

Should misogyny be treated as a form of extremism?

August 28 2024, by Stephanie Wescott and Steven Roberts



Credit: Norma Mortenson from Pexels

The UK government has recently [announced a review](#) into their counter-terrorism strategy, focusing on responses to "extremist ideologies." This announcement named misogyny as one of its extremist ideological trends

of interest.

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said, "For too long, governments have failed to address the rise in extremism, both online and on our streets, and we've seen the number of young people radicalized online grow."

Calls for action on the effects of extremist ideologies propagated by online masculinity influencers have recently increased. Last month, The UK National Police Chiefs' Council [described](#) the radicalization of boys into misogyny as a "national emergency." They noted that online extremist influencers such as Andrew Tate recruit and radicalize boys in ways similar to how followers are drawn into other extremist ideologies. This has profoundly dangerous implications for women and girls.

Reframing how [violent crimes](#) are conceptualized has an impact on how seriously they are taken by police and how they are resourced.

At a time when misogynistic attitudes are on the [rise](#), and the crisis of violence against women continues, understanding misogyny as an extremist ideology is key to shaping appropriate responses.

What's happening in Australia?

There have been concerted [efforts](#) to improve markers of gender equity in Australia. But [backlash](#) to the project of gender equity and efforts to eradicate gender-based violence continues.

Our [recent research](#) has found misogynist ideology is increasingly present among boys and young men in Australian schools. This problem is amplified by extremist content infiltrating boys' and young men's social media feeds.

Our interviews with women teaching in schools has uncovered the

presence of misogynist beliefs among boys in schools across the country. These include beliefs about women's inherent inferiority, commitments to regressive gender roles, and a brazen entitlement to treat women and girls in sexist and derogatory ways.

We have argued that a process of misogynistic radicalization seems to have occurred. By this we mean that sustained exposure to misogynistic content, delivered by social media, has reshaped how boys and young men understand women's roles and their relationships with them.

Online communities, certain social circles, and media content can act as echo chambers that reinforce and deepen misogynistic beliefs. This in turn can lead to [progressive exposure to increasingly extreme views](#) on gender roles.

There are similarities here with radicalization into far-right extremism. This typically involves individuals being exposed to more mainstream or even seemingly benign nationalist or anti-immigrant sentiment, and then more extremist ideologies.

Misogyny and gender-based violence

The rise of misogynist attitudes among Australian boys occurs alongside an existing crisis—endemic levels of gender-based violence and murder perpetrated against women. Researchers have long [argued](#) that gendered violence and violence informed by extremist ideology, such as terrorism or mass casualty attacks, are inextricably connected.

Increased exposure to misogynist content is a concern not only for its potential to harm, but also for its connection to other forms of extremism. Recent [research](#) on violent extremism in Australia found that individuals who hold misogynist attitudes are more likely to support other types of violent extremism. This report also noted that gendered

biases are overlooked as pathways to radicalization and violent extremism.

Conversation about how to categorize misogynistic violence increased following the Bondi stabbings earlier this year. There was some resistance to naming the attack as an act of terrorism, with definitional limitations preventing it from being categorized in that way. This is despite police [stating](#) it was "obvious" the attacker targeted women.

Failing to recognize these acts of violence as informed by misogyny as an extremist ideology prevents us from fully understanding its radicalizing influence and how it propels violence against women.

What difference would labeling misogyny as extremism make?

Despite their different focuses, misogynistic extremism has much in common with other forms of extremism such as far-right nationalism. They are each characterized by rigid ideologies, violence, and systemic oppression. They also challenge principles of equality and justice.

The rigid belief in the superiority of men over women that is the cornerstone of misogyny is akin to the far-right beliefs in the racial superiority of white people over other racial and ethnic groups. At their core is the systemic oppression of the group to which they position themselves as superior.

Misogynist ideology, including the belief in men's innate role in the protection of women and in the rightness of women's subordination, are a feature of many other extremist and far-right ideologies, including [neo-Nazism](#). [Research](#) has established this connection between gender ideology, extremism and terrorism, and also how these ideas spread

across online platforms and channels.

Recognizing misogyny as a form of extremism enables governments to approach it with the seriousness it deserves. It supports the development of targeted policies and legal frameworks to combat gender-based violence, systemic discrimination, and societal division. Recognizing the gendered components of extremist ideology is essential to accurately responding to their risk and understanding their transmission.

For example, in Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner Micaela Cronin's inaugural yearly report card delivered to the Press Club in August, she [noted](#) that if the same intelligence resources were devoted to domestic violence as to terrorism, some women might be saved.

Not all people who hold extremist beliefs will end up committing acts of violence, and extremism exists on a continuum of beliefs and ideas. However, the focus of the definition should not be on the outcome of the belief or the consequence. It's important to identify that misogynistic beliefs *are extremist*, and should not be accepted and tolerated.

Australian governments need to act

It has been widely recommended that federal and state governments should make extremist ideologies a national security priority. This should include ideologies that perpetuate violence against [women](#). As recent research recommendations [attest](#), prevention should attend to the gendered elements of the radicalization process.

[Education](#) is a crucial part of primary prevention work. Part of that work will be accurately categorizing and [naming misogyny for what it is](#). While there is some [attention](#) in curriculums to preventing [violent extremism](#), this rarely goes beyond a broad consideration of social cohesion.

If we are committed to the eradication of gender-based violence in Australia, we must accurately categorize misogyny as its underlying extremist ideology.

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