advance democracy and prevent violence.

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## 1. Barrier: Failure to Recognize Misogyny as Ideology

The failure to recognize misogyny as ideology has been a foundational barrier to countering male supremacy and gender-based violence. While, for instance, racist and xenophobic motivations for violence are commonly understood as ideological, media and research often frame male supremacist violence as apolitical—even when perpetrators explicitly articulate misogynist beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Especially when misogynist perpetrators do not have clear ties to a specific male supremacist community or group, analysis is more likely to position them as apolitical, often suggesting that mental health is the issue.<sup>2</sup> This neglect creates major gaps in anti-violence and pro-democracy work.<sup>3</sup> It often results in recommendations for individualized treatment of extreme supremacists rather than systemic cultural and institutional change to prevent violence.<sup>4</sup>

In scholarship on right-wing or radical/extreme/far-right ideology, especially as this area of study developed in the West in the 21st century, misogyny was commonly overlooked as one of its core characteristics.<sup>5</sup> When gender was referred to at all, it usually meant the role of women in right-wing movements.<sup>6</sup> Researchers often euphemize misogynist and anti-LGBTQ ideology, especially that coming from religions, by describing it as traditional values or morality.<sup>7</sup> This cedes ground to male supremacists, such as the Christian Right in the United States, who use euphemistic terminology to present their beliefs as legitimate in the public sphere.<sup>8</sup>

Gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination are so ubiquitous that they are deeply normalized across global society—what can be understood as the invisibility of the universal.<sup>9</sup> Transgender and cisgender women, transgender men, and non-binary people are disproportionately the targets of domestic violence and sexual assault, and cisgender men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of such violence.<sup>10</sup> Yet this “everyday terrorism” is rarely recognized in monitoring of hate crimes or extremist violence.<sup>11</sup>

While researchers and organizations analyzing the far-right, hate, and terrorism that previously overlooked misogyny have begun to incorporate assessments of male supremacy into their work in recent years, the long-standing neglect is felt in the prevalence of misconceptions related to this topic.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, there remains insufficient attention to the interplay among forms of oppression and the foundational role that male supremacy plays in reinforcing the structure and enforcement of authoritarian hierarchies.<sup>13</sup> Lack of incorporation of intersectionality—a concept advanced by Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to further understanding of how race, gender, class, and other forms of identity intersect in systems of oppression—into far-right, terrorism, and related studies contributes to these issues.<sup>14</sup>

## Recommendation: Invest in Deepening Expertise around Male Supremacist Ideology and Violence

The first step is simple: recognize misogyny as a central ideology in far-right mobilization and authoritarianism worldwide. Second, expand the understanding of supremacist ideology to include “everyday” and structural violence.

The rise in explicitly misogynist violence in several countries has sparked commentary questioning why this is not recognized as ideological, with Canada and Australia now including extreme misogyny in their categorizations of ideologically motivated violent extremism.<sup>15</sup> Journalists, researchers, and practitioners can reshape the conversation by identifying and naming misogynist ideology. While some violent men may also have diagnosable mental illnesses, that is not causal for misogynist violence.<sup>16</sup>

Far-right studies and related fields that have historically minimized the significance of misogyny can rectify their knowledge gap by reading the foundational, interdisciplinary work on this topic. Despite its underrepresentation in far-right studies and related disciplines, research on misogyny and patriarchy is not a new area of study, and substantive work framed around male supremacy has expanded rapidly over the past five years. Far-right and extremism studies theory and curricula can substantively incorporate this body of research on male supremacy (predominantly conducted by women and femme researchers).<sup>17</sup> Organizations that have recently begun to incorporate research on male supremacy into their work on hate or extremism need to allocate greater resources to this topic to make up for gaps in understanding and misconceptions arising from decades of neglect.<sup>18</sup>

While male supremacy needs to be included in existing tracking, programming, and policy developed to counter ideological violence, it is not enough to simply add misogyny to the list. While some countries have hate crime legislation that includes gender, these still neglect pervasive everyday gender-based violence.<sup>19</sup> Incorporating male supremacy and intersectionality focused a spotlight on needs to evaluate current approaches to discern whether or not they are adequate for responding to systemic violence and oppression.

Finally, more work is needed exploring intersections and relationships among types of supremacy.<sup>20</sup> Acceptance of one type of supremacy predisposes people to accept other supremacist ideologies, as they are founded on shared building blocks of dehumanization and entitlement (as discussed in part one of this white paper series).<sup>21</sup> A framework of intersectional supremacy studies offers a structure for examining how multiple forms of ideology interact to enact harm and structure society. For instance, consider how the Proud Boys leverage narratives of cisgender men’s rightful superiority to recruit men of color, with misogyny operating as the glue adhering the group despite its focus on white supremacist goals.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Barrier: Narrow Focus on Fringe Groups and Beliefs

Preventing and countering violent extremism programming emphasizes “fringe” or “radical” ideologies and/or participation in known supremacist extremist groups.<sup>23</sup> The tendency to relegate supremacy (whether male supremacist, white supremacist, etc.) to the fringe beliefs of a small minority of the population situates it as a problem “over there” rather than one fundamental to society. This leads to the prioritization of resources to shift the beliefs of individual “at-risk” cisgender men and boys, or deradicalize those already active in overt supremacist groups, rather than addressing the elements of mainstream culture and institutions that contribute to the development of dehumanizing and entitled beliefs.

The focus on extremism and another popular term, polarization, contributes to a tendency toward a false equivalency between ideologies deemed radical on the left or the right. False equivalency, or claims of harm “on both sides,” is intentionally deployed by supremacists as a tactic to obscure the threat their ideologies pose.<sup>24</sup> Political moderates and anti-extremism advocates can inadvertently help them by not challenging the premise that radical supremacist beliefs and radical social justice beliefs pose equivalent harm. Furthermore, a focus on countering extremism or radicalization implies that the center or the status quo is the ideological goal.

The fringe emphasis has directed attention away from the appearance of misogyny in mainstream culture and elevated individual care fields, such as mental health care, as solutions without considering their potential for complicity in harm. Therapists and counselors without training in identifying supremacist ideology may reinforce misogynist clients’ beliefs by buying into their narratives of themselves as victims.<sup>25</sup> Organizations against domestic violence, for instance, warn that couples counselors may not recognize the signs of abuse, believing an abuser’s victimization narrative and inadvertently becoming complicit in the emotional abuse and gaslighting of the abused partner.<sup>26</sup> The prevalence of racism, ableism, and transphobia among mental health care providers demonstrates the influence of mainstream cultural supremacy in many forms.<sup>27</sup>

## Recommendation: Use Spectrum Thinking for Deep Cultural and Structural Change

“Supremacism studies” is an alternative approach rooted in intersectionality that approaches supremacism as a spectrum. Replacing “radical” or “extremist” with the words they euphemize—i.e., “supremacist,” “authoritarian”—can redirect attention to the actual ideology that is harmful and undermine attempts to use false equivalency against anti-supremacist organizing. Under this approach, the terms “radical” and “extreme” are treated as modifying adjectives (ie, “extreme supremacist ideology”) rather than stand-alone nouns. Removing the negative connotation from “radical” brings back the true meaning of radical liberation and social justice: addressing the structural roots of inequality rather than surface-level solutions.<sup>28</sup>

Moving away from the terminology of extremism brings research on supremacism and authoritarianism into alignment with fields that understand supremacism as structuring society and value concepts such as radical liberation.<sup>29</sup> Supremacism studies builds on fields such as race and ethnicity, feminist, queer, disability, and intersectionality studies that have long histories of recognizing and addressing supremacism as a core structuring force in mainstream society.<sup>30</sup> It does not conflate violence with fringe activity, given that the prevalence of gender-based violence and rates of perpetration among cisgender men goes beyond a small fringe of actors.

Sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and ableism are woven into the fabric of mainstream culture and institutions. It is crucial to design services that recognize male supremacist ideology and abusive behavior in a way that does not enact further harm or reinforce misogynists’ sense of victimization.<sup>31</sup> Serving this need requires a deep investment in anti-oppressive approaches and understanding of structural harm involving multiple intersecting forms of supremacism. Meaningful transformation requires redirecting resources to a primary prevention approach that reaches the general population—especially children—to accomplish deep cultural change before individuals reach the point of absorbing extreme supremacist beliefs.

Beliefs develop through narrative and emotional resonance, whether rooted in truth or misinformation.<sup>32</sup> As such, education and entertainment offer primary sites for social change. Curricula founded in valuing empathy, consent, and critical thinking and oriented toward the entire youth population from an early age, not just those deemed at-risk, can provide a channel for effectively challenging the sticky cultural narratives underpinning male supremacist ideology and violence. Supremacists have actively targeted mainstream education and entertainment—from campaigns to censor books and movies, to training programs on taking over local school boards, to shaping textbook content—to prevent their potential for underpinning transformative change.<sup>33</sup>

Anti-supremacist work includes valuing the human needs of communities working toward change while living within structural supremacism. Creative community-building initiatives—from queer dance parties and banana suits to disrupt Proud Boys protests to inflatable frog suits as part of the mass resistance against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) violence and injustice—simultaneously challenge the fascist aesthetic and sustain participants by deploying humor and joy.<sup>34</sup> Especially in times of heightened authoritarianism and trauma, access to beneficial individual and community care services and support is vital.

### 3. Barrier: Neglecting the History, Diversity, and Intersections of Male Supremacism

Research monitoring supremacism and mainstream media consistently underreports the prevalence of male supremacism, including gender-based violence, with everyday violence routinely overlooked in favor of spectacular or sensationalized events like bombings, shootings, and legislation.<sup>35</sup> When coverage does occur, such as the sensationalized interest in the “manosphere,” it tends to report on misogynist campaigns and violence in isolation, ignoring the historical and systemic dimensions to male supremacism.<sup>36</sup> Male supremacism is common in every part of the globe to varying but always significant degrees, yet lack of transnational research collaboration obscures continuity in male supremacist ideology and violence across regions and cultures; for instance, movements such as men’s and fathers’ rights that developed substantial multinational presences and learned from one another’s successes and setbacks.<sup>37</sup>

As research on male supremacism has expanded, popular interest has cohered around specific communities, groups, or ideologies. Much of this research fails to consider the extant research, history, and varied manifestations of male supremacism. One prominent example is the interest in misogynist incels, which has given rise to flawed analyses, such as accepting misogynist incel men’s claims that their lack of sexual access to women causes violence and proposing that their gaining relationships would prevent this.<sup>38</sup> Ignoring the history of the incel community—the term was coined in the 1990s by a bisexual woman who created an online community to support lonely people of any gender—helps obscuring the evidence that misogynist ideology is not an inevitable outcome of unwanted celibacy.<sup>39</sup> This flawed analysis also fails to consider the prevalence of violence against intimate partners and the existence of male supremacist communities (including those linked to violence) that are not organized around lifelong involuntary celibacy, such as the men’s and fathers’ rights movements.<sup>40</sup>

An artificial division between what is perceived as “private” versus “public” violence means that research on, for instance, intimate partner abuse is rarely considered in studying misogynist mass violence.<sup>41</sup> This remains the case despite recent recognition of the prevalence of domestic abuse in the histories of mass violence perpetrators, and the fact that perpetrators of both “private” and “public” violence are disproportionately cisgender men.<sup>42</sup>

Even though supremacist ideologies tend to intersect, many journalists, researchers, and practitioners also struggle with examples of multifaceted supremacist belief systems. This can be seen in recent reporting portraying supremacist manifestos as incoherent and ignoring their deep misogyny, and in research organizations that limit analysis by boxing groups and movements into a single ideological category.<sup>43</sup> This can lead to underreporting of the extent of male supremacist ideology and violence, given that it frequently occurs in tandem with other forms of supremacism, and a misunderstanding of how supremacist ideologies function together.

## Recommendation: Learn From Historically-Informed, Interdisciplinary Research on Male Supremacism

Male supremacism is a widespread system rather than singular, individualized acts. In identifying past mobilizations—such as witch hunts that killed women who deviated from patriarchal gender roles—as male supremacist, the continuity of the ideology becomes visible.<sup>44</sup> Anti-supremacist research calls for a historically-informed global perspective that assesses mainstream culture and systems, values creative thinking, and draws on the lessons of fields such as intersectional, feminist, queer, antiracist, and postcolonial theory. Research and knowledge from fields led by women of color and gender justice activists, such as reproductive justice and domestic abuse prevention, can bring valuable insights and frameworks for research on male supremacism to radicalization, extremism, far-right, and right-wing studies.

For researchers and practitioners seeking to develop responses to misogynist mobilization, foundational knowledge of the research on male supremacist ideologies and tactics can mitigate inadvertently contributing to flawed approaches. It is important to understand misogynist ideologies within an ecosystem of male supremacist belief systems, including recognizing the public-private violence connection and the cultural pervasiveness of male supremacist ideology, which is not limited to formal groups or recognized communities. Understanding supremacist narratives in social media needs to look at these technological platforms not alone but as part of and interacting with other societal systems and structures; for instance, how might an early foundation in consent- and empathy-based education versus sexist entitlement narratives impact the later resonance of misogynist online influencers.

Finally, research must embrace a willingness to understand supremacism in its complex intersections, avoiding the desire to have a simple, single ideological identification for each supremacist group, community, or movement (which requires funders to also be on board with less neat segmentation). For journalists whose work covers violence, authoritarianism, and/or supremacist ideologies, it is important to anticipate and learn about the fundamentals of supremacism in advance, rather than when an attack or incident occurs requiring reporting on a short deadline. IRMS offers educational resources to deepen understanding of supremacism, authoritarianism, and other key concepts, so that reporters can deepen their foundational understanding in ways that prepare them to understand complex ideologies and manifestos.<sup>45</sup> Such preparation also introduces reporters to which experts they can rely on to provide accurate analysis, given the current flaws in research and scholarship.

## 4. Barrier: Gender Essentialism in Research and Programming

Gender essentialism treats culturally constructed gender norms as natural and assumes they are inherently linked to biological sex. Research fields, such as evolutionary psychology, with weak understandings of structure and socialization can reproduce patriarchal and biologically essentialist assumptions.<sup>46</sup> Radicalization, extremism, and related fields sometimes draw uncritically on gender essentialist research in assessing male supremacist ideology.<sup>47</sup>

Contemporary male supremacist communities take advantage of terms, theories, and publications from the field of evolutionary psychology to simulate the appearance of scientific legitimacy, relying on essentialist narratives about evolution to portray patriarchal structures as natural and inevitable.<sup>48</sup> This is described by Ann-Kathrin Rothermel as a “discursive strategy, whereby members of the manosphere refer to (and misinterpret) knowledge in the form of statistics, studies, news items and pop-culture and mimic accepted methods of knowledge presentation to support their essentializing, polarizing views about gender relations in society.”<sup>49</sup> Such discourses have permeated mainstream media and popular science, as in the use of simplified evolutionary narratives about men and women in the context of dating and self-help advice for young men.<sup>50</sup>

Benevolent sexism is an insidious form of gender essentialism that relies on stereotypes that might seem positive, such as portraying women as naturally ethical and caring, and positioning men as women’s protectors.<sup>51</sup> While aspects of benevolent sexism can appear beneficial to women on the surface—and male supremacists sometimes point to them as examples of cisgender men’s oppression—research from around the globe finds that it keeps women in a subordinate position, contributes to worse educational and career outcomes for girls and women, and pushes girls and women to caretake for boys and men’s emotions and violence.<sup>52</sup> (“Ambivalent sexism” describes the way in which benevolent sexism co-occurs with hostile sexism to keep women in their assigned place and punish those who challenge cisgender men’s dominance.<sup>53</sup>)

Despite its intentions, gender essentialism can appear even in gender equity and violence prevention work, such as programs founded on the concept of “healthy masculinity” and/or using benevolent sexist tropes of men as protectors. While ostensibly intended to move beyond gender expectations for boys and men, the term “healthy masculinity” reinforces the gender binary by “set[ting] masculinity up as the only expression of gender that men can legitimately engage in,” as Andrea Waling writes, and leaving out nonbinary identity and genderfluidity.<sup>54</sup>

## Recommendation: Challenge Gender Binaries with Human-Centered Approaches

A “human-centered approach” entails a shift in thinking from frameworks rooted in biological essentialism and reinforcement of the gender binary to programming that stresses autonomy and consent for all people. Youth have the opportunity to understand how to be good *people*, without being boxed into patriarchal and supremacist expectations for femininity and masculinity from birth. Comprehensive gender and sexuality education, for instance, offers a potential avenue for gender transformative work, as do other shifts in curriculum that reach the student body as a whole.<sup>55</sup> As Gen-Z is more critical of binary gender socialization, this calls further attention to the deficiencies and harms of traditional approaches that reinforce a gender binary.<sup>56</sup> As previously discussed, early education and entertainment directed toward all youth, not segregated by gender or perceived at-risk characteristics, offers an opportunity for deep change.

Researchers and practitioners can avoid harm and develop more effective approaches through historically informed, interdisciplinary engagement with fields such as gender, race, and queer studies. Cross-disciplinary scrutiny strengthens the quality of research and reduces the risk of reinforcing harmful worldviews. Despite occasional claims that misogynist communities misinterpret evolutionary psychology, longstanding multidisciplinary critiques question the discipline’s narrow and sexist interpretations of gender and sexuality.<sup>57</sup> Understanding oppression as sociological, historical, and structural, rather than caused by individual malignant motives, is important grounding for gender justice work.

Researchers, journalists, and practitioners can also educate themselves about established concepts such as benevolent sexism and gender essentialism in order to avoid reproducing these popular but harmful frames. Fact-checking claims to scientific truth or the presentation of benevolent sexism as beneficial to women—and oppressive of men—can maintain the integrity of work that touches on male supremacist narratives and stereotypes.

## 5. Barrier: Misinformation and Centering of Cisgender Men's Interests

Violence prevention work, including countering violent extremism, deradicalization, and work to end domestic and sexual violence, often recommends engaging cisgender boys and men in preventing violence by emphasizing how this work benefits them.<sup>58</sup> While championed as an effective way to advance anti-violence work, this approach reinforces the implicit male supremacist assumption that men's interests must be fulfilled before attending to anyone else's needs. Emphasizing how men are harmed by gender expectations or norms can fuel false equivalency that impedes work to recognize and dismantle oppressive structures that disproportionately harm and subordinate cisgender and transgender women, transgender men, and nonbinary/genderfluid people.

Himpathy, a prevalent aspect of global culture described by scholar Kate Manne as “the flow of sympathy away from female victims toward their male victimizers,” acts as an exonerating tactic which protects cisgender men from scrutiny, even those who engage in repeated violence.<sup>59</sup> Misogyny is often pathologized as mental illness or the result of unmet needs rather than addressed as a supremacist ideology.<sup>60</sup> As we are all socialized in patriarchal societies, unconscious himpathetic bias is a widespread threat to effective, ethical research and practice.

Himpathy can predispose researchers, journalists, and practitioners to be overly credulous of victimhood claims deployed by male supremacist men. This can lead to inadvertently legitimizing male supremacist beliefs; for instance, violence prevention work that accepts the premise that women's failure to provide sexual and emotional service is the cause of men's violence or putative mental distress, and makes the suggestion that helping these men to form sexual relationships with women would be a solution.<sup>61</sup> This is not only ineffective at addressing misogynist ideology and behavior, it also makes women responsible for men's actions while ignoring the risk of harm or abuse to the women who would enter these relationships with men steeped in dehumanizing and entitled anti-consent beliefs.<sup>62</sup>

Concerningly, misleading and decontextualized data is often found exaggerating the victimization and harm faced by cisgender boys and men. This can be accompanied by the explicit or implicit suggestion that this problem has been ignored because of feminists or women, who are inaccurately perceived as having obtained controlling power over society.<sup>63</sup> Education has for decades been a popular area for the argument that boys and men are being left behind.<sup>64</sup> Statistics showing that men now obtain fewer higher education degrees than women are cited as evidence, yet closer investigation shows the context that cisgender men earn more money with lesser credentials—indicating that leaving education earlier is a marker of privilege.<sup>65</sup>

Many misrepresentations of data stem from respected organizations, and are therefore likely to be taken at face value by journalists, other researchers, policymakers, and grantors.<sup>66</sup> For instance, the “male loneliness epidemic” talking point, which has been used to explain men's radicalization and violence; this phrase obscures that other groups, including women, experience similar or greater rates of loneliness in modern society (and are far less likely to be violent).<sup>67</sup> Tunnel-vision, in which organizations and practitioners only look at cisgender men's experiences, can lead even good faith actors to advance decontextualized and misleading data.

## Recommendation: Advance Critical, Justice-Based Approaches to Work with Boys and Men

Effective, ethical, humanizing programming emphasizes collective justice over individual self-interest. A future feminist, antiracist society would entail a safer and more fulfilling world for everyone, and envisioning a better future for everyone is a valuable part of progressive structural and systemic change. Nonetheless, individual members of dominant groups may face the loss of economic, reputational, and other privileges stemming from the system of oppression. Catering to men's self-interest is not an effective pathway for transformational long-term change. Investment should prioritize intersectional gender justice programming that discusses systemic oppression, and inspires people around a commitment to universal human rights and justice for current and future generations with respect to all identities.

Catering to cisgender men's self-interest via misrepresentation of science, as with claims that men experience a unique "loneliness epidemic," undermines the potential to recognize and address the actual root causes of shared social problems. More ethical humanity-centered programming goes hand-in-hand with strengthening research, such as asking how culture, institutions, and systems shape violence and well-being for humanity.

Drawing on critical disciplines, such as feminist studies, queer studies, and antiracist studies, which center the interests and experiences of oppressed communities can help ensure longstanding understandings are not missed and avoid collusion with male supremacists' victimization narratives. "Critical empathy" encourages researchers to recognize the humanity of the people they study, including their experiences or perceptions of loss or suffering, while maintaining the ability to critically consider the harms they may cause and avoid collusion or apologism.<sup>68</sup> Research and practice can be based in accountability and challenging a sense of entitlement, sexist beliefs, and self-perception as victims. Critical empathy asks that researchers and practitioners extend empathy to everyone, not just cisgender white men, which includes avoiding tunnel-vision and misrepresentation of demographic differences in social problems.

Reflexivity, another approach promoted in feminist scholarship, asks researchers to consider how their identities, experiences, and worldviews influence their work.<sup>69</sup> This type of critical reflection also applies to academic fields, nonprofits, and industry, given that many fields remain dominated by cisgender straight white men and vulnerable populations such as women, LGBTQ people, and people of color face greater risks as researchers and journalists.<sup>70</sup> Beyond awareness, critical reflection calls for those working to end supremacism and violence to recognize, acknowledge, and address the factors that shape patterns in the perpetration and distribution of violence and extremism. This is relevant beyond work to end male supremacism to any form of dominance that can bias research and practice, such as racial, religious, and national identity.

## Example: Platforming of “Former” and Active Male Supremacists

Self-identified “formers,” people who self-label as previously involved in supremacist movements, have gained significant platforms in media, conferences, trainings, and other venues. Platformed formers are usually cisgender white men with white nationalist histories, with a smaller and more recent growth in platforming male supremacist “formers.”<sup>71</sup> This platforming runs the risk of doing further harm in spreading supremacist messaging. Often these men present themselves and their (former) movements as victims while minimizing or dismissing their harm to marginalized communities.<sup>72</sup> Panels of “formers” are too often composed entirely of cisgender white men, frequently including the moderator, with no voices from the harmed communities or critical voices represented. Despite excitement about what has been perceived as successful exit programming, follow-up research has found that many self-identified “formers” maintain supremacist beliefs. Prominent speakers who claimed to be non-violent or reformed later walked back their performative reformation and returned to espousing explicitly supremacist views.<sup>73</sup>

In rare but damaging cases, researchers and media producers have uncritically platformed *active* members of male supremacist communities. This is justified by an excessively and uncritically sympathetic perspective toward misogynist incel men, in which researchers and mediamakers accept their claims of being unfairly maligned. This has involved not only speaking platforms but even research co-authorship, providing a veneer of legitimacy that enables male supremacists to present themselves and their movements and ideologies in ways that advance their interests.<sup>74</sup>

### *Recommendation: Approach “Formers” Speakers and Narratives Critically*

Pursuant to the discussion of empathy and excessive centering of men’s interests, critical empathy offers guidelines to prevent platforming and legitimizing supremacists. Recognition of the humanity and potential suffering of self-identified formers does not require accepting their sense of victimization or offering platforms to advance that perception. A fundamental question for those proposing research, events, responses, or reporting on supremacism is: whose interests will be served and whose will be harmed? Centering voices from the communities that are targeted and harmed by supremacist ideologies provides a more ethical approach that mitigates the harmful impact of only hearing (former) supremacist voices and self-serving narratives. The strategy of deny, attack, reverse victim and offender (DARVO), a concept coined in domestic violence work to describe how perpetrators respond to attempts to hold them accountable, is a useful framework for understanding male supremacism and other supremacist narratives.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, being aware of the prevalence of continuing supremacist beliefs among “formers” highlights the importance for researchers, practitioners, and journalists to deeply understand their subjects and the context they come from before giving them a platform.<sup>76</sup> Entering into work on supremacists requires an investment in understanding the research and the structure and ideology of supremacism, including manipulation tactics common to adherents, to produce high-quality work that is accurate and ethical. Incorporating systematic accountability can involve fact-checking claims, consulting with experts, declining to reproduce quotations from supremacists, and correcting mis- and disinformation.

## Concluding Remarks

There are still many contentious arguments and unanswered questions in studies on male supremacism, requiring further research from scholars around the world. This white paper aims to be a starting point for addressing current flaws in research and practice, and exploring more effective approaches to countering supremacism and advancing gender justice. The broad guiding frameworks seek to shape future work that identifies specific interventions. This white paper series was a collaboration among multiple fellows and mentees affiliated with the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism, and also benefited from input by a number of other scholars, researchers, and practitioners. We look forward to continuing to expand our network and to working together to find more effective solutions to addressing global supremacism.

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