

Healing from Hate: How Young Men Get into -and out of-Violent Extremism

Michael Kimmel

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Healing from Hate, written by the renowned sociologist and expert on masculinities, Michael Kimmel, has a truly interdisciplinary scope, which addresses the interests of political and social scientists, who work on populism, extremism, far-right movements, masculinities, race, ethnicity and whiteness studies, gender studies, youth culture, intersectionality, identity, power structures and inequalities. The author's avoidance of opaque theoretical discussions and positioning of himself both as a curious researcher and a person who is concerned about the global popularity of the extremist movements he works, make this book beyond an academic one, and a must-read for the related non-governmental organizations' (NGO's) or governmental organizations' shareholders. Kimmel's analysis, a "gendered political psychology of extremism" (p. 234), as described the by the author himself, includes the biographies of men, who had been involved in different far-right movements such as Neo-Nazis and Jihadists, and *jumped out* of these movements, after feeling disillusioned, disheartened and alienated because of their experiences, observations and reflections during the times they were a part of those movements.

The book focuses on the biographies from Germany, Sweden, U.S. and Britain, and contextualize these biographies within the historical

and current political and economic problems in these societies, which push people in and out of extremist movements. The biographies often include the social factors, such as harassment by the family members or bullying in the school which led people to feel marginalized and search for alternative communities with far-right ideologies, in their search for identity and sense of belonging. Their sense of identity and belonging is also strengthened by powerful cultural symbols, such as swastika and other Nazi paraphernalia. However, they gradually feel frustrated within these communities and seek a way to exit, often with the help of NGO's. The international scope of this book is further enriched by the comparative examples from Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and Canada, pointing out the problems related to far-right populism. The international comparisons are especially valuable in outlining the similarities and differences in the strategies of the NGO's, such as EXIT Sweden, EXIT Deutschland, Life After Hate (LAH) in the U.S, and Quilliam in Britain. For instance, EXIT operates through its own offices in Sweden and Germany, whereas LAH lives mainly on social media, "as a place in cyberspace", with a motto "No Judgement, Just Help" (p. 179). Although EXIT and LAH employees largely avoid ideological discussions with the extremists, and act as life coaches who show that an alternative communal life and personal identity are possible, often by materially supporting them in employment and housing, Quilliam provides ideological explanations on "political and religious errors of modern Islamic movements" (p. 219).

Political and economic crisis induced by the problems in global neoliberalism today caused the rising of populist, racist, far-right movements, throughout the world, which caught the attention of many social and political scientists, such as Scott Atran (2010) and Marc Sageman (2017). *Healing from Hate* differs from these authors' works, in

terms of its emphasis on particular conceptions of masculinity, which is a major factor for the people, whose biographies are narrated, which led them to be a part of, and later on, to exit, these extremist movements. This process is a highly gendered one, which is related to the fact that the traditional gender roles in patriarchal cultures, where the men are associated with the responsibility of being the breadwinners and protecting their wife and children, are no longer valid in most parts of the World. Therefore, this conception of male responsibility which comes with a “particular set of entitlements and rewards” (p.8) in their family, community, and society, as a result of their successful performances of masculinity. However, loss of jobs and unemployment due to “economic displacement in an increasingly interconnected global economy” (p. 9), the challenges against the domestic patriarchy by the working wives and children, who are getting an education and being politically marginalized, lead to a breakdown in this conception of masculinity. Similarly, the participants of the extremist movements often narrate childhood traumas, such as bullying, sexual abuse, and isolation from their family and community, as other factors which harm their masculinity. This breakdown of the particular conception masculinity requires “restoration, retrieval and reclamation” (p. 8), which often takes the form of attacking the racial, ethnic and/or religious others and immigrants, who are blamed to take the jobs and girlfriends or wives of the Whites, partying, brawling, heavily drinking and using drugs. In the case of Muslim immigrants who turned to Jihadists in Canada and England, their masculinity is often threatened by the racism they experience in their everyday lives and identity issues since they do not feel a sense of belonging to any community or country, and it is reclaimed with the plan of being a suicide bomber and a martyr, which would guarantee to go to heaven after death and join “72 virgins” here (p. 213).

Despite his particular focus on the threat against masculinity, Kimmel carefully avoids psychologizing this process and does not establish a direct link between these particular challenges and joining an extremist movement. He states that there are many other men who have experienced these challenges and coped with them in different ways, such as seeking professional help of a psychologist or embrace an alternative, more compassionate and inclusive form of masculinity. However, these common patterns in the biographies from different countries point out a gendered pattern, which the author also notices and request the NGO's who help the extremists in jumping out of the movements to consider this pattern and act accordingly in shaping their strategies and discourses.

As Kimmel also mentions, reading the extremists' biographies in *Healing from Hate*, frustrates the readers, since it gives them an impression that many people are one bullying or harassment away from joining an extremist group. However, it also gives them hope, since the biographies often end with extremists' developing a new conception of masculinity and starting a more peaceful and integrated life with the help of NGOs, such as EXIT and LAH. The book does not have a particular methodology section, but Kimmel's arguments are largely based on the interviews that he had conducted often in unusual places such as EXIT offices and high-security prisons, as well as the social media sources, music and cartoons, which represent far-right ideologies and movements and became influential in recruiting new members to these movements. The richness of sources begs for a more detailed account on the methodology, where the author could explain more how he had reached and built a rapport with the participants of his research, and how the participants benefit from the sources of popular culture and social media in shaping their arguments and lifestyle.

While the author successfully discusses the particular biographical, historical and current social conditions which lead men to become extremists, one quote from a Swedish Neo-Nazi Stefan stands out: "I wasn't a Nazi when I was born...I became a Nazi" (p. 101). This quote refers to the contingencies in a particular social context in making (and unmaking) of a Nazi, and reminds the readers Rakel Dink's *Letter to the Loved One*, which she wrote after the assassination of her husband, the acclaimed Armenian journalist from Turkey, Hrant Dink, by an ultra-nationalist, in Istanbul in 2007: "Whatever would be the age of the murderers, 17 or 27, I know that they were born babies once. Without questioning the darkness that created murderers from those babies, there's nothing to do".

Kimmel explores the far-right movements from the angle of his participants' masculinities. However, he never singles out the concept of masculinities in his analysis, and contextualize it by pointing out its interaction with the class, race, ethnicity, age, immigration and family history within the biographies of young men he interviewed. This approach adds sophistication to the author's arguments, which also shows that people's lives are multi-layered, complex and complicated entities, where the slightest contingency make a big difference in its flow. In that respect, *Healing from Hate* is a pertinent example of the studies of life history, despite the fact that it focuses on a brief period of time in the earlier phases of people. Although the young men's biographies constitute the main scope, the experiences of women within the far-right movements and the LGBTQ issues in relation to these movements' ideologies are also included in the book. However, these parts on women and LGBTQ stress out their rather instrumental role in the lives and views of the main actors of the book, than standing on their own, which leaves the readers eager to learn more about the women and LGBTQ in

these movements. Perhaps, this calls for another book on this issue by Michael Kimmel.

Work Cited

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