

# Leader's Suicide Brings Attention to Men's Rights Movement

By Arthur Goldwag

After 10 years of custody battles, court-ordered counseling and imminent imprisonment for non-payment of child support, Thomas James Ball, a leader of the Worcester branch of the Massachusetts-based Fatherhood Coalition, had reached his limit. On June 15, 2011, he doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire just outside the Cheshire County, N.H., Courthouse. He was dead within minutes.

In a lengthy "Last Statement," which arrived posthumously at the Keene Sentinel, Tom Ball told his story. All he had done, he said, was smack his 4-year-old daughter and bloody her mouth after she licked his hand as he was putting her to bed. Feminist-crafted anti-domestic violence legislation did the rest. "Twenty-five years ago," he wrote, "the federal government declared war on men. It is time to see how committed they are to their cause. It is time, boys, to give them a taste of war." Calling for all-out insurrection, he offered tips on making Molotov cocktails and urged his readers to use them against courthouses and police stations. "There will be some casualties in this war," he predicted. "Some killed, some wounded, some captured. Some of them will be theirs. Some of the casualties will be ours."

For people who associate the men's and fathers' rights movements with New Age drum circles in the woods, the ferocity of Ball's rhetoric, the horror of his act, and, in particular, the widespread and blatantly misogynistic reaction to it may come as something of a revelation. When the feminist Amanda Marcotte, a bête noire of the men's rights movement, remarked that "setting yourself on fire is an extremely effective tool if your goal is to make your ex-wife's life a living hell," a poster at the blog Misandry.com went ballistic. "Talk about the pot calling the kettle black," he raged. "She is evil and such a vile evil that she is a disease that needs to be cut out of the human [consciousness] just like the rest of the femanazi ass harpies."

It's not much of a surprise that significant numbers of men in Western societies feel threatened by dramatic changes in their roles and that of the family in recent decades. Similar backlashes, after all, came in response to the civil rights movement, the gay rights movement, and other major societal revolutions. What is something of a shock is the verbal and physical violence of that reaction.

Ball's suicide brought attention to an underworld of misogynists, woman-haters whose fury goes well beyond criticism of the family court system, domestic violence laws, and false rape accusations. There are literally hundreds of websites, blogs and forums devoted to attacking virtually all women (or, at least, Westernized ones) — the so-called "manosphere," which now also includes a tribute page for Tom Ball ("He Died For Our Children"). While some of them voice legitimate and sometimes disturbing complaints about the treatment of men, what is most remarkable is the misogynistic tone that pervades so many. Women are routinely maligned as sluts, gold-diggers, temptresses and worse; overly sympathetic men are dubbed "manginas"; and police and other officials are called their armed enablers. Even Ball — who did not directly blame his ex-wife for his troubles, but instead depicted her and their three children as co-victims of the authorities — vilified "man-hating feminists" as evil destroyers of all that is good.

This kind of woman-hatred is increasingly visible in most Western societies, and it tends to be allied with other

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Darren Mack

anti-modern emotions — opposition to same-sex marriage, to non-Christian immigration, to women in the workplace, and even, in some cases, to the advancement of African Americans. Just a few weeks after Ball's death, while scorch marks were still visible on the sidewalk in Keene, N.H., that was made clear once more by a Norwegian named Anders Behring Breivik.

On July 22, Breivik slaughtered 77 of his countrymen, most of them teenagers, in Oslo and at a summer camp on the island of Utøya, because he thought they or their parents were the kinds of “politically correct” liberals who were enabling Muslim immigration. But Breivik was almost as voluble on the subjects of feminism, the family, and fathers' rights as he was on Islam. “The most direct threat to the family is ‘divorce on demand,’” he wrote in the manifesto he posted just before he began his deadly spree. “The system must be reformed so that the father will be awarded custody rights by default.”

The manosphere lit up. Said one approving poster at The Spearhead, an online men's rights magazine for the “defense of ourselves, our families and our fellow men”: “What could be more ‘an eye for an eye’ than to kill the children of those who were so willing to destroy men's families and destroy the homeland of men?”

### **‘The Homeland of Men’**

The men's rights movement, also referred to as the fathers' rights movement, is made up of a number of disparate, often overlapping, types of groups and individuals. Some most certainly do have legitimate grievances, having endured prison, impoverishment or heartrending separations from genuinely loved children.

Jocelyn Crowley, a Rutgers political scientist and the author of *Defiant Dads: Fathers' Rights Activists in America*, says that most men who join real (as opposed to virtual) men's rights groups aren't seeking to attack the family court system so much as they are simply struggling to navigate it. What they talk most about when they meet face to face, she says, are strategies to deal with their ex-partners and have better relationships with their children.

But Molly Dragiewicz, a criminologist at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology and the author of *Equality With a Vengeance: Men's Rights Groups, Battered Women, and Antifeminist Backlash*, argues that cases in which fathers are badly treated by courts and other officials are not remotely the norm. The small percentage of divorces that end up in litigation are disproportionately those where abuse and other issues make joint custody a dubious proposition. Even when a woman can satisfactorily document her ex-husband's abuse, Dragiewicz says, she is no more likely to receive full custody of her children than if she couldn't.

The men's movement also includes mail-order-bride shoppers, unregenerate batterers, and wannabe pickup artists who are eager to learn the secrets of “game”—the psychological tricks that supposedly make it easy to seduce women. George Sodini, who confided his seething rage at women to his blog before shooting 12 women, three of them fatally, was one of the latter. Before his 2009 murder spree at a Pittsburgh-area gym, he was a student — though clearly not a very apt one — of R. Don Steele, the author of *How to Date Young Women: For Men Over 35*. “I dress good, am clean-shaven, bathe, touch of cologne — yet 30 million women rejected me over an 18 or 25-year period,” Sodini wrote with the kind of pathos presumably typical of Steele's readers.

Other movement adherents have forsworn sex altogether, or at least romantic relationships and marriage; the acronym they use for themselves is MGTOW, for “Men Going Their Own Way.” “If you are willing to marry a woman — any woman — in the West then you must also be willing to become the next murder-suicide story when she threatens to file for divorce, steal your kids out of your life and extort you for every current and future dollar you will ever earn,” wrote one commenter at The Spearhead. “If a man kidnapped your children, stole your home, your wallet and your bank account, you'd be more than willing to kill him in self defense. Why is it any different when ex-wives do it with the full force of the law behind them?”

Some take an inordinate interest in extremely young women, or fetishize what they see as the ultra-feminine (read: docile) characteristics of South American and Asian women. Others, who have internalized Christian “headship” doctrine, are desperately seeking the “submissive” women such doctrine celebrates. Still others are simply sexually awkward, and nonplussed and befuddled by society's changing mores. The common denominator is their resentment of feminism and of females in general.

“It’s ironic,” the feminist writer Amanda Marcotte observes. “These [misogynist Web] sites owe their existence to feminism’s successes. At some point in the last couple of years, the zeitgeist hit a tipping point where female power — Hillary Clinton’s, Rachel Maddow’s, even Sarah Palin’s — stopped being questioned. Being sexist has become less acceptable than it used to be. This makes some men particularly anxious.” At the same time, of course, domestic violence and sex crimes are much more likely to be prosecuted than they were even a decade ago. Shelters, social services and legal aid are more available to most battered women than in the past.

But some experts argue that men’s rights groups have been remarkably successful. The groups, says Rita Smith, director of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, “have taken over the way courts deal with custody issues, particularly when there are allegations of abuse,” largely by convincing them that there is such a thing as “Parental Alienation Syndrome” (PAS). (PAS is a supposed clinical disorder in which a child compulsively belittles one parent due to indoctrination by the other — frequently leveling false allegations of abuse. It is not recognized as a clinical disorder by either the American Psychiatric Association or the World Health Organization.) Citing studies that show that false domestic abuse accusations against men are far less common than men’s groups and PAS enthusiasts claim, Smith says the groups nevertheless have “been able to get custody evaluators, mediators, guardians ad litem and child protective service workers to believe that women and children lie about abuse.”



George Sodini

### Threats and Abuse

One kind of abuse that is undeniable is the vilification of individual women on certain men’s group websites. The best example of that may be Register-Her, a registry of women who “have caused significant harm to innocent individuals either by the direct action of crimes like rape, assault, child molestation and murder, or by the false accusation of crimes against others.” The site was set up by Paul Elam, the blogger behind A Voice for Men, less than two weeks after Ball’s suicide. “If Mary Jane Rottencrotch decides to falsely accuse her husband of domestic violence in order to get the upper hand in a divorce,” Elam boasted on his Internet radio show, “we can publish all her personal information on the website, including her name, address, phone number ... even her routes to and from work.”

Under a headline reading, “Why are these women not in prison?” the site features photos and information about some 250 alleged malefactors, including notorious women like Lorena Bobbitt and Tonya Harding, although Elam hasn’t made good on his threat to publish home addresses or phone numbers. Many of those listed received prison sentences for various crimes, but large numbers were acquitted in court, while others were never accused of any lawbreaking. A well-known feminist, for example, is listed for “anti-male bigotry,” which is compared to racism.

Elam’s site can be frightening to its targets. In one case, he offered a cash reward to the first reader to ferret out a pseudonymous feminist blogger’s real name. In another, Elam singled out a part-time blogger at ChicagoNow who describes herself as a “vegetarian park activist with two baby girls.” The woman’s mistake was to write about her discomfort with male adults helping female toddlers in the bathroom at her daughter’s preschool. The blogger conceded that she was being sexist, but wrote that “I’d rather be wrong than find out if I’m right.”

After the woman was listed, she was widely attacked on men’s movement sites. “I don’t always use the word ‘cunt’ to describe a woman,” one poster raged, “but when I do it’s because of reasons like these.” Shocked, the “Mommy blogger” took down her original post and apologized for her “demonization of men.”

It wasn’t enough. “You targeted fathers, and just fathers,” Elam rebuked her. “It strikes me that you have never really been held to account for any of your actions in life. It is quite likely that the concept of complete, selfless accountability is just completely foreign to you.” Over at the Reddit Mens Rights forum, another poster

fumed: “This entire episode should be a warning to all those male hating feminists out there who believe that they are safe screaming their hate messages on the web. Finally, they are held accountable for their hate messages and finally the rest of the world will find out exactly what type of depraved people they really are.”

Amanda Marcotte, who is a prime Register-Her target, writes about men’s rights activists less than she used to. That’s not because she doesn’t take them seriously — they introduce too many “anti-woman, anti-child, pro-abuse, pro-rape ideas into the public discourse” not to —



Scott Dekraai

but because “they’re so doggedly mean. It becomes frightening after a while.” Marcotte says the registry may incite violence against its targets, especially because many angry male activists are active abusers. “They interact with their ideological adversaries online,” she says, “much as they do with their spouses and children: ‘I’ll give you something to cry about!’”

“I don’t know if Thomas James Ball ever visited this site,” Elam wrote on his blog when he started Register-Her. “What I do believe is, though, that he, if convinced to stay alive, would have been a hell of a soldier in this war.”

### **Soldiers in the War**

The first shots in this so-called war on feminism were fired 22 years before Tom Ball’s suicide. On Dec. 6, 1989, Marc Lépine, a troubled 25-year-old computer student, strolled into the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal, Canada, carrying a Ruger Mini-14 semi-automatic rifle and a hunting knife. He walked into a classroom, ordered the men to leave, and lined the women up against a wall.

“I am fighting feminism,” he announced before opening fire. “You’re women, you’re going to be engineers. You’re all a bunch of feminists. I hate feminists.”

By the time he turned the gun on himself, 14 women were dead and 10 were wounded; four men were hurt as well. The suicide note in Lépine’s pocket contained a list of 19 “radical feminists” he hoped to kill, and this: “I have decided to send the feminists, who have always ruined my life, to their Maker. ... They want to keep the

advantages of women ... while seizing for themselves those of men.”

Today, that kind of rage is often directed at all women, not only perceived feminists. “Women don’t need the powers-that-be to get them to hate and use men,” the blogger Alcuin wrote recently. “They have always used men; maybe they have always hated us too.” Added another blogger, Angry Harry: “There are now, literally, billions of dollars, numerous empires, and millions of jobs that depend on the public swallowing the idea that women need to be defended from men.”

“A word to the wise,” offered the blogger known as Rebuking Feminism. “The animals women have become want one thing, resources and genes. ... See them as the animals they have become and plan ... accordingly.”

And many are quick to endorse violence against women. “There are women, and plenty of them, for which [sic] a solid ass kicking would be the least they deserve,” Paul Elam wrote in an essay with the provocative title, “When is it OK to Punch Your Wife?” “The real question here is not whether these women deserve the business end of a right hook, they obviously do, and some of them deserve one hard enough to leave them in an unconscious, innocuous pile on the ground if it serves to protect the innocent from imminent harm. The real question is whether men deserve to be able to physically defend themselves from assault ... from a woman.”

For some, it’s more than just talk. In 2006, Darren Mack, a member of a fathers’ rights group in Reno, Nev., stabbed his estranged wife to death and then shot and wounded the family court judge who was handling his divorce.

That kind of violence continues right up to the present.

In Seal Beach, Calif. last Oct. 12, a day after Scott Evans Dekraai and his ex-wife had been in court to fight over custody of their 8-year-old son (Dekraai had 56% custody but wanted full custody and “final decision making authority” on matters of the child’s education and medical treatment), Dekraai walked into the hair salon where his ex-wife worked armed with three handguns. There, he allegedly shot seven women, six of them fatally; he also is accused of killing two men — the salon’s owner, as he attempted to flee, and a man in a car outside.

Michelle Fournier, Dekraai’s ex-wife, had testified that Dekraai was not taking his bipolar medicine and that he was suicidal and dangerous. If she had survived his rampage, she might have enjoyed having the last word about his propensity for violence. But she did not, becoming instead the latest in a long, sad line of victims of women-hating men.