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## Meet the men giving up on women

They don't want girlfriends, they don't want children — they don't even want to have sex. The secretive MGTOW movement is a fast-growing online community of disillusioned males. But are they misogynists or misunderstood? MARTIN DAUBNEY tracks some of them down

## Part I

David Sherratt, 18, is a chemistry student at Cardiff University. He has never had a girlfriend and isn't planning on finding one. Not now. Not ever.

"Hook-up sex is too risky for words," he says. "Girls can wake up the next day and claim you raped them. I'm genuinely too scared to go near a woman — just in case. At university, I'm made to feel like a rapist all the time... I've never had a relationship and I don't think that's going to happen anytime soon. It's just too dangerous."

Neither does he see the point of marriage, since half of them end in divorce. "Marriage is like playing Russian roulette with three bullets in the cylinder" he says firmly. "I've never been interested in having kids since I learnt about the lack of fathers' rights. The whole system is stacked against men. Our generation has been screwed over by feminism. People might say it's sad, but I'm checking out."

It would be all too easy to scoff at David's comments and dismiss him as just another angry teenager. But an increasingly militant anti-lad culture in our universities, complete with sexual-consent classes, is causing young men such as David great concern. Rather than risk an emotional battering, they are simply giving up on women.

Far from being an isolated loner, he is part of a growing, global army of men, young and old, who have had enough of women altogether — they even have a name: men going their own way, or MGTOW (pronounced "mig-tau").

The acronym may be eminently unmemorable, but that has not stopped an increasing number of British men embracing the movement and its aims. In America, the MGTOW movement has its origins in the Men's Rights Movement, which branched off from the more profeminist men's liberation movement in the late 1970s. Initially, groups were formed for men to meet and challenge what they considered to be the more brutal and emasculating tenets of radical feminism, but gradually they migrated online and became a powerful and vocal community.

In Britain, the movement is still in its relative infancy, but it is making great strides, particularly online. Older men, with traumatic life experiences of divorce and bitter battles over access to children, have become more militant. Outspoken groups such as Fathers for Justice — and more recently the growing number of campaign groups that have attempted to address concerns such as the high prevalence of male suicide in the under-fifties — have spawned a new wave of British MGTOWs.

There are many different shades of MGTOW thinking, but all MGTOW supporters and members have some common ground — they reject feminist theories on how patriarchy and male privilege oppress women.

Instead, they point out that men die younger, commit suicide at four times the rate of women, attain lower grades at school and university (where men are now a minority), routinely

come out the loser in divorce and family courts and, if they are granted access to their children, suffer cripplingly high maintenance payments as their punitive reward.

As a result of these views, such men are making what they see as logical, factual and cost-benefit-based decisions about women, dating and sex — and their brutally stark conclusion is that it's simply not worth the risk, expense or effort.

Of course, not all the facts are in their favour: men still hold 95% of FTSE100 chief-executive jobs (there are more CEOs called John than there are female CEOs), and women make up only 29.4% of British MPs. But, even so, MGTOW supporters genuinely believe that if enough men take the MGTOW vow, society as we know it will crumble. They want women to be forced to give back the power they have spent the last century trying to secure from men. Unsurprisingly, this makes the MGTOWs unpopular with many feminists. MGTOW, says one blogger, is "a Pandora's box of male anger"; another describes it as "home of the internet's most toxic misogynists".

As a former editor of Loaded magazine, I have been studying British men for more than two decades, and while the MGTOW movement saddens me, its emergence — and its increasing prevalence — does not surprise me.

In common with many MGTOWs, Sherratt is the product of a broken home — his parents divorced when he was three — at which point he was raised by his loving mother, whom he adores. He totally rejects the accusation he is sexist, and instead based his decision to go MGTOW on hard-won life experience.

"When my parents split, although my mum was fair with my dad, she said, 'I could have taken everything, but I didn't,' he says. "That resonated. I went to an all-boys school and, when I was 13, I was exposed to aggressive feminism during a debate on sexual consent at a nearby girls' school. All these girls had been brainwashed to believe that all men are potential rapists, and it scared the hell out of me. I love women and had never even had sex — I'm still a virgin — yet I was being accused of being a potential sex criminal. It was insane.

"I started to learn how feminists have been controlling the law and state for decades. Women aren't oppressed, they're privileged. A new religion has taken over. Misogyny is the new blasphemy. Now feminism is backfiring.

"I'm in favour of long-term relationships, but I would be very, very wary of getting into one. You don't know what could happen. I haven't had a girlfriend. I don't think that will happen. I've had no relationships and don't go out. I guess I'm interested in sex, but I don't even watch porn. It just doesn't appeal to me. I've just started university, and the issue of sexual consent on campus really, really terrifies me. There are new police guidelines that mean you have to prove consent and now I'm genuinely afraid to even go near a woman.

"Sex is too dangerous. I'm afraid of false rape allegations. I'm really into the individualism of MGTOW: not getting married or having kids, and the state generally deciding what you do with your life."

He says that he has been happier since he created his own online community, making YouTube videos under the name of Spinosaurus Kin, in which he likes to "challenge and debunk feminism", which "gives me a sense of self-worth".

"Maybe it stems from my parents' divorce," he says, "but I've always seen relationships as an add-on. They're not guaranteed. It's easier to be content on your own. I'm not capable of being lonely. I don't have many real-life friends, but via YouTube I have a great network of around 20 male friends who bring as much joy to my life as any woman could."

Doesn't he find some of the more vehement MGTOW voices misogynistic? Sherratt admits that they can be, but adds: "I don't hate women — quite the opposite, I adore people and have no hatred. There are some in the YouTube community that genuinely hate women — but they pretty much hate all men, too. You get extremists in any ideology, including feminism. "Some MGTOWs say that women are evil and inherently against men. They are a response to extreme feminism. They are symptomatic of the problem — that the system feels stacked against men."

Carl Benjamin, 36, from Swindon, runs a hugely popular YouTube channel called Sargon of Akkad, which has 194,000 subscribers and a colossal 38.8m video views — and rising. He believes MGTOW is the product of 50 years of feminism. "They are saying that politically correct culture has taken over and 'I understand the system is stacked against me'. And they're right." This view is echoed by many of the other MGTOWs I have spoken to.

Andy Keane, 34, a physics student and inventor from Birmingham, became a MGTOW a year ago after an acrimonious divorce. He is now trying to live by MGTOW's punishing "monk mode" — a strict vow of celibacy. "My experiences of women in my earlier life was that there was a lot more freedom; there was a feeling of working together toward a common goal of happiness — but my last three relationships have really left their mark on me," he says.

His high-flying wife cheated on him, and this influenced his decision. "I discovered that she had been having extra relationships when she left her Facebook account logged onto my laptop. I felt like I'd had my heart ripped out. I no longer feel I can trust that fragile part of my heart again to someone who could toss it away. I am simply worth more."

Keane feels MGTOW gives him the tools to deal with a world that has become hostile towards men. "From the beginning, the game is rigged, so I've decided to opt out. I have replaced sex and dating with dedication to study, entrepreneurship, writing and martial arts. I am exponentially more productive without the need of acceptance from the opposite gender. I am heading towards MGTOW "monk mode": to choose celibacy and self-improvement over sexual interactions and conquests."

Isn't that just opting out?

"I am sure that many women will regard us as losers, or that we should just 'man up', or are too unattractive to gain dates. But therein lies the problem for women. The next time you ask your girlfriends, 'Where have all the good men gone?', the answer is, men are going their own way." Milo Yiannopoulos, a British columnist for the conservative US website Breitbart, sees the MGTOW movement as a reflection that young men are in a crisis.

"There are hundreds of thousands of smart, creative, sensitive, fascinating, attractive young men who have given up entirely on girls," he says. "I wrote about it early this year and called it the 'sexodus': boys who retreat into porn, video games and, in some cases, horribly, suicide, because they have no reasonable prospect of a normal, healthy relationship.

"These kids aren't dorks or losers or 'manbabies' or angry men's rights activists. They're normal young men whose lives are being destroyed by wacky feminist orthodoxy and the hostility toward young men at college and in the workplace".

The veteran campaigner Erin Pizzey, 76, is the founder of the women's domestic-violence charity Refuge, and in 1971 founded the first internationally recognised women's shelter in Chiswick, west London. Now, however, she believes it is men who are seeking refuge through MGTOW — and, controversially, she thinks it is women who have created the backlash against their own gender.

"MGTOW to me is a healthy movement," she says. "It's men taking power back because they have been rendered powerless in the past 50 years. There is a generation of men saying, 'I've been burnt, I'm dropping out.' We are in uncharted territory. As women made war with men, men are beginning to say, 'Maybe this war is liberating me. I don't have to be a wage slave in order to have a relationship with a woman.'"

She believes campus life is so hostile to young men that it is putting them off going to university (another explanation is that boys are outperformed by girls at all levels of British education).

"If, as a young man, you are from a very ordinary family, where you would never consider harming a woman, then you get to university and the first thing that happens is you are all corralled into a meeting where you are told that you might rape — that's a shocking thing to do to a young man," she says. "Is there any wonder these men are disengaging?

"We need to make women responsible for their behaviour. We have spent 40-50 years pretending that we can't say anything about women because we are victim-blaming. Until we get women to take responsibility, nothing is ever going to change."

That sentiment is echoed by Karen Straughan, a Canadian blogger and co-founder of the Honey Badger Radio podcast series, in which gender issues are regularly debated. Her GirlWritesWhat YouTube channel has 110,000 subscribers and 9m views.

"MGTOWs are resisted and hated because they represent a completely new paradigm where men's needs, interests and desires matter — because they do," she says. "We should protect men from exploitation by unscrupulous women and the system that enables them, not just because doing so is necessary to convince them to get back to the grindstone, but because men are part of the human community and deserve this protection from abuse and exploitation."

This interpretation of MGTOW appeals to those who subscribe to the movement, but who also still have relationships with women. One such man is Ciaran Lovejoy, 21, a journalism student at Demontfort University who has been a MGTOW for about a year, but is in a happy, sexually fulfilling relationship — although he says he will never be trapped into having children.

"You can be a MGTOW and be in a relationship," says Ciaran, who also has a YouTube channel, Bread & Circuses. "I've been in a relationship for seven months and my girlfriend's OK with MGTOW. We have sex. I love her. It's not currently favourable for men to have children. If we split up, I would almost certainly lose my child, and if I couldn't afford to pay for it, I could face jail. Men have historically been seen as workhorses. We're disposable. Now we have the opportunity to reject that — to not be society's bitch."

For some MGTOWs, however, a lifetime of enforced solitude is the only way to answer the rise of empowered women. They are the disciples of the outer reaches of the movement, called "true forced loneliness" (TFL).

Stephen Allen, 49, a part-time cleaner and music maker, was married for eight years and divorced 10 years ago after fathering three daughters.

"I've not been in any serious relationship for 10 years and have completely given up on love, because it plainly gave up on me years ago," he says. "I haven't seen my children in 10 years. I am lonely, but I'm far from damaged. I am just very guarded. I would love nothing more than to be intimate, but I feel women use me. A couple of years ago I started a friendship with a woman and I did all her washing, cooking and cleaning, but I got very little in return. So, I've given up. "No wife is a happy life and no child equals a healthy bank balance. My message to men is simple: do not get married. Under no circumstances have children, as you will be paying

a high amount of your wages to the Child Support Agency and lose everything you have worked for. Marriage will destroy most men."

## Part II

Of course there are men who have had unhappy lives and who feel hard done by by society. Does the MGTOW movement amount to any more than a posse of them getting together on the internet? Dean Esmay, the online activism director of the National Coalition for Men, a leading American men's rights group, insists that it does. He believes the brutal message of the MGTOWs has the capacity to end the gender war.

"Women need to have a conversation about this, and in a very serious way, because men are starting to hate them," he says. "This is a problem men and women need to fix together. Men can't do it on their own."

Although many people, particularly in Britain, may not have heard of MGTOW yet, it isn't a new concept. According to A Voice for Men, one of the internet's biggest men's rights forums, the first documented use of the term was in 2004. It is believed to have originated in North America.

In 2009, the growing MGTOW community began encouraging other men to reject marriage, fatherhood and even women altogether, eulogising that they should "refuse to bow, serve and kneel for the opportunity to be treated like a disposable utility". With the clarion call of "the only way to win is to not play the game", MGTOW's popularity exploded, particularly in Canada, Australia, America, Britain and Germany.

Miles Groth, professor of psychology at Wagner College in New York, first became aware of it five years ago and has seen the movement flourish on campus.

"At first I was suspicious that this was middle-aged, unhappily married men who were divorced and angry," he says. "But now there is a downward drift into the younger guys. Due to the new politically correct atmosphere on US campuses, and widely circulated statistics such as one in five American college women will be sexually assaulted, the younger men are now being treated like dangerous sexual predators and suspects. This is an appalling situation."

In common with all movements that have flourished on the internet and through social media, MGTOW has its own cabal of YouTube "thinkers" — the most high-profile are based in America and Canada. Sandman and Turd Flinging Monkey are at the more extreme end of the movement — as the latter's internet nomenclature might suggest. Their online clarion calls have inflammatory, provocative titles such as Are Women Capable of Love? and Why Civilised Society Hates Men. Clearly the intention is to provoke a debate, but who is behind the aliases and how have they managed to garner such a huge following in a relatively short period? Sandman is a 36-year-old photographer based in Toronto, Canada, and has more than 40,000 YouTube subscribers. "MGTOW is already massive and has tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of men around the world," he claims. "They just don't know they are going their own way, and that the term or online community exists."

He explains that his own awakening happened after a nine-year relationship ended. "I decided to take a break and learn about why I kept picking the wrong women. Now I reject long-term relationships with westernised women. Young women in their twenties are sleeping with dozens of men before finding a man to settle down with. Many western women are looking for the bigger, better deal in a partner, even when they are in long-term relationships."

Sandman thinks the majority of men are doomed to become servants to females because women are incapable of love without constant material reminders such as flowers, rings and so

on — and men have never been taught to say "no" to women. "Men going their own way realise they can say no to women, and yes to their own dreams and desires."

So what does that mean in practice?

"I would like to see artificial wombs and gestational surrogacy allow men to be fathers without the need for mothers. And I would like to see female androids replace the sexual functions of women. Once we have a level playing field, the sexes can sit down and renegotiate, if that's really what we want."

Although Sandman's views are a manifestation of the movement at its most militant, there is evidence that in Britain we are certainly having less sex, even if we are a long way away from Sandman's utopia. While the average British adult has sex four times a month, a third of them do not have sex at all in that period — an 8% increase since 2008. Until now, we've blamed work exhaustion, smartphones in bed, porn and even austerity. But is there another explanation? Could men opting out of sex — MGTOWs — be having an impact?

The evidence is mixed. Not all MGTOWs live like hermits. Some still have no-strings sex with women; others date and even marry. Others have vasectomies and have more sex than ever. According to Sandman, there are four levels of MGTOW. Level one sees women "for what they are", but still "take the risks". Level two believes in dating, but not marriage or cohabitation. Level three doesn't believe in dating women at all and limits their interactions with them. Level four tries to limit its interactions not only with women, but with the state: they believe in "going ghost" and trying to stay invisible to men and women.

The activist Dean Esmay says: "I think the true MGTOW philosophy is not eschewing women, but saying, 'I'm a self-defined man, I don't care what women think. I'm going to live my life the way I see fit, and if you don't like it, you can go stuff yourself."

He believes that some men "have always felt this way, but now they're forming networks. These guys can't be shut up. And they're growing in number. They think, 'The problem isn't my misogyny, the problem is women hate me. I'm a utility. I'm disposable.' Others want nothing to do with women, and they're happy if women are miserable. I think that's sad. Some say 'masturbation is so much cheaper'. It's a pretty hardcore rejection."

Esmay is convinced that this movement is here to stay. "I see this deep rift developing between men and women, and that's tragic — to distrust and fear half the human race. There is a militant strand that thinks the female is truly incapable of love: they are there to use men's resources. It's not hate, it's more contempt or even indifference. But we must not forget: these men don't want to kill anybody. They're lonely and afraid. They're not pathetic. They're often just hurting."

What is the cause of all this anger?

"A lot of these boys are from single-parent homes, with absent fathers. They never knew a male role model. When they went to school, they never saw male teachers — they were effectively raised in a matriarchy. As a result, they don't see women as anything other than punishing, authoritative, demanding and judging. All men need to rebel against authority — so, for these guys, who will that be? Women."

The MGTOW message is raw, visceral and, ultimately, heartbreaking. How did we get to the point where men want to retreat to caves and have sex with robots? Yet what amazed me most while researching this article was that every time I explained the MGTOW concept to a friend, they all knew one — they just didn't know they were called MGTOWs. One woman said: "I've got a male mate, a good-looking, well-paid accountant. He's athletic, a good catch, but he's given up on women. He reads about false-rape cases and he thinks sex isn't worth the hassle."

Another added: "I know gay guys and women who do this, too. People are dropping out everywhere. Is there any wonder we're all single?"

Men are more confused and bewildered by the world and its women than ever before. Dismissing MGTOWs as losers and telling them to grow up will only exacerbate the growing divisions between the sexes. The truth is that these men feel abandoned, unwanted and even despised. Beneath the tough-talking armour, I believe they are in pain, and, being men, they don't always express that in the most constructive way. For that, they deserve not our rage, nor our pity, but our understanding and sympathy. The future of mankind may depend on it.