USING "SMALL DATA" TO MAP HOW MEN'S RIGHTS CAME ONLINE

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The digital turn provides social movement researchers with numerous opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, born-digital materials, digital archives, and computational methods allow us to study how social movements use Internet technologies to network, disseminate messages, build community, and recruit new members. On the other hand, we are often frustrated by both the abundance *and* scarcity of data, especially for historical research (Nanni, 2019). While the advent of the Internet can be seen as a "revolution" in how social movements communicate and organize – for instance, through connective action (Bennet & Segerberg, 2013) – digital methods and materials do not necessarily constitute a "revolution" in how we study these movements or their histories (Nanni, 2019).

It is thus unsurprising that some researchers "have questioned the idea that bigger is necessarily better" (Milligan, 2019a, p. 9) when studying social movements online. Furthermore, big data analysis often requires access to computing resources and skills that are not always available or easily learned by researchers. Furthermore, archival materials are often "messy": print materials cannot always be easily converted to digital formats for optical character recognition (OCR), and digital archival materials can be equally cumbersome and difficult to "clean" for computational methods. My paper enters this discussion by suggesting a "small data" approach for studying the early digital presence of social movements. In my case, a "small data" approach refers to collecting a preliminary dataset by manually trawling through print and digital archive materials, using simple spreadsheets to track the data, and Google My Maps to visualize the data.

I focus on the men's rights movement's transition from print to digital media. The men's rights movement refers to the "diverse range of groups and individuals who believe that the dignity and rights of men and boys are diminished, threatened, or non-existent" (de Coning, 2020, p. 1). Men's rights activists often blame feminists in particular, and sometimes women in general, for their perceived lack of rights. This social movement has gained notoriety in recent years with events like #Gamergate (2014) or misogynist-incel attacks (Kelly, DiBranco, & DeCook, 2021), and its proponents are often

associated with "extremely online" and "toxic" masculinities. However, the movement's history and adoption of Internet technologies remain understudied. Here, I use two unique datasets to demonstrate how the men's rights movement in North America transitioned from print-based communication to digital spaces in the early 1990s, and how these communities were often geographically well-positioned to do so.

My first dataset uses print archival materials from the *Changing Men* collection at Michigan State University to map the locations of men's rights groups across North America. Men's rights newsletters and zines often dedicated space in their publications to list other publications and organizations — typically with contact numbers and postal addresses (see Fig. 1). I draw specifically on the "Directory Lists" included in the prominent men's rights zine *The Backlash!* from October 1993 to October 1994 to pinpoint the locations of men's rights groups, publications, and organizations operating during this time (see Fig. 2).

My second dataset draws on the Usenet Historical Collection, hosted by The Internet Archive, and the men's rights newsgroup alt.mens-rights in particular. Working through the archived newsgroup chronologically, I collected a dataset of 100 posts (spanning September – November 1994). While each post contains the written content of the message, I focus on the metadata attached to these posts. Of the initial dataset of 100 posts, I identified 83 unique users; of these, 24 had no clear location data and were removed from the dataset. However, the remaining posts include 59 users with university, organizational, or corporate email addresses that allowed me to locate them to some extent; while these email addresses are not an accurate representation of where users were located at the time of accessing the newsgroup, they do indicate the geographical areas where alt.mens-rights participants were located when first accessing Usenet. Additionally,10 users provided included their full addresses in their post signatures (see Fig. 3).

By comparing the geographical information across the two datasets (see Fig. 4), I demonstrate how: 1) there is significant overlap between the print organizations and alt.mens-rights users; and 2) men's rights communities in North America were often concentrated in areas like Southern California, the Pacific Northwest, and the North Eastern Seaboard. This is important for several reasons. First, it suggests that the movement's transition to digital media was impacted by its proximity to Internet infrastructures and the typically middle-class, university-educated populations who had access to this technology in the early 1990s. I thus provide a more definitive picture of the men's rights activists who "pioneered" the movement's current digital manifestations. Second, I demonstrate how print materials aided the movement's transition online by providing "pre-digital networks" that presaged its digital networks.

Finally, this paper acknowledges specific challenges and potential problems with this approach. First, the sensitive nature of the metadata raises ethical concerns about its use (see Dame-Griff, 2019; Milligan, 2019b; Kollock & Smith, 2005). For this reason, I have anonymized the data and removed any identifying information about alt.mens-rights users from the paper. Second, the data is preliminary; further research will expand both datasets to provide a more robust and rigorous analysis of the transition to digital media discussed here. Third, my small data approach suggests a critical re-

evaluation of the methods and tools available to researchers using archives. As Nanni argues, it is imperative for historians to "go beyond an unquestioned adoption of the new sources and tools at their disposal" and "instead critically employ them, in search of new historical perspectives" (2019, p. 122). However, I am not proposing that big data and computational methods are not valuable, or that potential mixed-methods collaborations could not be fruitful. Furthermore, as with print archives, digital archives are often incomplete and represent only a portion of the people who may have had access to the Internet at a particular time. Thus, researchers making use of "small data" must be vigilant about selection bias and the representativeness of their data (Milligan, 2019b, p. 85). Nonetheless, my research provides an opportunity to think critically and creatively about the digital revolution, and how small data (both analog and digital) can still be valuable to researchers studying social movements online.

Directory of Men's Groups

- A Men's Magazine, 288 Arlington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1R 5T2
- Austin Texas Men's Center, 4314 Medical Parkway, Austin, TX, 78756-3324
- Behavior Science Associates, Suite 340, W. Quadrangle, Village of Cross Keys, Baltimore, MD, 21210, (301) 435-9281
- Bioenergetics Press, P.O. Box 9141B, Madison, WI, 53715
- Center for Men's Studies, 2490 Channing Way, Berkley, CA, 94704
- Children's Rights Council, Inc., 220 "I" Street, Suite 230, Washington, D.C. 20002-4362, (800) 787-KIDS
- Dads Against Discrimination, Smith Tower, Suite 1518, 506 Second Avenue, Seattle, WA 98104-2311, (206) 623-3761
- Domestic Rights Coalition, 2145 West University Ave., St. Paul, MN, 55114, (612) 659-0640
- Everyman, Canadian Men's Journal, Box 4617 Station E Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1S 5H8
- Family of Men Support Society, 3240 Kerrydale Rd SW, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T3N 4S6
- Family Preservation Alliance, P.O. Box 285, Mercer Island, WA 98040
- Family Renewal Center, 6750 Hillcrest Plaza Drive, Suite 218, Dallas, TX, 75230, (214) 233-2199
- Fathers-at-home Support Group, P.O. Box 27161, Seattle, WA 98125
- First Class Male, 50 N. Arlington Ave., Indianapolis, IN, 46219
- The Gauntalet, 2129 Genderal Booth Blvd., Suite 103-208, Virginia Beach, VA 23454
- Golden Valley Health Center, 4101 Golden Valley Road, Minneapolis, MN, 55422
- Ho!, A Men's Journal, P.O. Box 1029-477, Van Nuys, CA, 91408
- Island Men's Network, 35 Cambridge Street, Victoria, BC, V8V 4A7, (604) 383-MALE
- Journeyman Magazine, 513 Chester Turnpike, Candia, NH, 03034, (603) 883-8029
- M.E.N.S. Network Society, P.O. Box 280, Station G, Calgary, Alberta, T3A 2G2, (403) 251-1531
- Manitoba Men's Network, P.O. Box 26022, Winnipeg, MB, R3C 1K9

- National Center for Men, P.O. Box 317, Brooklyn, NY 11240, (718) 845-2010
- National Coalition of Free Men, P.O. Box 129, Manhasset, NY, 11030, (516) 482-6378
- National Men's Resource Center, P.O. Box 882-Q, San Anselmo, CA, 94979-0882
- NOCIRC of Washington, 501 N. 36th St, #404, Seattle, WA 98103
- North American Confederation of Men's Councils, 60 South Aberdeen Street, Arlington, VA, 22204, (703) 979-6170
- Oasis Center, 7463 N. Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL, 60626, (312) 274-6777
- Olympic M.E.N. (Men's Evolvement Network), 167 West Silverton Road, Sequim, WA, 98382
- Orlando Men's Council, P.O. Box 462, Winter Park, FL
- QUEST, Men's Resource Magazine, 1592 Union Street, Suite 370, San Francisco, CA 94123, (415) 931-5332
- Redwood Men's Center, 705 College Ave., Santa Rosa, CA, 95404
- Seattle M.E.N. (Men's Evolvement Network), 602 W. Howe Street, Seattle, WA 98119, (206) 285-4356
- Shared Parenting Association of Alberta, 315 10 Ave SE, Suite 202, Calgary, AB, T2G 0W2, (403) 262-4662
- The Panfaea Institute for Gender Studies, Box 862, Sebastopol, CA, 95473
- United Fathers of America, 506 Second Ave., Suite 1532, Seattle, WA 98104, (206) 623-5050
- Valley Men's Newsletter, Men's Resource Connection, 24 S. Prospect Street, Amherst, MA, 01002, (413) 253-9887
- Vancouver M.E.N. (Men's Evolvement Network), 3392 West 34 Avenue, Vancouver B.C., V6N 2K6, (604) 290-9988
- Washington Families for Non-Custodial Rights: POPS (Parents Opposed to Punitive Support), c/o Robert J. Hoyden, P.O. Box 68401, Seattle, WA 98168, 1-800-795-7677, or (206) 382-0212
- West Palm Beach Men's Council, 443 Wilder Street, West Palm Beach, FL, 33405
- Wingspan, Journal of the Male Spirit, Box 14P.O. Box 23550, Detroit, MI 48223-0550

Figure 1: *Directory List extract from the October 1993 edition of* The Backlash! w*hich lists men's rights organizations across North America.*
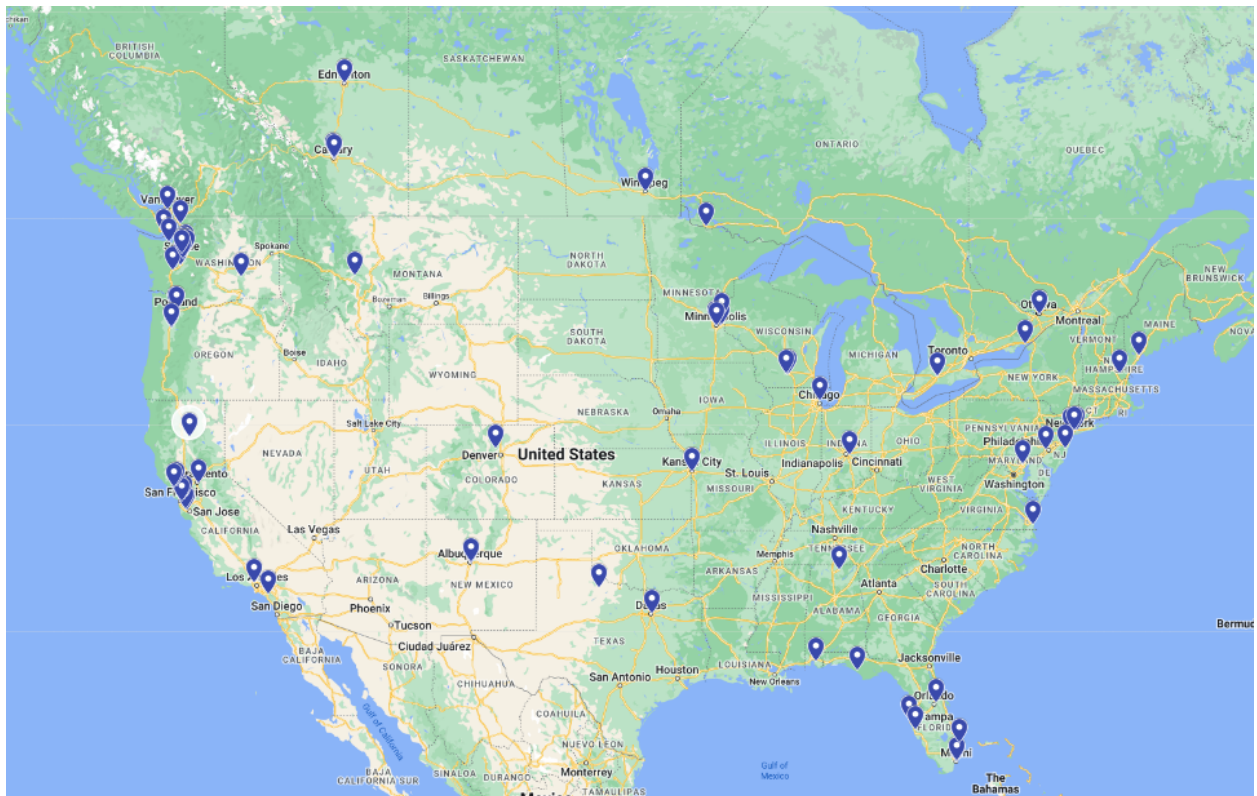
Figure 2: *The locational data from my first dataset using organizational addresses published in* The Backlash! *between October 1993 – October 1994.*
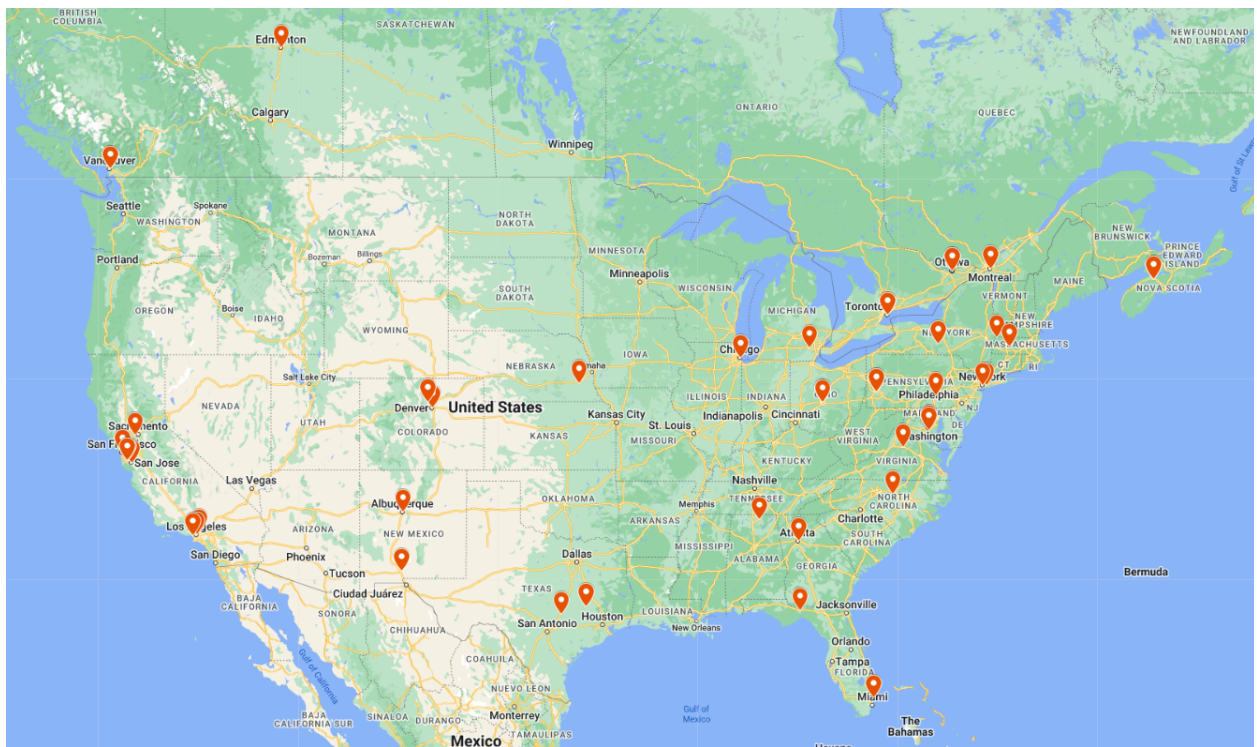

Figure 3: *The locational data from my second dataset using university, organizational, or corporate email addresses, as well as post signatures, collected from alt.mens-rights between September – November 1994.*
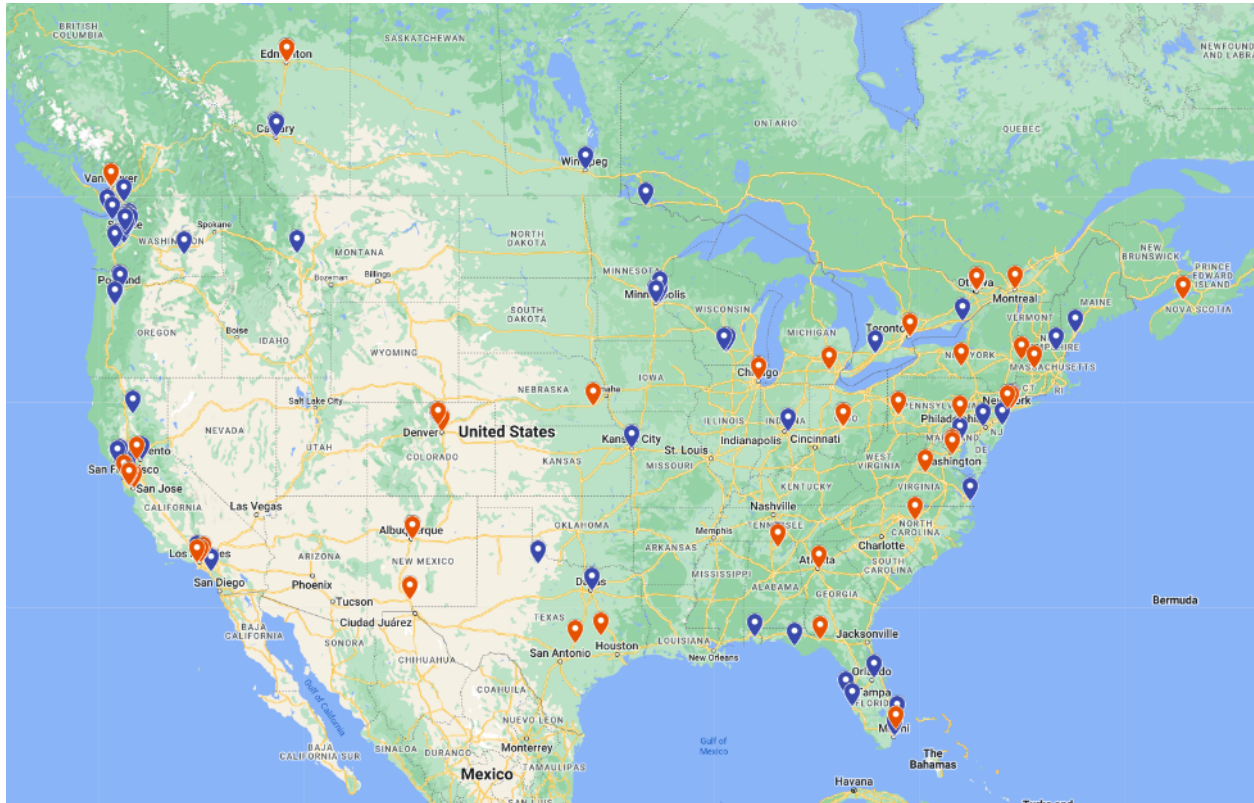
Figure 4: *Overlaying the two maps.*

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