Experiences of engaging with the manosphere

Ofcom

Revealing Reality

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REVEALING REALITY Ofcom

Contents page

Foreword by Ofcom

This research report sets out findings and themes from our qualitative research with people who view, engage with or create content associated with the manosphere[1] online. It explores their experiences, attitudes and media literacy. Given this focus, all but one of the participants in this research are men, and we are not exploring here how women feel about manosphere content or how it affects women.

Ofcom is the UK's online safety regulator, and under the Online Safety Act 2023 has duties to protect UK users from illegal content on online services, protect children from content that is harmful to children, and to produce guidance on how online service providers can protect women and girls from online content and activity that disproportionately affects them (where those providers have duties under the Online Safety Act in relation to such content and activity). Ofcom also has statutory duties to promote and research media literacy. The Online Safety Act has also clarified and added specificity to our media literacy duties in the Communications Act 2003, including a focus on regulated services and a duty to make arrangements for carrying out research to support our role in heightening public awareness and understanding of 'content and activity disproportionately affecting particular groups, including women and girls.' This research will inform our work in both online safety and media literacy.

This in-depth qualitative research focuses on the broader context for online misogyny: users' experiences of online spaces where existing literature suggests such content may proliferate, sometimes referred to as the manosphere, as well as the life events and circumstances which might lead individuals to engage in such spaces. The research explores the first-hand experiences of people engaging with the online manosphere, their journeys into it, their views and reflections on it, and explores if and how harm may occur as a result.

Online misogyny[2] describes a wide range of content and behaviour which engages in, normalises or encourages misogynistic attitudes and ideas. This includes content that incites hatred towards, abuses or threatens women and girls, as well as sexual or explicit content that normalises or encourages harmful sexual behaviour. Online misogyny is perpetrated and witnessed in a variety of online spaces, across both large and small services and dedicated online communities. This spans across illegal content such as illegal threats and extreme pornography, as well as content which is legal but harmful to children, such as content normalising gendered or sexual violence. We address illegal content in our Illegal Harms Register of Risks and our Illegal Content Judgements Guidance and address content that is harmful to children in our Children's Register of Risks and in our Children's Harms Guidance. We also set out the measures that regulated services can apply to mitigate the risk of these harms occurring on their platforms in our illegal harms codes of practice and our protection of children codes of practice[3].

This research draws on interviews with 38 men and one woman, aged between 16 and 50s, who were viewing, engaging with or creating content in various diverse manosphere sites and communities. While our sample included some aged 16-19, the findings cannot be generalised to children. While many in our sample reported the ability to selectively engage with manosphere content, it is possible that younger teenagers and children are less able to critically evaluate the content that they encounter. It is also important to note that, during recruitment, we encountered a considerable mistrust of organisations that potential participants considered to be 'mainstream'. For some, this included Ofcom, and this at times affected our ability to recruit people to take part. The sample was also inevitably self-selecting, so it is possible that those with more extreme views would have been reluctant to speak to researchers. We cannot know who we were not able to include in the research and the findings set out here should be considered in this context.

The qualitative approach used for this project enables us to hear in detail from those who are engaging with and experiencing content in manosphere spaces and understand the particular personal circumstances that shape those experiences. Participants describe their journeys, attitudes, and experiences of engaging with such content, however this is not a longitudinal study and cannot evaluate the potential long-term effects of repeated exposure to manosphere content and how it may affect views and attitudes about women and gender dynamics.

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[1] The 'manosphere' is described by Collins Dictionary as *"A loose agglomeration of blogs, websites and forums dedicated to men's issues"*.

[2] Using the dictionary definition, misogyny refers to the feelings of, or beliefs in, the hatred of women,

[3] Subject to the [Protection of Children] Codes completing the Parliamentary process, from 25 July 2025, [providers] will need to take the safety measures set out in those Codes or use other effective measures to protect child users from content that is harmful to them.

Note: Some of the quotes in this report represent views and include language which some might consider offensive and/or derogatory towards women and/or other groups. Additionally, the report discusses some harmful practices that were mentioned by participants. References made by participants to academic research, or terminology used in quotes, may be inaccurate or taken out of context. The report names a range of public figures and organisations that were mentioned by participants, who hold a wide range of views. Any views shared in this report are the views of participants and not of Revealing Reality or Ofcom.

Background and context

With growing concern over the potential for online communities to promote misogyny, Ofcom commissioned this research to explore how people come to engage with the manosphere, what role it plays in their lives, and how it might affect their views and behaviour.

Introduction

This report presents the findings from research exploring people's experiences of content associated with the online manosphere.

What is the manosphere?

A loose agglomeration of blogs, websites & forums dedicated to men's issues (Collins Dictionary)

Much of the wider literature considers the presence of misogynistic content online and the promotion of misogyny[4] in online communities.[5]

This project was commissioned by Ofcom to understand the first-hand experiences of people engaging with the online manosphere, their journeys into it, their views and reflections on it, including if and how they think harm may occur as a result.

The specific research objectives for this project were to:

- Understand user journeys towards enabling online misogyny, for example what factors explain why people come to engage with these online communities
- Understand the ways in which media literacy impacts online misogyny, for example what factors shape differences between online and offline behaviours and attitudes
- Understand potential harm, and as a result where media literacy interventions may be effective

The methodology section below sets out our rationale for a broader focus on manosphere content.

[4] Please see the second footnote, above.

[5] Studies include: "It's really easy to go down that path": Young people's experiences of online misogyny and image-based abuse. Internet Matters ; Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation: Recommended measures for platforms to assess and mitigate online gender-based violence. Institute for Strategic Dialogue ; SAFER SCROLLING How algorithms popularise and gamify online hate and misogyny for young people. UCL and University of Kent ; Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation: Recommended measures for platforms to assess and mitigate online gender-based violence. Institute for Strategic Dialogue ; The 'Manosphere'. Institute for Strategic Dialogue ; Algorithms as a weapon against women. ISD, Reset Australia

Methodology

Revealing Reality began with a scoping phase, designing a methodology based on wider available literature and exploration of content across the manosphere.

Building on the existing literature:

The team reviewed a number of the available reports and studies on the online manosphere and issue of online misogyny. This was not a systematic literature review, so this did not cover the full extent of available studies.

A small number of studies captured testimony from individuals who have consumed online content from across the manosphere. Others used different methodologies to explore the existence and proliferation of online content, offering explanations of the different communities found within the manosphere, and in some cases evidence for how platforms can facilitate journeys of engaging with this content through algorithmic recommendations.

Some studies included in the scoping phase[6] categorised a wide array of online content as harmful or misogynistic, including discussions of masculinity, self-improvement, or critiques of specific feminist arguments. Some reports equated exposure to any content from influencers who have produced misogynistic content with exposure to misogynistic content or ideas.[7] The content review that the researchers undertook and the subsequent interviews with those who engaged with manosphere content provides further context about the extent to which exposure to specific pieces or types of content may contribute to or normalise online misogyny.

Exploring the online manosphere and online misogyny:

The research team spent time exploring publicly available online communities and topics reported by the literature to form the online manosphere and to contain online misogyny. This included the 'red pill' and 'black pill', incels, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), Pick-up Artists (PUAs), 'Looksmaxxing', as well as topics surrounding self-improvement, masculinity and gender politics.[8]

Further to this, researchers explored content produced by specific influencers and public figures frequently referenced in literature on online misogyny.

Across this phase, researchers encountered some examples that, while not judged against specific criteria - as literature reviewed in the scoping phase did not provide a clear system of categorisation - met a dictionary definition of misogyny[9] and were promoting misogynistic ideas, some examples include:

- Written posts explicitly condoning sexual violence against women, or harassment, found in dedicated Incel forums.
- Written posts explicitly calling for violence against women and using dehumanising language found on MGTOW forums.
- Videos justifying violence against women on religious grounds found on Video Sharing Platforms.

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[6] Studies include: "It's really easy to go down that path": Young people's experiences of online misogyny and image-based abuse. Internet Matters ; Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation: Recommended measures for platforms to assess and mitigate online gender-based violence. Institute for Strategic Dialogue ; SAFER SCROLLING How algorithms popularise and gamify online hate and misogyny for young people. UCL and University of Kent ; Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation: Recommended measures for platforms to assess and mitigate online gender-based violence. Institute for Strategic Dialogue ; The 'Manosphere'. Institute for Strategic Dialogue ; Algorithms as a weapon against women. ISD, Reset Australia

[7] "It's really easy to go down that path": Young people's experiences of online misogyny and image-based abuse. Internet Matters.

[8] Definitions of these content types and communities are provided below under the heading: Manosphere communities, genres and topics

[9] Using the dictionary definition, misogyny refers to the feelings of, or beliefs in, the hatred of women,

Other examples reviewed were more challenging to assess, given ambiguity as to whether they were promoting misogynistic ideas:

- Social media posts promoting traditional or conservative gender roles on the grounds of religion.
- Debates and discussions on YouTube and Rumble that included insults or 'call outs' but based on a specific woman's behaviour or beliefs rather than women as a group.
- Self-improvement advice across social media directed at men with the goal of improving their romantic or sexual success with women, based on assumptions about women's nature and their romantic and sexual preferences.
- Discussions of immutable differences between men and women but without asserting the dominance or superiority of one over the other.
- Critiques of specific feminist arguments, or social issues (e.g., circumcision, abortion).

Learnings from the scoping phase:

- Classifying content from within the manosphere as misogynistic or otherwise is challenging and relies on careful interpretation of cultural context, language and intent.
- Clear examples of misogynistic content can be found within specific areas of the online manosphere.
- However, a wide range of content reported by literature to originate within the manosphere does not appear at face value to contain misogyny or promote misogynistic ideas.

With these learnings in mind, the team designed an approach to explore Ofcom's research objectives by:

- Recruiting a sample of 40 people who had engaged to varying degrees with the online manosphere, from passive exposure through to active engagement and content creation – this included within specific named online communities and regularly referenced content creators as described in wider literature.
- While we interviewed 40, one participant chose to withdraw from the research after the interview, meaning there are 39 interviews presented in this research.
- Exploring, through in-depth interviews, these individuals' online experiences, journeys into engaging with manosphere content, views and attitudes towards it including their critical thinking and media literacy applied to it. Researchers also explored their underlying views and attitudes towards topics raised, including women, feminism, gender politics, dating, etc.
- Analysing examples of content raised during interviews or subsequently shared by participants, as well as further exploration of the online communities and content creators mentioned by interview participants.

Methodological detail:

Interviews were conducted online via remote video-call or in a minority of cases, voice-only calls where participants were concerned about disclosing their identity by showing their face. The vast majority of the sample were male – of the 39 participants, only one was a woman. Most interviews were conducted by male researchers, except for the single interview with a woman and a small number of early interviews with men. After an early review point, it was decided that all interviews with men would be conducted by male researchers, as the research team were concerned that participants may be withholding some details for fear of presumed judgement by a female researcher.

The participants were recruited through a wide range of routes – primarily via social media through online promotion of invitations to take part, proactive engagement with specific communities in the public domain (e.g., posting adverts within threads, forums and groups), promotion or snowballing[10] from members within said groups. A smaller subsection of participants was also recruited through research recruitment partners.

Recruitment for this project was particularly challenging, not least given an evident lack of trust in organisations that potential participants considered to be 'mainstream' - for some, this included Ofcom. Several potential participants assumed any resulting research report would misrepresent their views. While the research team made great efforts to build trust with potential sample and were able to interview many

[10] 'Snowballing' is a recruitment method whereby researchers used existing contacts to connect with new recruitment leads.

initially cautious individuals, there will be some views that are not represented in this research due to these challenges.

In this report, identifiable information has been removed and pseudonyms used to protect participants' identities.

Manosphere communities, genres and topics

Red Pill discourse	Discourse centred around variations on the 'red pill' ideas. Drawing on the film The Matrix – 'taking the red pill' refers to the process of 'awakening' to the 'reality' of relations between men and women – for example differing priorities in dating or signals of attractiveness. Under this paradigm, 'taking the blue pill' refers to opting to continue living in comfortable ignorance or denial of these 'real-world' dynamics.
Incels and 'Black Pill' ideas	Communities of men online who feel unable to find a romantic or sexual partner ('involuntarily celibate'), sometimes leading to feelings of deep frustration and resentment of both women and men who have greater romantic success. The "Black Pill" represents a nihilistic outlook, with adherents believing that their lack of success with women is due to unchangeable factors like physical appearance.
Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)	Communities of men online advocating for men to completely disengage from relationships with women and focus on their own self-interest. MGTOW adherents believe that biases in modern society leave men vulnerable to exploitation in relationships with women.
Men's Rights Activists (MRA)	An online movement and associated communities who advocate for men's rights in areas like family law, custody rights, and domestic abuse and violence, and believe that men are victims of prejudice and discrimination in society.
Pick-up Artists (PUA)	Online communities and content which focuses on teaching men techniques and strategies to improve their success in attracting and seducing women. PUA culture often emphasises social skills, body language and psychological insights to achieve romantic and sexual success.
Looksmaxxing	An online subculture of primarily men, dedicated to improving one's physical appearance through various methods, including exercise, diet, grooming, and cosmetic procedures.
Topics of self-improvement, masculinity and gender politics	A broad range of content encompassing discussions about various aspects of being a man in the modern world, often on topics like personal development, traditional gender roles, challenges faced by men, and the changing dynamics between men and women.

Who engages with the manosphere

Researchers interviewed people who both consume and create content across the manosphere.

Their views varied on politics, culture and dynamics between men and women. While there was a range of views across the sample, many had strong personal relationships with women.

Breakdown of who was interviewed

Revealing Reality interviewed 39 individuals with experience of seeing or creating content across the manosphere

The research included a range of people aged 16 to 50s. Out of a total sample of 40, 39 were male and one was female. One man then withdrew from the research.

Individuals with experience of all the above-named genres and communities were represented in the sample. The sample covered people who engaged with online content from across the manosphere in different capacities – from very passive skimming while scrolling their social media feeds, to more active participation in forums or communities, to active content creation.

The sample included people from a range of demographics and backgrounds. Researchers spoke with people who were affluent and/or middle-class, to those who were much more financially vulnerable. Many were living stable lives, in employment, with strong relationships and networks – a smaller number were facing more challenging circumstances including chaotic living situations, family breakdown, mental health conditions, addiction and insecure housing/homelessness.

The sample included people who sit across the political spectrum in terms of their views and personal politics, both in terms of voting and on a range of specific issues.

To explore the extent to which online content influenced people in the sample, sections of the discussion were dedicated to understanding their personal views, attitudes, and behaviours. This section briefly summarises what the sample had in common, and where they differed, in this respect.

Views and values of those interviewed

Researchers explored the underlying views, attitudes and values of participants to understand any potential impact of online content

Views on social issues, justice and equality

Many of the participants expressed a strong commitment to equal treatment and fairness. They showed particular sensitivity to situations they perceived as unjust or discriminatory. This extended to issues specifically concerning men.

> *"From what I'm coming across…but also what I experienced […] people are reporting domestic abuse to the police or family courts and they are just dismissed routinely, routinely ignored… [they're] not bothered about it.*
>
> *We've had it where…incidents in family where men are showing…video evidence. It's not he said, she said. We're talking undeniable proof of abuse…and the judge is ignoring it. If it was a man doing it to a woman, he would not be seeing those kids for years, if at all. And rightly so, by the way. Let me just make it clear. I'm against all forms of abuse."*
>
> **Richard**[11]

Many of them viewed contemporary social justice movements and identity-based politics, often described as 'woke' politics, as working against true equality, believing these approaches created new forms of unfairness, censorship and harm.

> *"Affirmative action is not about getting women equal jobs anyway. It ends up getting women more jobs than men. So it's economic violence against men, in my opinion. And it socially damages men. Unemployed men are socially damaged."*
>
> **Andy, 40s**

> *"I think a world where you have equal outcomes would not work in the slightest. Whereas everybody should have the same opportunities, yes. But like, a company should not be forced to go like 50:50 male to female, or should not be forced to have to like hit certain DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] quotas and stuff."*
>
> **Nathan, 30s**

Views on speech and online discourse

Most participants reported that they enjoyed and were in favour of open debate and discourse. Many emphasised the importance of protecting freedom of expression, even when confronted with challenging or opposing perspectives. They reported consistently preferring what they perceived as factual, evidence-based discussions over emotional arguments. Many participants expressed concerns about perceived restrictions on

[11] Age range omitted.

speech and opposed what they viewed as 'cancel culture' reactions against controversial opinions. Many specifically said they appreciated encountering viewpoints different to their own. Many participants rejected the idea that if a public figure or content creator said something that they considered wrong or harmful, that they should therefore refuse to engage with anything else that the individual said on any other topic – citing this as an example of 'cancel culture'.

"I don't mind being challenged, if it's intelligent. I've got no issue if it's intelligently based, then you know, I've had people online change my opinion about something. I'm happy to. If you can change my mind, great."

Anton, 40s

"I'm very anti-censorship, and as soon as the government start saying what you can and can't see on social media, I think that's the wrong direction to go in"

Nathan, 30s

"I think I'm more open. I prefer…free speech. That's why I like platforms like [image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images] in terms of places where you can say what you actually think without being reprimanded for it. You know, you see people who have been arrested for what they've said online."

Daniel, 20s

"I like the topics he [Piers Morgan] comes up with on his show and the guests he brings on because they talk about controversial subjects in society, which I always like because I always think one thing that really does annoy me about modern society is trying to eradicate freedom of speech. They all have that idea that free speech should be allowed, whether it's going for or against the norm."

Toyin, 30s

Views on society

Across much of the sample there was a reported low level of trust in mainstream institutions, government and media. Many felt these to be 'captured' by what they described as progressive politics, further contributing to a censorious 'cancel culture'. For a minority, these feelings were underpinned by a deeper suspicion of what they considered to be suppression of speech and furthering of a politics not aligned with mainstream UK views.

"We don't even have normal TV anymore. I would never believe anything. I think the news tells you what they want you to believe and what they want you to hear"

Jack, 16-19

"I think that more traditional media sources, like if you're reading the news or watching the news, it does feel like: 'here's the message we want to send to people and then we've built a supporting story around it. We've gravitated towards it to make that narrative'."

Matt, 30s

"Yeh I'm definitely losing trust in mainstream media, you know, not necessarily thinking they're telling us the truth or the facts. […] I think there's maybe an agenda there sometimes to share news that maybe benefits organisations or, you know, things like that, rather than us."

Callum, 30s

"At the end of the day, the whole family court and divorce court system needs to change. […] Why do we have to have a double standard here?"

Martin, 40s

Views on women

Most of the men we spoke to reported positive views of women. Most mentioned that they had women in their lives – both personal and professional - that they loved and respected. Most, in line with their stated commitment to equal treatment and fairness, emphasised that women should be able to exercise individual choice in their lives. This applied to men who had a preference for a more traditional family set up. Most were also keen to articulate that both men, and some women, can behave and have behaved badly, and that broad brush conclusions cannot be drawn from the behaviour of individuals.

Socially conservative views:

Some held more **traditional values** and had views that conservative gender roles held some value in society. Several expressed a view that natural differences between men and women make them, on average, suited to different roles.

"I think a man's always been seen as the breadwinner in the house and the one who earns more.

And the woman historically has been seen as the housewife who looks after the kids... I think both people are of equal value and matter equally in the relationship.

The relationship doesn't work without one or the other."

Gary, 30s

"As a man, my job is to be able to provide...I need to think about how I can provide security and a lifestyle above and beyond how I can provide enjoyment and fulfilment to myself in my career.

I want to provide an environment where my partner doesn't have to make that economic consideration first, they can choose to do something that they find more fulfilling."

Matt, 30s

Among those who expressed more conservative views on gender roles, the majority were keen to caveat that they felt people should be free to choose not to conform to these roles. However, they often felt that what they viewed as progressive society had tried to counteract or undermine these norms, to the detriment of both men and women.

"The Right seem to be more on that path of embedding those old sort of values that society used to have. And obviously modern society has changed now where you've got 250 different genders now. […] For me it's just gone so extreme. I've got no issues with people being what they want to be. […] I've always been a kind of, believe in what you want to believe. As long as you're not harming anyone, it really doesn't bother me. For me, it's just the force-feeding of the message. It's like, 'you are going to believe in our ideologies whether you like it or not.' And I just saw that as an extreme. […] And also, I found that they were neglecting men quite a lot, especially young men."

Toyin, 30s

"Do I think that women shouldn't do certain things? No. But I don't think men and women were made to do everything. Men are certainly better at some things. […] I believe we do have masculine roles and feminine roles. I'm not saying that women can't do those things. But the women who want to be feminine…often don't feel like they can be fully feminine because they've got to try and do the blue jobs[12] as well."

Kelly, 40s

Views on societal expectations of men and women:

Some in the sample felt that society tends to **underplay disadvantages faced by men** when compared to those faced by women. Many pointed to areas of life where they felt women face advantages, while acknowledging there were many other areas where they thought the reverse is true.

"I did research recently and found out 93% of people polled in the UK don't know that men are behind in university and they've been behind for 30 years. And I'm like, why do they not know? It has to be at least partly feminists' fault for not advocating for men and boys."

Joel[13]

"I personally believe that women are actually socially dominant over men and men are actually submissive to women [...] Women control the family unit.

"Women have more legal rights than men and social rights than men"

Andy, 40s

Some participants felt there were **double standards** in society applied to men and women in many areas of life. For example, some felt that feminist rhetoric online was often given greater leniency by the mainstream media, and that more should be done to hold women to the same standard as men. Most of these individuals also mentioned areas where they felt the opposite was true, where unfair standards or discrimination was applied to women.

"So, the mainstream media, they go on and on about angry young men. What they don't talk about is why they're angry. Yeah, they never talk about that bit. And the reason, if they do, the most they'll say is because men haven't learned to cry enough.

[12] 'Blue jobs' or 'blue collar jobs' traditionally refer to manual labour, often in manufacturing or construction

[13] We do not have this participants' age, but he was over 18.

But what people don't realise is that when a man cries, usually that's used against him. So, we've [on MRA forums] had a bunch of stories from men where they opened up to their girlfriend after immense prodding about their emotional problems and how they were raped and stuff like that.

Woman instantly goes off them. Women instantly friend zones them. So, opening up to women, especially for men, is extremely risky unless that woman is a really good friend and they trust them implicitly and they know how they're going to react."

Tim, 30s

"So, any criticism of female behaviour, somebody somewhere will try and say that's misogyny. Let's say, for example, calling out women who make false allegations. To me, that's not misogyny. But some will say it is. And this is where we've got to be careful. Now, if a woman was calling out men who don't pay child support, is that misandry? No, it's not, is it? So, this is the double standards we've got."

Richard

"[On misogyny] I believe it exists, but I think the goalposts move all the time. Like when they talk about the gender pay gap. I personally didn't see it working in the corporate world, not saying it doesn't happen though.

And then, they want to be equal to be like men, but for what, because when I go on a date, I still got to pay. So, you're now getting paid the same or more, so what am I paying for? Why won't you pay? It's like, they fought to get the same rights as men. That's fine, but I still have to do everything anyway."

Kahleel, 30s

While a small minority of cases, there were examples of participants applying double standards the other way. One participant, when discussing how he thinks about 'body count' (how many sexual partners a prospective partner has previously had), said the following:

"I'm gonna be entirely real with you when it comes to men and women. Let's say I was to hear a guy's body count[14] and it was like, oh, 50 plus. I'd still be like, wow, that's insane [in a negative way] ... If I was to hear a woman say the same thing, I'd be like, ***wow, that's insane,*** *bro. It's like two different realms. Disgusting is definitely not the right term [...] but more towards the disgust side."*

Julius, 20s

It is worth noting that Julius reiterated that he would also react negatively if he knew that men had a lot of sexual partners. He was also aware that the opinion he expressed was a double standard.

[14] The term 'body count' refers to the number of sexual partners someone has had.

What makes up the manosphere

While often defined as a network of communities, the manosphere, as experienced by participants of this research, appeared more to encompass a wide range of topics, genres, content creators and in some cases more defined communities, often with conflicting or contradictory views.

What is the manosphere

Most of the sample consumed content from the manosphere as described by wider literature, but most felt this was an unhelpful and misunderstood label

The majority of the content analysed during this project originated in some way within the manosphere as described by the wider literature, e.g., originating from a sub-community or content creator associated with the manosphere.

The manosphere as a term emerged to describe a loose collection of online communities, forums, blogs, trends and influencers revolving around topics of masculinity, relationships and dating, gender politics and self-improvement. Some wider literature argues that this online ecosystem is inherently misogynistic.[15]

This report suggests the manosphere is far from a unified community, network or ideology, but a fragmented array of online subcultures, with often conflicting perspectives. Content and views found within these communities range from mainstream (e.g., men should work on their mental health so they can be a good partner or husband, a view commonly found in self-improvement spaces) to the extreme (e.g., women are inherently mentally inferior to men, a view observed in some instances on Incel forums).

Many of the participants who had heard the term manosphere thought it was frequently misapplied or used so often as to mean very little. Many participants were incredulous about the links made between some content creators and the manosphere in the press or popular culture, especially where implicit assumptions were made that the manosphere was inherently misogynistic. For example, some felt that any personalities expressing strongly masculine traits, or who held counter-cultural political ideas, were often labelled as part of the manosphere and therefore associated with misogynistic ideas.

> *"If you're seen as ultra masculine, then you're getting lumped into the manosphere… I truly don't know why David Goggins is in there"*
>
> **Julius, 20s**

> *"They try and lump the far right into the manosphere… I mean most of the MRA's are actually centrists or left wing or lean slightly right."*
>
> **Tim, 30s**

[15] Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation: Recommended measures for platforms to assess and mitigate online gender-based violence. Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

The 'red pill' was a phrase referenced frequently across the manosphere and by participants in this research

A theme that runs through much of the manosphere is that of the 'red pill'. But what is the red pill?

Taking the 'red pill'

A symbol for (harsh) reality, particularly if you choose to embrace it (Collins Dictionary)

Drawing on the film The Matrix – 'taking the red pill' refers to the process of 'awakening' to the 'reality' of relations between men and women. Under this paradigm, 'taking the blue pill' refers to opting to continue living in comfortable ignorance or denial of these 'real-world' dynamics.

If you're blue pilled, you're living in the construct, a fake constructed sort of world of how they want you to see it.

When you take the red pill, you see it for how it actually is. For me it's about seeing how men and women actually are, about mating strategies and relationships"

Richard

Several participants reported reading what they felt to be credible academic research that aligns with some of the broader claims within the red pill concept. This included studies into sex differences and preferences within the field of evolutionary psychology; research conducted on how dating sites are used; studies about physical attractiveness in relation to dating opportunities; differences in how people generally apportion sympathy across the sexes, and more.

These specific dynamics between men and women include concepts like 'hypergamy' – defined as *marriage [or forming relationships] with a person of a higher social class or position* – Collins Dictionary.

"*I'd say the underlying theory is that women are naturally hypergamous. So, they'll naturally go out and seek a better man. And if there's an option to go for someone who is better than the current offering that they have, they will go out and take it"*

Julius, 20s

"Ideas like hypergamy, which is essentially men and women selecting for different criteria in partners.

Where women tend to select across and up the social hierarchy and men tending to date across and down the social hierarchy"

Sebastian, 30s

Other ideas commonly referenced as part of the 'red pill' are that men and women have differing goals on average when it comes to dating and relationships. Often discussed is the idea that women are more selective in dating, whereas men have less of a motive to be so. Under this paradigm, men and women are both said to navigate relationships strategically, maximising their respective goals. This is used to explain the reported phenomenon whereby some perceived 'lower status' men have very few options for dating.

"I think like as men we are definitely more visual creatures compared to women.

Most men essentially don't care what a woman does in terms of her career, whereas a lot of women definitely care what a man does and his financial status"

Toyin, 30s

Others talked about other issues about which you could be 'red pilled', i.e., awakened to 'truth' about.

"Red pill isn't one thing. Every countercultural movement now uses the word red pill."

Tim, 30s

Several mentioned the so called 'empathy gap' wherein society tends to offer greater sympathy, protection and care towards women and girls than men and boys. Examples cited were conscription and military service and the historically more disposable attitude displayed towards men than women or the instinct to save or protect female victims over male in a disaster or accident.

"And men get, like, a lot less, like, lot less empathy than women do. They get a lot less help. So, if you think about it like this, if you've got a car that's on fire and there's a man in one side of the car, woman in the other, you're standing, like, right in front of the bonnet, which one are you going to try and save first?"

Tim, 30s

Others mentioned the perceived differing societal reactions to discussions of female versus male victims of domestic abuse or sexual assault.

"So, let's say you're a male domestic abuse victim. A lot of the time your friends aren't going to take you particularly seriously. Society isn't going to take you particularly seriously. Women are not going to take you particularly seriously. That's one thing that people miss out on.

[…] They're not going to take you seriously because both genders are set up to think of men as being able to keep being strong and capable of getting out of these situations. So, if you can't get out of this situation, what kind of man are you?"

Joel

One issue that was mentioned by a number of participants in relation to this was male circumcision. Several participants felt this was a harmful practice routinely underplayed or ignored by wider society, and while no one equated it directly with the harm done by FGM (female genital mutilation)[16], they felt it was a cultural double standard to condemn one but ignore the other.

"The number of people I've had very, very caustic arguments with because they see as their basic right to cut their child, and I shouldn't judge them for it. Yeah. Okay. You know, you just… we don't harm children like that. Really. It's absolutely... It's disgusting. We wouldn't do it to baby girls."

Martin, 40s

Disagreement about what to conclude from the 'red pill'

While most bought into the 'red pill', many participants disliked the conclusions drawn by others also considered to be part of the manosphere. Different communities, while referencing similar 'red pill' moments of realisation, often adamantly disagreed with or contradicted each other. These varied conclusions and perspectives meant that men across the sample often expressed dismay at what other communities within the manosphere said.

[16] FGM is a procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed, but there's no medical reason for this to be done.

Those in the sample who affiliated more with the Incel communities were extremely negative about figures like Andrew Tate (10.8 million followers on X[17]) – who they saw as cynically capitalising on the structural dynamics that advantaged him but disadvantaged them (e.g., physical attributes and wealth). Others who described being 'red pilled' about relatively mainstream ideas like hypergamy expressed disgust at what they saw as the outrightly misogynistic discourse expressed by others:

"There's being red pill, which is what I am. I'm aware of the state of things and I want to make changes to them.

And there's red pill, which is the whole pickup artistry, 'women are scum, just use them, pump and dump', you know, you're no good if you're over the age of 21, you've got 300 bodies [people you've slept with] and all that kind of crap."

Martin, 40s

"There's a bit of tension because the men's rights activists who are doing serious work in political advocacy, they don't want to be compared to these nitwits on TikTok."

Joel

[17] Twitter officially rebranded to X in July 2023. "Twitter" is used in this report if participants used the name, or if the reference refers to activity prior to the rebrand.

What attracts people to manosphere content

Most participants found narratives about self-improvement and personal agency appealing in manosphere content, as well as a perceived culture of irreverence and humour, open debate and discussion.

For many, specific ideas were appealing where they resonated with personal experiences or beliefs.

The appeal of general manosphere content

Most of those interviewed saw a wide range of manosphere content but didn't identify strongly with specific communities or subcultures

Enjoying discussion and debate

Much of the content that people in the sample enjoyed took the format of discussion and debate. Much of this was longer-form media, such as YouTube videos and podcasts, often upwards of two hours long. Others were shorter form, for example videos on TikTok, Facebook or X – although often these were clips taken from longer form videos hosted elsewhere. Formats such as one-to-one interviews, round table discussions or debates were commonly featured.

Humour, and chemistry between the content creators was cited by many across the sample to be key to why they enjoyed them. Participants often said that they liked the fact that conversations seemed relatively unstructured and informal.

Another comment made by many across the sample was the appeal of people willing to have a discussion about a wide range of topics, including many that some might consider controversial. Participants said that they liked the idea that no topic was off the table, and that open conversations might involve people who disagree or who come to differing conclusions.

> *"Even if I don't agree with something, I will watch the whole thing. Even if it's something that's way off the mark. I might cringe a bit and be like [cringing sound], but I'll…watch the rest of it"*
>
> **Bradley, 30s**

Overall, perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of general manosphere content or influencers participants engaged with were men. Mainstream examples were mentioned including Piers Morgan, but the name that emerged most was Joe Rogan (19.5 million subscribers on YouTube), an American podcaster.

> *"I listen to people like Joe Rogan, like I mentioned. I think it's informative. I think he's down to earth. And obviously he has these long-form discussions. […] There's always a guest he gets on that I'm curious about."*
>
> **Callum, 30s**

> *"I like Joe Rogan, I think his podcasts are quite interesting, I find him quite funny. He did one with the guy from Top Gear on Freddie Flintoff's crash, I thought that was quite interesting. He had one with Elon Musk which was quite good as well. He's done a few with like American politicians and stuff. He's had a few fighters on there. I think that's probably why I like him because it's quite random and he comes out with quite a lot of different content."*
>
> **Chris, 20s**

"I like that when he talks to people, it seems authentic and there's a genuine interest. Like when he has people on there, it's not 'I need to convince people of this thing'. It's, 'I'm a person who is genuinely interested in this, and I want to sit down and have a conversation and pull these things out."

Matt, 30s

Joe Rogan's podcasts often extend to three hours or more, and many people in the sample enjoyed listening in the background, for example while driving or working. He was described as relatable by many people across the sample. Participants said they appreciated that the long-form format meant they felt topics could be discussed from a range of angles, and they liked what they perceived as a willingness on Rogan's part to challenge interviewees, to change his mind, and for both parties to walk away not agreeing with one another.

Participants claimed that there were few taboos, that Joe Rogan and interviewees seem to be genuinely open with one another, and that there were moments of irreverence and dark humour, which also appealed to them. They also reported liking the variety of guests. They appreciated the opportunity to hear from people who they thought might not be platformed elsewhere, whether or not they agreed with that they said or liked them as people.

Some participants were aware that Joe Rogan was considered problematic by some. They mostly attributed this to critics not having actually engaged with Rogan's content themselves, or the fact that he had interviewed people sometimes considered controversial.

"I just like the fact that…he's just a bloke. You can kind of identify with him as a man…He's kind of relatable..[…] It's the same BS that you hear for everyone. Every time there's a man who comes across with a reasonably sensible, positive message for young lads, they just get cut down."

Martin, 40s

Other debate format shows and podcasts were mentioned by a smaller number of participants, that had less universal appeal. Shows like **Fresh and Fit,** the **Whatever Podcast** and content creators like **Sneako** and other similar shows were mentioned by a small number of participants. In these videos, two or more hosts typically interview a range of guests, often women, about topics relating to dating, relationships, gender dynamics and gender differences.

A few participants mentioned that they felt these shows sometimes made good points or tackled subjects that were considered taboo elsewhere, but they were far more sceptical and dismissive over other aspects of the content. The tone and attitude displayed towards the female guests was cited as being uncomfortable by some. Several felt that this was probably done for 'shock value' to make more money.

"With Fresh and Fit they can make some good points in certain situations, and they'll prove certain points in terms of how certain women think.

But then on the flip side they go to that extreme where it's like… It's almost to the point where they see women as like objects… that they shouldn't have a say.

It's like stuff like that that I just think. Are you just saying that just to get clicks or like do you genuinely believe that?"

Toyin, 30s

"I think they're just grifters…. Because their audiences are very young as well. That's the thing a lot of people don't realise, particularly with people like Sneako, a lot of his audience is kids.

[…] They don't really think about, you know, the lessons and the things that they're putting out there to their audience because they just want to get the viral moments from them because, you know, especially with kids, they see something controversial, they're going to click." **Tyrone, 20s**

"There's a guy, I forgot his name, but he'll interview a panel of women […]

One of the girls said on there, for example, said something like, 'I want to be a housewife and be looked after, but I'm not cooking'. And he was like, 'how can that make sense if you're not going to cook and look after the kids if you want to be a housewife.' She says, 'no, I want you to pay me. And then I can just look after myself and, you know, do my nails and look pretty for you.' But he's like, 'what about everything else in the house', basically.

But yeah, he doesn't put on any women with any depth of intelligence. That's the only problem with these podcasts. I've yet to see a woman that's actually got enough fire back for him to really argue his point. They're just dumb, I'm sorry this is rude, but these ones they get for their particular show, he gets them on just so he can destroy them."

Kahleel, 30s

Narratives of self-improvement and personal agency

Much of the content cited across the manosphere that participants enjoyed related to self-improvement. This ranged from gym and fitness advice to motivational speeches, to more philosophical reflections on what being a 'good man' involves, or what it takes to achieve success.

Many of the participants across the sample resonated with content that they found motivating for self-improvement – both physically and mentally.

"I focus on it a lot. I take very good care of myself. I have skin care routines. I make sure I'm always well groomed. I always dress smart, and I do that for me rather than for anyone else. You know, I love knowing that I'm the best version of what I can be. I focus on that just as much as I do on my fitness, yeah."

Jack, 16-19

"[I read] a bit of everything. So, at the moment I've got a psychology book on the go […] So a bit of everything from evolutionary psychology, finances. Just self-improvement, physically and mentally."

Callum, 30s

"Honestly, as I say you know I want to improve myself in every aspect of my life. And I think it starts with yourself. You know, I think being able to…consistently work on your body and work on your health and everything…it helps you work on other aspects in life like your work ethic and motivation."

Liam, 16-19

Many men across the sample said that they'd found self-improvement content particularly useful and motivating at particular moments in their lives, for example nudging them to start exercising or taking action to improve their career prospects.

Many specific content creators were cited, the most regularly mentioned being David Goggins (12.9 million followers on Instagram), Jordan Peterson (8.64 million subscribers on YouTube), and Andrew Tate (10.8 million followers on X). Participants emphasised how different these individuals were from one another in their tone, messages and perceived underlying motivations and beliefs.

David Goggins, a US based content creator, was mentioned particularly for his inspirational journey from overweight to incredibly fit, ultra endurance athlete. Many people in the sample said they appreciated his tough, no-nonsense persona, informed by his background as a US Navy SEAL.

"What a legend that guy is. He turned himself from a how many hundred pounds, to becoming a machine doing you know, marathons and 200-odd miles in 30-odd hours. […] I think it's really important to keep that positive mindset…and keeping yourself surrounded by positive people. And if you're not surrounded by positive people, then quite often [it's good to] pick-up your phone and watch a podcast on someone like David Goggins"

Kelly, 40s

"He's all about pushing your mentality past your comfort zone because help you achieve more. […] He's very much: 'if you do this you won't suffer with your mental health'."

Bradley, 30s

"I've seen great stuff from him. Like mentally challenging himself, physically as well. I've seen him running, doing pull ups. I've seen him talk about life and about young people, about how they should train. […] I like that he mentally and physically challenges himself. It makes you tougher."

Sal, 16-19

Overall, those who had seen David Goggins' content – which was usually seen either on YouTube in the form of podcast interviews, or from short clips on TikTok and Instagram from podcasts or his endurance challenges – admired him for his discipline, strength and commitment to testing his limits.

Some participants expressed scepticism as to why David Goggins was sometimes associated with the manosphere, other than because of his masculine persona. When questioned about the impact of his content, no one thought that David Goggins was likely to have a negative or 'toxic' influence.

Jordan Peterson was also a commonly mentioned name across the sample, with mostly positive but more mixed views. Jordan Peterson is a Canadian academic and author. Nearly everyone in the sample was familiar with Jordan Peterson as a figure and some of his most commonly discussed topics, although a smaller number were active followers or viewers of his content.

"He's a really divisive character. People either haven't heard of him before, they hate him, or they love him. […]

I got this message from him which was like, 'maybe your life isn't everything it could be, but if you took responsibility and picked yourself up, you could make it better'. That was the message and the takeaway I've got from him."

Matt, 30s

"[When I first came across him] I kind of agreed with him to be fair. Because, you know, he might have different views, but he's still a clinical psychologist who has spent years of his life studying this kind of thing.

And if people are actually willing to sit and listen to what he's actually saying rather than just shouting against his views, then you'll probably get a better understanding of what's actually going on."

Nathan, 30s

Most of the sample were positive about his impact overall, although many mentioned areas where they disagreed with him, for example on topics like religion. Many recognised he was a controversial figure, mostly due to his association with the gender pronouns debate in Canada but did not share those concerns about him and his views. Most saw him as a positive influence overall.

"I've got a couple of his books, I think on Audible. Seen him on podcast as well. I think he's good. But yeah, I know he's controversial as well. He talks a lot about kind of having responsibility for your life [..,] I think his target market is kind of younger men, like, you know, just coming into adulthood and just trying to steer them in the right direction as to what's right and how to become a decent man".

Callum, 30s

A figure mentioned by nearly everyone in the sample was Andrew Tate. Andrew Tate is a personality and former kick-boxer chiefly associated with UK social media, widely cited as a central content creator within the manosphere. It should be noted that his name was one of those asked about in screening, and every participant was also asked about him if they hadn't already brought him up unprompted.

Opinions on Tate were very varied with most participants having both positive and negative reflections on him. The most popular elements of Tate's content related to self-improvement and motivation – with many people across the sample saying they'd seen this content and taken positive messages from it. However most also reflected that they did not like or agree with everything Tate said.

"Me and my friends just saw him as, not necessarily an idol, but someone who should be looked up to because obviously he was a rich man, he was in shape, he had a kickboxing career. He was basically what every young man wanted at the time."

Ollie, 16-19

"With Andrew Tate… it was all about doing health and fitness and things like that and living a kind of rich lifestyle. And the rich part wasn't the bit I was focussed on. But it was almost just a form of like: 'wow look at this guy, he's healthy, wealthy, he respected because of how he's built himself.

As a whole he was saying things like: 'you need to get in shape, you need to do this, stop making excuses…pick-up the pace'. You know, that kind of attitude to life.

[…] I think he's a controversial man who has his opinions"…

Liam, 16-19

"I first saw him on Big Brother. And then it was on TikTok. I can't specifically remember how, but I was engrossed by his stuff. […] I do agree with some of his stuff, not to do with women, but to do with like, men being men, earning your money, and family values."

Bradley, 30s

"A lot of the self-improvement stuff started because of Andrew Tate, because people wanted to live a life like him.

Personally, I'd say he's got the right ideas, but just doesn't have the right…he doesn't say it right.

Obviously, he's more like traditional [views] – man provides for a woman and stuff. […] He pisses people off, calls them bums for not making money, which is kind of true, like, people do need to start making money. But he's kind of going too far and like, trying to piss people off. […] I only realised it recently, but I think it's for like publicity. Because the more controversial he became, the more popular he became."

Ali, 16-19

Alignment with personal religious values

A small proportion of the sample were drawn to content that aligned with their religious values. Several content creators that came up during this research, including Andrew Tate, focussed some or most of their output around their religion. Andrew Tate converted to Islam and often speaks about the values being a Muslim instils in him. Some of his content about the role of family, and men in the family, as well as about discipline and work, revolve around his newfound Muslim faith and identity.

Often the names raised in relation to religious content were ones associated either directly or loosely with the manosphere. Sometimes these creators, like Mohammed Hijab (1.29 million subscribers on YouTube), had previously referenced or appeared in videos with Andrew Tate. Mohammed Hijab is a Muslim YouTuber and author who regularly debates those on his channel, as well as appearing on large channels such as Piers Morgan's 'Uncensored'. He describes his output on his YouTube bio as "Arguing the case for and educating people about Islam."

"I watch like, a Muslim guy. He does the Speaker's Corner, the religious Speaker's Corner. […] He's called Mo Hijab [Mohammed Hijab]. He's quite up there now. Does a few big things on YouTube. He like interviews people. Him and Tommy [Robinson] have got a little beef. He talks about the Jews and the Zionists. […] Also talks about Christianity, and about women. About how women should act in it. A bit like the old misogynistic thing, like they should have freedom, but they should be covered, and they shouldn't be entertaining other men and all that. […] Again, I believe like, down the way, some of it's okay, but some of it is like putting your foot on the neck, do you know what I mean? […] It sounds horrible yeh, but like, a lot of relationships are like, when you argue, and the woman gets battered, if the woman wasn't allowed to argue back with you that wouldn't happen. So, they kind of get that bit right. The woman doesn't confront, or doesn't argue back with you, because they're going to get a slap. But I don't think that the slap bit is right. […] I don't think the hitting each other is right, but I think how they are getting women to act is."

Alex, 40s

Other participants spoke about content or influencers that resonated with them because they propounded traditional, religious values – whether that be Islamic or Christian within this sample – particularly around family values and men and women's roles.

"I chose Christianity [...] because I felt like it resonated with me the most. […] Because my upbringing was very traditional and you could link into religion in a certain way and for me it's a good way of living. […] And I guess my opinion [on men and women's roles] is like…men are the breadwinner and women are the nurturers. […] I mean, they [traditional gender roles] haven't just made themselves up, you know. There have always been gender roles. And you know, I'd like to think that through religion, there's a better culture, there's a better system."

Kaleb, 20s

Kaleb, 20s, engages with people like Nick Fuentes (561.3k followers on X) – described by Wikipedia as an American far-right political pundit, activist, and live streamer - and Jon Zherka (158k subscribers on YouTube) - a self-styled controversial comedian and streamer. Amongst other things, Kaleb likes that when these creators talk about masculinity and gender roles, they are encapsulating the Christian values he holds.

"[Nick Fuentes is] a very smart person when he speaks. It's refreshing because normally what you see nowadays online is just random, just consumerism, just talking about stuff that honestly, you'll forget about after 15 seconds. […] He also talks about what's correct and what's incorrect, Bible wise. He's very misunderstood in today's age. […] When you gain that level of popularity people will take anything out of context and twist it in a way to make you seem like a horrible person."

Kaleb, 20s

Niko, 16-19, considers himself as part of a religious community online. He is part of Discord servers where *"like-minded"* people *"discuss…different topics together."* Niko engages with influencers such as J Dyer (159k

subscribers on YouTube) and Orthodox Kyle (65k subscribers on YouTube) on YouTube. He enjoys their in-depth discussions about religion and its role in the modern world.

"For J Dyer, it's more in-depth study, he uses lots of words that I couldn't really understand what he meant when I started watching his channel. While for Orthodox Kyle…so he kind of does the same thing [as another influencer who talks from a Presbyterian perspective], but from an Orthodox perspective. […] I also like watching Speaker's Corner…like religious debates live from there as well."

Niko, 16-19

Niko enjoys discussions about the best ways to live from a religious perspective, including the roles of men and women in society.

"I would say [a woman's role] is to support the family. I would say the family plays an important role, but I wouldn't limit it to just the family. I would say women can also have important roles in society. Like…teachers. […] I would say midwives, I would say they are very important…And other roles as well. I would just say that some roles like fire fighters, policemen, miners, I would say they're more suited towards men than women.

"I would say I'm against the Andrew Tate perspective, where it's like just submissive women and just crazy dominant men. I'd say that's not really the Christian way to view things. I would say it's more of a balance…where we are in value, equal, but we still have different roles, but this doesn't mean one is better than the other."

Niko, 16-19

Many of the influencers and much of the content researchers were signposted to by participants had significant crossover with much of the manosphere content found within other genres explored in this report, such as the self-improvement content seen across much of the sample.

Alignment with socially conservative or traditional values

Many within the sample resonated with content or influencers espousing a more socially conservative message. Often this content covered themes about traditional family dynamics, and men's and women's role in society in a way they resonated with. This kind of content was found across several of the different groups described within the manosphere.

Typically, this was characterised by conversation about men's and women's role in the society, the home, and the job market – and what lay behind these ideas. Several influencers mentioned above in relation to self-improvement content discussed these things. Many spoke, for example, about how gender roles functioned in their parents' or grandparents' time.

"It's a bit of a sticky one. That the women and stuff [should] act right. And that that's how women should be. They should be at home and be catering for your kids and doing what the women did in Britian in the 70s. […] Do you know what I mean? Without trying to sound weird and misogynistic. And it's like the women of my nana's era, she just wanted to make my grandad happy. She just wanted to put food on the table. She wanted to make sure that when he went out, he come back with some dough…Just living that, that equal lifestyle."

Alex, 40s

"They can take things too far. Do I think that women shouldn't do certain things? No. But I don't think men and women were made to do everything. Men are certainly better at some things. Andrew Tate – you can listen to him, he'll go 'men built the roads and the buildings.' They did, they do. If you look at the construction industry, how many women are in construction? And there's a reason for that. We're not built to be lugging bricks…I believe we do have masculine roles and feminine roles. […] Tate goes too far. You know, you can't go out without seeing your man, or

men cracking onto you is rude, you shouldn't put yourself in these positions, and all that. That's too far in my mind. […] Jordan Peterson puts it in such an eloquent way about masculinity and femininity, you know, and I think there's a lot of people who feel that way. The older generation certainly talk more about, sort of, what roles were theirs. You look back at my grandma and grandad. My grandad used to come home with the pay cheque, give it to my grandma, and she ran the house with it."

Kelly, 40s

"So like, I would say I'm quite a traditional man, like, in terms of an old school traditional man. Like, my wife works on my business. I'd prefer her to be at home with my children. Obviously, in my opinion, my wife is the best person to raise my children up. We've built a relationship together. So obviously I must think that she's the best person to raise children. […] When you speak to some people in my workspace, some of my clients that are really professional women, you know, they've climbed the career ladder. They find it quite shocking that that's my setup and assumed I've forced it in some capacity. So, I think the problem with the Andrew Tate content is he's saying, I think women should stay at home and look after the children. I think so too, but I don't think it's a forced issue. I think that it's the best setup for us…What you do in your house is up to you. I don't care. But that is what works for us."

Jay, 30s

Some of those interviewed were more closely affiliated with specific manosphere identities or genres

Men's Rights Activists (MRA)

Within the sample, five men interviewed were actively engaged in Men's Rights Activism (MRA) online. Three were active content creators, running dedicated campaigning pages or networks and sharing content. Another moderated a group on a forum, reviewing contributions and blocking spam. One more loosely contributed to online debates on various Reddit threads dedicated to Men's Rights objectives.

A number of other individuals across the sample had come across content produced by self-proclaimed MRAs, but none actively followed or saw large quantities of this genre.

MRA content and messages

The content creators, given their goals to campaign and raise awareness for men's rights topics, generally shared content publicly on platforms like Instagram and X. They aimed to attract a following and often ran dedicated discussion forums alongside these public pages on platforms like Discord to engage a smaller number of more dedicated followers.

The topics posted about by the MRAs generally related to perceived injustices and imbalances faced by men, including:

- Suicide and mental health
- Incarceration rates and experiences of the justice system
- Educational disparities
- Perceived cultural double standards in how men are treated compared to women (e.g., in how much sympathy female victims of domestic violence and abuse attract versus male victims).

Given their goal to raise awareness of these issues, the men interviewed were keen to stress that their intent was not to offend audiences, although they recognised that this might be a byproduct of their activism. None of the examples seen by researchers used violent or derogatory language to describe women; instead, they argued against specific women's views or took issue with feminist discourse.

The content shared by these individuals tended to foreground statistics, data, and cited sources to raise awareness of these disparities. In other cases, content aimed to stimulate debate by posing open questions. One content creator shared links on their social media page to longer-form articles.

> *"[Issues I focus on are] things about education, like how badly boys are doing in school. Boys are behind at every stage of education in every single Western country, with a few small exceptions. Men are dying more at every single age. Men lead at 13 in the top 15 causes of death."* [18]
>
> **Joel**

Pathways to MRA content and communities

Men's journey into playing an active role in MRA debates online fell into two main categories, both of which often referenced a 'red pill' moment of 'realisation'.

Firstly, two content creators described a moment of 'realisation' that many men's issues were under-represented in public discourse and a perceived double standard applied when they had faced vociferous pushback and critique for raising these subjects in social situations. In both cases, these individuals previously identified with left-wing politics and social justice movements – later becoming disillusioned with them as a result of what they felt to be a blind-spot for issues disproportionately facing men.

[18] This is a complex picture and requires careful analysis to verify, which the researchers' conducting interviews have not done. However, out of the WHO's (World Health Organisation's) leading causes of death (from 2021), men in the UK are overall more likely to die in the majority of these leading causes.

"I left feminism because, simply, the things I was hearing from my feminist peers did not line up with my lived experiences, the lived experiences of men in my life, nor the research I was doing.

So, for example, the concept of domestic violence, as in it's something that men are exclusively doing to women. That would be the narrative that's presented to me. And if men are abused, you know, it's the woman defending herself and it's not that bad. And it's a very small case, very minute. Then I'll go away and I'm like, well, it's actually one in three victims of abuse is a man, according to the UK Office for National Statistics.[19] *And I was like, that's not infinitesimal to me, that's 750,000 men every year. That's huge. It's not as big as 1.5 million women, but it's still one in three. And I'm like, that's deserving of so much more. And the vilification and hysteria and pearl clutching around men I didn't appreciate, didn't find accurate and I actually felt was antithetical to feminism's own sort of cause.*

And when I brought that up, their anger and their complete lack of answers was like a second red flag. I got like, very aggressively, like finger in the face, "you don't understand". And I'll be like, I understand that 81% of people murdered around the world are men[20]*. You're talking about violence against women as if that's just a one way thing. And it's not. Like how could you say violence against women when four in five murders are men."* [21]

Joel

[19] Mankind 'Statistics on Male Victims of Domestic Abuse' - Statistics on Male Victims of Domestic Abuse - Mankind ; ONS 'Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2024' - Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

[20] UNODC 'Global Study on Homicide' (Executive Summary) - GSH23_ExSum.pdf

[21] The primary focus of the conversation with Joel was on the perceived disproportionate attention female *victims* of abuse and violence get compared with men. He did not focus attention on perpetrators, or whether perpetrators were male or female.

Joel, men's right activist (MRA)

- Self-identified as a feminist and was a member of the Labour party

- Began questioning narratives about men that he heard from feminism
- Became disillusioned and left feminism

- Set up social media profiles dedicated to raising awareness about men's issues and male inequality

Early adulthood

Active fundraising to raise money for women who had been abused and trafficked

A few years ago

Started questioning the things his feminist peers were saying.

Began to realise that the things being discussed were not matching up with his "lived experience" and those of the men in his life, nor with the research he was doing.

Became disillusioned and left feminism.

Present

Started doing a lot more research and then raising awareness for men's rights.

Set up social media profiles dedicated to this, as well as raising awareness through other channels like doing podcasts.

"This is the common experience for MRAs. They often, very often start off as feminists. They raise a men's issue in a feminist space, often because they've experienced. It's like "oh, yeah, I had a woman hit me". Instantly. Instantly. They're banned from the group.

And this is why they talk about controlling the narrative. They're always talking about controlling the narrative. And it's a blatant admission that what they're saying isn't true."

Tim, 30s

The other MRA's described similar moments of 'realisation' of what they saw as unfair treatment of men and societal double standards, but instead triggered by personal circumstances and experiences with women, such as relationship breakdown, divorce, going through family courts and other legal disputes. Similarly, these men felt that society has a 'blind spot' for many issues that they felt disadvantage men and had therefore built-up networks and activity online aiming to raise awareness and offer support to men facing similar experiences to their own.

"[Talking about a prior experience of paternity fraud] I found there was no help for paternity fraud victims in the UK at all. I was heartbroken."

"My genuine belief is that the courts are gynocentric. Feminist ideology runs through them... [there is] a view that once a woman makes an allegation it must be true. A man has to prove his innocence. It's automatically assumed to be true."

Richard

Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)

Those men involved in MRA discussions due to their personal negative experiences with women were also engaged with 'MGTOW' (Men Going Their Own Way) communities. Where MRA content was typically aimed at raising awareness or influencing policy change, discussions and content in MGTOW forums tended to be more social, with less of a clear objective.

MGTOW Content and Messages

The men engaged with MGTOW content described it as supportive, enlightening, and sometimes irreverent or funny. Generally, it involved:

- Discussions of the risks facing men in relationships with women (e.g., legal or financial harm).
- Discussions and theorising about the psychology of women and relationships.
- Content focused on men, their hobbies, interests, social lives, and lifestyles when living without romantic relationships with women.

This content was mostly found on:

- YouTube channels run by MGTOW content creators.
- Shorter video snippets on social media feeds like TikTok.
- Specific chat forums on platforms like Discord or threads on X and Reddit.

These men felt strongly that the majority of MGTOW communities were not focused on misogyny, as the content they saw did not, in their view, promote hatred of women, but rather a view that life was better without relationships with them.

"So, to me a misogynist would actually hate women. Whereas I don't. A misogynist, in how I would define it, would actively seek to discriminate against women because they are women. I don't, I'm choosing not to have a relationship

with a woman out of my own free will and choice, not out of hatred for them. Because I see the game as it is, and the risk is too high with a very, very small chance of reward at the end of it. I just think, 'nah, sod it'."

Richard

"I think overall MGTOW is pretty benign in general. I think there's nothing wrong with telling people that, like, you don't need a relationship to be fulfilled in life. I think there's a feminist movement called 4B which is actually similar."

Theodore, 30s

Pathways to MGTOW content and communities

These men consumed content from figures like Better Bachelor (474k subscribers on YouTube), a YouTuber who creates discussion videos on topics impacting men with a focus on dating and marriage. Videos also talk about news, current events, and political themes around gender, equality diversity and inclusion (EDI), crime, migration, and global politics – through a lens of how they impact men. Better Bachelor also facilitates social networks between 'MGTOW' men, including film nights and camping trips.

Some also mentioned wider 'red pill' genre content creators like Rollo Tomassi, author of the book The Rational Male, which discusses a wide range of topics cantering around dating and relationships, masculinity, and 'red pill' ideas such as hypergamy.

In reference to MGTOW and wider 'red pill' content, some participants who identified with the MGTOW label felt that the messages they'd absorbed from this content had helped them make sense of negative experiences they'd had and avoid them going forward.

"Once you're red pilled about all this, you can't unsee it. I'm never dating again... I didn't watch much MGTOW stuff at all before all this kicked off... when you see how men and women really are and think and act and why they do it, everything makes sense."

"It's [red pill and MGTOW content] amazing stuff. I really like it. My life benefited from it. So, it's not turned me into a woman hating misogynist or anything. Quite the opposite. But I choose not to want a relationship with them at all. I'm quite happy with that."

Richard

Richard, men going their own way (MGTOW)

- Experienced paternity fraud
- Started being actively involved in helping to support victims of paternity fraud
- Learned more about existing men's rights activism and MGTOW content and communities

Present

Richard experienced paternity fraud.

He found there wasn't much help on offer for those who have suffered paternity fraud in the UK.

He is actively involved in helping to support victims of paternity fraud.

Believes that the courts are "gynocentric" and that "feminist ideology runs through them".

Started finding out more about the justice system and what he perceived as biases within it.

"Once you're red-pilled about all this, you can't unsee it."

Said he's never dating again, and engages now with more MGTOW content, which has, from his perspective, helped to clarify how things work.

Some reflected that engaging with MGTOW content is often a reaction to negative experiences with women, like a traumatic relationship breakdown, and as a result may for some be more of a temporary phase.

"I found like the movement itself really fascinating because there's a difference between like the content creator who sticks around in that space and the users who go through the space.

With MGTOW, it was like you had these content creators, right. And then the people moving through. There's a lot of transient people in the MGTOW space, who were just there for like a little bit of time and then moved on."

Theodore, 30s

"Those things [videos] show up and, you know, men talk about abandoning women and just going and doing your own thing. There were a lot of things on TikTok where you'd have like a man driving along in his van and then he'd be like, talking about how women treat men and 'we don't need women'.

I don't think that's true, but you know, going back [at the time]. I never wanted to be in a relationship ever again.

But actually like, we need women, women need men, men need women. Like we, we are better together. And it scares me to think that there's such a divide that's happened"

Dylan[22]

A couple of participants reflected that this could have potential negative impacts, trapping men in a negative mindset towards relationships at a time when they were particularly vulnerable.

"You'll see these little clips where it's these 'men going their own way', sigma male[23] *type content creators that are trying to tell you, like, 'everyone's the enemy'. And I think that they prey on any sort of amount of bitterness and resentment you have in your life from a negative situation. Because I noticed when I was in this bad part of my life, I was getting served up more of that content."*

Matt, 30s

"At one point, one thing I did notice about myself and others is that I think they can get trapped into it. Instead of consuming it, taking the information and walking away from it. It can be a bit of a vicious circle that is. So I don't watch as, as much anymore."

Richard

Pick-up artists (PUA)

Within the sample, three men had engaged with PUA content and communities online. One was a content creator, while two others had participated in Discord servers focused on dating advice and social skills. Several others across the sample had encountered PUA content on platforms like YouTube and TikTok but did not actively engage with these communities.

PUA content and messages

[22] Age range omitted.

[23] Sigma male is a slang term for a popular, successful, but highly independent and self-reliant man. Another term for a sigma male is a lone wolf.

Some participants described the timeline of PUA online communities and how they'd evolved over a number of years. One PUA content creator described PUA culture being previously more rooted in manipulation and aiming to find 'silver bullet' techniques that 'magically' seemed to work in attracting any woman.

"They were like magicians turned pick-up artists, you could say. So, they, understood about deception and sleight of hand. They had this air of mystery and so they played into that"

"I mean it was a lot of that sort of snake oilery going on. It certainly seemed like that"

Sebastian, 30s

Sebastian enjoyed the kind of content he'd seen at the time, from content creators such as Erik von Markovik (53.2k followers on Instagram), a well-known pick-up artist on YouTube. However, he felt that he had seen it more as entertainment:

"For myself and the people I was associated with at the time, we sort of laughed…laughed it off in that sense", and didn't take it too seriously."

Sebastian, 30s

Ethan similarly talked about content creators in the PUA space he'd previously engaged with, but who had since been 'cancelled' for 'crossing lines'. He gave the example of them posting secretly recorded audio from sexual encounters following 'pick-up' exercises.

Sebastian and others interviewed felt that the landscape of PUA content online had shifted, or at least diversified since it first emerged, with less of an obvious focus on manipulation and 'tricks'. The content those creators originally involved in the PUA community produced or engaged with focused more on developing social skills, addressing insecurity and building confidence for men when speaking with women.

"Yeah, basically [my content is] coaching guys to become more confident, improve their dating lives, specifically with [name of channel], which is, you know, more focused on approaching strangers out in public and having conversations."

Ethan

"I'd say to people 'I teach guys to talk to girls'. And she'd be like, 'oh, so that's manipulative'. I'm like, 'what do you mean, manipulative? No, it's just how else is he gonna meet her if he doesn't go and talk to her?' She says, 'oh, yeah, but he's doing tricks and stuff'. He's not doing any tricks, just saying, hello, how are you doing? You look nice."

Sebastian, 30s

"[I was interested in] the social aspect of it. Like you may have noticed I've got a very monotone voice, so it was just about kind of dealing with stuff like that. [How you] engage with people"

Jacob, 20s

Some participants followed influencers who used to be involved in the PUA space but have since diversified and now most of their output focusses on unrealistic expectations, and perceived double standards of women in dating – so not necessarily aligned with traditional PUA content. It now sits somewhere between PUA, general self-improvement and MGTOW content.

Pathways to PUA content and communities

Participants described discovering PUA content and communities through multiple routes, primarily starting with mainstream platforms like YouTube and TikTok.

For some participants, the pathway often began with dating advice content on social media, leading to more niche communities through Discord servers. Jacob discovered these through content creator links:

> *"If [I'm watching] something interesting, a lot of the time they'll have a link to a Discord server…most influencers have their own server."*
>
> **Jacob, 20s**

These Discord servers varied in focus and tone, from general self-improvement advice to specific dating tactics, such as tips on what to do next once you've got a girl's number or Snapchat. Jacob would ask for advice on these servers to how to work around that when approaching girls to talk to them.

Jacob has also left servers before when he didn't like the type of conversations or content being shared:

> *"It wasn't people trying to improve their own lives, it was people trying to knock down others. […] Just like actual proper Incel propaganda, like 'all women are sluts', things like that. And it's just like…Jesus, mate. […] It doesn't help anyone."*
>
> *"He [an online PUA content creator] was big into like picking up women basically. It was all he spoke about and then he just dropped like this gem of a message. He said: 'Women love persistence, but you can't be too persistent because they'll call the police on you. Trust me. That's a lot of hassle.' Yeah. That's a bit of a red flag to hear someone say"*
>
> **Jacob, 20s**

Ethan, 30s, pick up artist (PUA)

- After graduating, started making prank videos and posting them online

- Drawn into PUA community by watching content from the likes of James Tusk and Johnny Berber
- Shifted his content from pranks to PUA, started building an audience

- Still has a social media channel and specific coaching website

Post-university

After graduating from university, felt unfulfilled by traditional employment.

Began exploring alternative paths, starting with creating prank videos for fun.

A few years ago

Started seeing content from PUA content creators and got more interested in the genre and format.

Shifted his output away from pranks and towards pick-up artistry, mainly due to a fascination with the dynamics of social interaction and attraction.

Started building a social media channel, building a following.

Present

Started coaching men who were struggling with dating, particularly those from introverted or technical backgrounds.

Now says his coaching centres on improving social skills and building confidence, with a focus on ‘cold approach’ (approaching someone in public with whom you’ve had no prior interaction) techniques.

Looksmaxxing

Within the sample, five participants had engaged with looksmaxxing content, with four still actively involved. This content focuses on changing physical appearance to become 'more attractive', ranging from mainstream fitness advice to more extreme body modification techniques.

Looksmaxxing content and messages

The looksmaxxing content described in this research was predominantly framed as tips and advice about how to improve physical appearance, with the aim of being more attractive to the opposite sex. Content seen during this project ranged from advice and tips about what hair gel or cologne to use; how to make the best and quickest 'gains'[24] in the gym; to people recommending using a hammer on your face ('bone smashing') to subtly reshape the bones or recommending the use of growth hormones to become taller.

Looksmaxxing content manifested in two forms. The first was on mainstream platforms, particularly TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. This often consisted of influencers offering tips and advice about how to improve physical appearance. For example, influencers like 'FitXFearless' (953.1K followers on TikTok). Much of his content consisted of him having recorded video calls with men, assessing their physique, and offering advice about anything from what to do with their hair, to how to get fitter, lose fat, or build muscle in certain areas. This content usually came in the format of Reels and short videos on participants' feeds, though there were some longer form videos too, particularly on YouTube.

The second form looksmaxxing content took within this sample was within more insular online communities such as Discord servers. Often participants would discover these servers and group chats because they have been linked from more mainstream content on TikTok or Instagram. Liam, who is 16-19, started by consuming self-improvement content on Instagram and TikTok, often focussed on the gym and getting more active, but also about making money and having a better lifestyle. He then found a link to a looksmaxxing Discord server through the comment on a TikTok video.

These servers, of which Liam, (16-19), Ollie (16-19), Edward (20s) and Jacob (20s) had all been a part at different points, usually revolved around people sharing their own tips about how to improve different elements of their looks. Often, people on these servers (sometimes up to tens of thousands of users) shared images of themselves in order to be rated by other members and given bespoke advice. As Liam, Jacob, Edward and Ollie reported, most of what is shared is advice about physical workouts, hair products, and so on. Some advice focussed on things like chewing specific, branded, hard-to-chew chewing gum to train your jaw, or using a Gua Sha to drain the excess fluids in your face. However, some of the content in these servers recommends more extreme behaviour such as "bone smashing" or taking growth hormones.

"Mewing is a way where if you hold the tongue at the top of your mouth constantly and you breathe out your nose, you can kind of almost. You slightly remodel your shape or your face"

"Well, there's no. There's not that much scientific evidence there, but it came from a guy.... the idea actually came from a doctor. And people have been posting their progress of it. And it seems to work. However, this could be because they're doing other things as well"

Daniel, 20s

He also posted about a method to increase your height. It's called Maasai jumping. So Maasai jumping, basically there's an African tribe called the Maasai tribe and they're famously known for being the tallest people in the world. They have an average height of I think 6 foot 3. And they basically have this activity where they basically they just

[24] Building or gaining muscle

jump up and down, up and down. And there's this scientist and he created this law called Wolff's law[25]. And Wolff's law basically entails that when you jump, you create micro fractures in your bones and these micro fractures will eventually heal over time and they'll become longer and longer. So, he will promote that. You should just jump and jump and jump and it will create more micro fractures on your bones and these bones will heal back and you'll become taller."

Ollie, 16-19

Some participants mentioned more potentially risky or extreme practices that they'd seen recommended online, although most in this sample were more sceptical of these examples.

"Recently bone smashing has appeared which is completely, you know, it doesn't work. It's not been proven to work. It's harmful for you. It's stupid. […] I think that some people use a hammer and try to hit their head to try to initiate something that they call Wolff's Law. They try to change the way that their skull looks, basically try to increase their cheekbone size, jaw size."

Edward, 20s

"Well, yeah, as I said, the hammer and smashing your jawline to try and get it more defined. That's very extreme. There's things like you don't drink water for 24 hours […] It's kind of to flush all the water out your system and then things like that. There's things where it's like to a point where it's almost dangerous to your health. That's where I draw the line. I'm not really willing to risk it for something that's that minute, in the grand scheme of things."

Liam, 16-19

According to Ollie and Edward, sometimes the conversation in these servers became unpleasant, with users being particularly rude or harsh while rating people's photos. They also reported seeing occasional racist and misogynistic language. However, they claimed the majority of the servers they were a part of had moderation rules meaning that kind of content was often removed, or users banned.

Pathways to Looksmaxxing content and communities

Those who subscribed to **'Looksmaxxing'** talked about 'red pill' moments when they 'realised' they faced structural disadvantages in dating specifically due to their physical attributes. These participants sought to overcome this disadvantage – often their height or facial bone structure – through specific practices.

Participants often transitioned to looksmaxxing from broader self-improvement interests, particularly fitness. This suggests a progression from general self-improvement to a more focused pursuit of physical attractiveness, potentially influenced by online communities.

"[Gym content] appealed to me because I knew that I had the ability to change myself physique-wise. So, when I started seeing the looksmaxxing stuff, it appealed to me because I knew that I could change myself facially along with my height."

Ollie, 16-19

[25] Wolff's Law is a theory that describes how bones adapt to mechanical stress. It states that bones will remodel themselves to become stronger when they are under increased loading. From the US-based National Library of Medicine. While there is much in the scientific literature that suggests the broad foundation of this theory is uncontroversial – i.e. that the constitution of bones alters when stressed - nonetheless, much of the literature it also explains that some applications of this theory have potentially adverse effects and trigger maladaptive responses. Techniques like Maasai jumping were seen by researchers and reported by participants as having been seen in certain Looksmaxxing spaces.

"It was to do with the fitness content. I think someone said in a comment of a video where the guy had a physique that I was aiming for [...] I think they were saying, you know, where did you get your meal plans and workout plans - and this was the place that was recommended"

Liam, 16-19

Liam, 16-19, Looksmaxxing

- Circumstances meant that Liam was unable to exercise as much as he had previously

- Liam suffered a bereavement in the family
- Struggled with motivation, most of his time spent gaming

- Motivated by self improvement content, made active changes
- Became involved in looksmaxxing communities
- Drew a line at extreme content

Present

Was not consuming self-improvement content.

Started getting really into gaming.

Liam suffered a bereavement in the family. He struggled with motivation to do much other than gaming.

Started to see self-improvement content on TikTok, motivating him to stop sitting at home gaming.

Saw more and more self improvement content on TikTok. Through the comments on a video, found a looksmaxxing Discord server, which he joined.

Enjoys the tips in servers for improving physique and facial structure.

Said he draws the line at extreme content like ‘bone smashing’ recommendations.

This pathway often involved starting with mainstream content and then moving towards insular communities like Discord servers, where discussions were more in-depth and sometimes included extreme or risky practices. For example, one participant, Liam started by consuming self-improvement content on Instagram and TikTok, but then found a link to a looksmaxxing Discord server through the comment on a TikTok video.

Incels

The term "incel" is short for "involuntary celibate" and refers to individuals who identify themselves as unable to find a romantic or sexual partner despite desiring one. Within this sample, three people identified as incels, a fourth had previously been involved in incel communities but had since moved on, and a fifth aligned with the "black pill" philosophy often associated with incels but did not personally identify as one.

Incel content and messages

The incel content and messages reported in this research primarily revolved around the concepts of the "red pill" and "black pill." The "red pill" refers to a perceived realisation that the dating scene is inherently unfair and that men are disadvantaged, particularly those deemed less attractive. The "black pill" takes this further, suggesting that this disadvantage is insurmountable, leading to a fatalistic outlook on dating and relationships.

> *"I've heard that it's a lot about how to pick-up women and using different methods. But at the end of the day, it's more like if you're a fat guy, then all these methods are not gonna help you."*
>
> **Edward, 20s**

> *"You know, if attraction is so looks based and based on kind of physical attractiveness then obviously there's going to be losers. And that's basically what it's based around."*
>
> *"The black pill side of things is more absolutist. There's less things you can game. The red pill, for a lot of things it's about how you use your mannerisms, use pick-up artist tricks and statusmaxxing [the act of improving one's value on the dating market by increasing one's social status].*
>
> *But I don't really believe in that. I think attraction is more instant, and as a result I think the black pill is more correct."*
>
> **Ron, 20s**

One key aspect of what Incels involved in this research reported, and the Incel content researchers saw online, was a sense of self-loathing and hopelessness. Conversations around depression and suicide are common in Incel spaces. The 'black pill' concept that underpins much of Incel culture is one that emphasises hopelessness and the futility of trying to improve your situation.

Some Incel spaces tended to be more insular, less overtly present on mainstream social media platforms. For example, Daniel spent a lot of his time online dedicated incel forums. This is one of the largest dedicated Incel forums, and users have to submit an explanation of why they would like to join the forum in order to be granted access to post and interact (although non-registered users can view content). There is a huge range of content on Incels forums. The format of the content is mostly text-based, with threads often being tagged by labels such as 'Serious', 'RageFuel', 'Toxic Femininity', 'Black pill', 'NSFW [Not safe for work]', 'Discussion'. The content on here seen during this research ranged from purportedly scientific or evolutionarily backed posts about sex relations, to dark, self-deprecating humour, to extreme fantasises of sexual violence.

Those in the sample more familiar with Incel culture, either through personal experience or from reading into it, mentioned the narrative that this nihilistic 'black pill' ideology could be linked to violent extremism. One participant who described himself as an Incel mentioned the regular references and slang within Incel forums relating to Elliot Rodger, a self-identified Incel who committed mass murder in California in 2014, although this participant said he was sceptical about how seriously most Incels took the connection between Rodger's status as an Incel and the mass murder. Other participants said they had read studies showing that the vast majority

of Incels are not violent and their fatalistic interpretation of the 'black pill' is more likely to lead them to depressive mental states.

Pathways to Incel content and communities

Those within this sample who identified as Incel were usually a combination of socially isolated and had suffered sometimes severe mental health issues in the past. One also reported being diagnosed with autism and ADHD. Daniel claimed that this was common among other Incels he had associated with. Daniel referred to some message boards on Incel forums where people refer to one another *"as robots…Because everyone on there is so autistic…they're basically robots. […] A lot of people I've spoken to on the boards are very autistic."*

The way people in the sample discovered this forum varied. Daniel originally saw it referenced in a YouTube video he was sent that was criticising content on the forum. Whereas Ollie followed a link to it that someone had posted on a looksmaxxing server on Discord. He didn't like what he saw and never revisited it. Only Daniel had spent a significant amount of time on the forum and reported that signing up to be a part of the forum was a difficult and lengthy process.

Daniel, 20s, Incel

- Struggled with friendships
- Felt socially excluded
- Diagnosed with autism and ADHD

- Began avoiding social situations
- Internalised idea that people avoid him

- Suppressed attraction to people due to negative expectations

- Motivated by self improvement
- But accepting of prospect of never having relationships

Present

Was sent a video ridiculing content on specific Incel forum site.

Daniel's view was that some of the content about the dynamics between men and women made sense.

He decided to explore the platform reported that being a part of the forum was a lengthy process.

Started using Twitter and an image-based bulletin board more and following Incel and red pill pages.

Enjoyed the sense of community and in-group humour.

Still spends time on Incel sites but rarely posts, more observing others' threads.

Part of some private Discord servers, mainly about anime and some about right wing politics.

Engaged in more 'white pill' threads about accepting your 'fate' as excluded from relationships.

Identifies as 'mentalcel', i.e. held back by his attitude and social skills rather than by physical attributes.

This research also found some Incel groups on predominantly message-based platforms such as Discord. Sometimes, these were loosely linked to, or accessible via, certain Looksmaxxing servers. Again, reportedly, conversations on these servers varied. Often, conversations were meme-based, incorporating themes of dark humour, and utilising language consistent across the Incel space. As with much internet culture, a series of repeatedly used words and phrases, as well as frequently referenced memes were often used.

One participant who identified as an Incel predominantly spent time on 'Incel Twitter' – spaces on X dedicated to Incel content. Ron, in his 20s, found Incel content initially via Reddit, via discussions about what impacted men's chances of success in the dating market. This led him to discover the idea of the 'black pill' (see above), and eventually to X (Twitter at the time) where he started consuming more Incel content.

What are the risk factors influencing the potential for harm

Most participants demonstrated critical thinking about what they saw and why.

In some cases, where the manosphere provided a strong sense of identity or community, or where content resonated with personal experiences, participants became less likely to challenge and more likely to be influenced.

Media literacy

A key objective of this project was to explore the impact of content across the manosphere, whether it has the potential to cause harm, and to work out whether and where media literacy[26] interventions may be effective. This section explores the factors that appeared to shape how participants engage with content and whether it influenced their views, attitudes or behaviours. As an in-depth exploration of experiences of engaging with manosphere content, the research does not seek to provide evidence for how such content may affect women. Rather, it seeks to identify risks which may increase the potential for harm to individuals.

Most participants demonstrated some critical thinking and did not take on all views they came across

Understanding of recommender systems and platform functionality

Algorithm-based recommender systems shaped what participants saw, but not necessarily what they thought. Participants across the sample displayed a range of levels of understanding of how social media algorithms impact the content they saw on feeds, but most spontaneously raised multiple factors they believed to impact the mix of content they saw.

Several mentioned that they thought that social media algorithms shaped what they were served, for example showing an interest in one topic and then being recommended similar or related content.

> *"[Why he sees Looksmaxxing] It's because I watch other stuff about like styling your hair or men's fashion, skincare for men. And it's, you know, kind of the social media pipeline that you hear so much about, where it moves onto that afterwards after you've interacted with a few of them"*
>
> **Jacob, 20s**

Jacob reflected that he was very aware of the social media "pipeline". When researchers asked what he thought about that, he said:

> *"Well, I have a rule on TikTok, that if I don't physically 'like' three posts in a row, I close the app."*
>
> **Jacob, 20s**

> *"It probably bases it [what content you are likely to see on X] around, like, you follow an account that is loosely tied to another account and then that is what you'll see."*
>
> **Nathan, 30s**

Several participants talked about being introduced to or exposed to content they hadn't previously seen, e.g., from new content creators, via algorithmic recommendations. Some also recognised that they were likely being pushed into consuming more of a similar kind of content once they'd engaged with it initially, due to how they perceived the algorithms to work.

However, they were also clear that just because content appeared on their feed, didn't mean they necessarily engaged closely or felt that they took on board beliefs.

[26] Ofcom describes media literacy as: "the ability to use, understand and create media and communications across multiple formats and services".

"I tend just to scroll through everything on my feed. Whatever comes up, really. I probably watch most videos. Yeah. And then in terms of engaging, I tend just to like a video or repost it [if I agree strongly with it].

"I'd say it's quite a good platform because you've got the option just to skip past whatever you don't want to see.

"So this video [video of a street interview with a woman in America] seems to be quite a popular thing that goes around at the minute, tends to be in America. And it's generally a girl saying that she would only go for a man that needs a set amount of wage.

"I wouldn't really say I pay much attention to them."

Nathan, 30s

Awareness of commercial incentives on social platforms

Most participants were conscious of the influence of commercial incentives on social media shaping content creators' output. Many participants spontaneously brought up the influence of commercial incentives on content creators online, in particular their motivation to post content that would maximise attention, viewers and followers. In particular, many mentioned that people probably post things that are more shocking, provocative or controversial in order to get attention online, meaning they were sceptical about whether posts always represented the true underlying beliefs of the content creator.

This was brought up most often with Andrew Tate, where a large number of participants felt that Tate's most provocative online statements were just an attempt by him to generate attention and controversy for financial gain.

Participants' interpretation of Tate and his content can be placed into three broad categories. The first was a feeling that his content was deliberately hyperbolic and exaggerated for effect, knowing that this is what would drive the most engagement – and that he probably didn't actually believe all the things he said.

"I think a lot of what he's done over the years was for the shock factor."

Kelly, 40s

"I just felt like Andrew Tate's case in particular, he was just a bit of a grifter."

"It's just manipulating young men and then using them to buy his courses and stuff like that, to try and teach them how to be men. But really, it was just a bit of a grift, in my opinion"

Tyrone, 20s

"So it's the women should just be quiet, not say anything, not work, not do anything, just sit there and be pretty. Some of the things he's said…it's been so extreme. But it's weird with Andrew Tate because, again, I think he's another one that plays up to the cameras or his social media…He knows that if he says something controversial, it brings more eyeballs to his content. So, people like that I can just never take seriously in terms of their viewpoints. […] I think he actually does like women, but he knows that extremist viewpoints is what makes him famous because, like I said, I think they are extorting and taking advantage of…young men that just have no voice and are lost in society."

Toyin, 30s

The second interpretation was that he didn't hold the kinds of views he's often accused of holding. These participants also said that most of his output is not extreme, and therefore that the response to him was overblown.

"He's been silenced. […] I've seen countless videos of people going up to women in the street: 'Do you like Andrew Tate?', [they say] 'No', [the other persons asks them] 'Why not?', [they respond] 'He's a misogynist', [the person asks] 'What is misogyny?', and they don't know. I think it's been programmed into women especially, who have never even watched an Andrew Tate video. His name is just hated. And I think that's part of the system's manipulation towards society.

"[…] You know, I think [misogyny means] negativity towards women and people having bad feelings towards women and thinking they're below you. And I'm never saying women are below us as men. I'm saying we have different values."

Jack, 16-19

The third interpretation was that overall, he may mean some of what he says about women – beliefs participants were keen to point out they fundamentally disagreed with. However, several still thought that the response to him was an overreaction, and that you could disagree with someone on their beliefs while still thinking they have useful things to say.

"He says stuff that provokes people in the comments. Some of the stuff he says is quite good – about like, get out there, get in the gym, keep active, keep your brain going. […] Most [of what he posts] is about Bitcoin and his Hustler's university. Some of the stuff that I've seen that I like is, you know, providing for your family, trying to be a strong, healthy man rather than…slobbing around, playing video games and watching Pornhub, really. I resonated with that more than, you know, women can't drive and all that ridiculous rhetoric…But I understand he's got to get clicks and views. That's the problem with all social media."

Jay, 30s

Some of these participants, while not feeling as if they had to take a strong stance either way, did express some concern about the influence of those like Tate on others.

"But I do if people want to base their personalities off of things. And then I think, I think there is potential that listening to Andrew Tate, I'm not saying someone's going to go shave their head and get a cobra tattoo, but they might take it, take his content as gospel, especially when he's spouting like, I've got a million people in my Hustler's University all making money. They're all making money off crypto and that. Come and join us and that sort of thing. And then you've got clips of young people being interviewed by those two brothers going, yeah, I made a million last year. I made a thousand last week, or something like that When you're a kid on pocket money, that sounds brilliant doesn't it?"

Jay, 30s

In addition, some participants thought that rather than Tate being disingenuous or cynical, the attitudes he holds may be a reflection of the influence of the people who he's surrounded himself with.

"Right. So I thought to myself, I played Devil's advocate and looked at it from first principles and I said, is it possible that he's actually, like, never met just a normal woman?

Has he ever just been to, like, the countryside […] and just walked through a village and met a normal girl in a pub and seen how different things are when they're not social media? You know, the whole of life doesn't operate around

social media. So, I think that he's not necessarily just disingenuous, it's that he's constructed his own life in a way that precludes him from meeting the average person. So, what he's talking about is based on, yeah, it's based on this small, sort of small box of the people that he's filtering for. You filter for women that want Instagram fame, money and, you know, whatever else comes with that, that's what you get and then that's what you base your understanding of women from. So, I think people shouldn't be so quick to mistake ignorance for malice."

Sebastian, 30s

Purpose and mindset

Participants appear to consume content in different 'modes' or mindsets, which shapes how seriously they take it

Participants encountered content across a wide range of online environments – personalised social media feeds fed by recommender algorithms or following specific content creators, longer form videos on platforms like YouTube, and less frequently Rumble, and through a mixture of text and image-based discussions taking place on more closed forums like on Discord or dedicated sites.

As participants described their experiences of consuming content across these different environments, it was clear that different goals or 'modes' shaped the way in which they engaged with content. For example, the amount of credence paid to content seen purely for entertainment purposes was very different to that engaged with for the purpose of learning or self-improvement. It was evident from participant descriptions of their social media consumption that people move between these modes dependent on their objectives, but also the content presented to them.

[Jacob] *"I understand for a lot of people it [red pill content] isn't about that [self-improvement] and a lot of other people take a more sinister message from that, but I don't think you should."*

[Researcher] *"How do you kind of separate the sinister messages that you might get from it, or interpretations?"*

[Jacob] *"I don't know. It's like when you're watching a TV show and you disagree with it or something. Yeah, I think maybe it's because I just, sad as it sounds, I've got a life outside of it."*

Jacob, 20s

"It's the same way how people watch sport. Some people watch it casually, just…like, as a neutral. Some people watch it and they're taking it more serious. So, yeah, some people might be analysing it. Some people might be studying the game, studying the sport. Some people might be looking at it because they want to play it soon. […] Everyone has a different way of thinking and everyone has, like a different way of interpreting it. And I feel like too much pressure is put on the influencer to make their content a certain way."

Kaleb, 20s

Entertainment mode | Content consumed in this mode was taken less seriously

Much of the content consumed on social media was described by participants as entertainment. This was most common for content appearing on social media feeds or that shared by friends on closed groups.

When participants were consuming content for entertainment, they seemed to approach content in a more frivolous, less earnest way. When the content described was more extreme, or even absurd, the drama associated with this and the way others react, seemed to make it even more entertaining.

"They're just trying to say they've got stupid reasons to start the gym. […] I think they're just trying to put humour to it [gym content on TikTok with misogynistic text overlaid that reads: 'I go to the gym so I can beat my wife'].

[When asked if these videos were trying to communicate something serious or literal] Oh no no no, 100% not. […] It's just stuff a lot of people do in the gym community. Like, those kind of jokes. People say, like, 'I have five kids in my basement, or whatever'. Jokes like that. Where it kind of sounds like not okay, which is why it's unbelievable. […] It kind of makes it funny."

Ali, 16-19

In this mindset, it appeared that participants did not need to agree with something, or to believe it to be true, for them to find it entertaining. Many participants talked about dark comedy or memes that 'sailed close to the wind' as well as people throwing tantrums or embarrassing themselves.

In this entertainment mindset, participants were not seemingly trying to learn or identify personally with online content, creators, or communities. Instead, they reported approaching content like they might watch a TV drama, or even play a game, and tend not to take the content too seriously, or at face value. Participants tended to feel that content they consumed in this way did not necessarily influence their personal views.

"Before I watch a video, before I watch anything, I look into it. Am I going to look at this purely just for fun, just for shits and giggles, or am I going to watch this expecting to gather some information and learn something? And, yeah, I just took it [Fresh and Fit] in my stride. I just took it in, like, an entertaining way. […] 99% of the time I'm watching it for entertainment."

Kaleb, 20s

"I think people my age know Andrew Tate exists, consume some of his content…. but we see it for what it is. Like, I enjoy the Terrifier [horror film]. I can't wait to see the third one. But it doesn't mean I'm going to dress up as a clown and kind of like scare people or do anything else. […] It's a bit like Call of Duty. I don't think I'm a general or a sergeant after playing Call of Duty. So it's entertainment, regardless of how you look at it."

Jay, 30s

Some participants also mentioned hearing sexualising or misogynistic lyrics about women in songs and made a similar comparison. Some conceded that lyrics like this could influence more impressionable people.

"Yeah, I would be sitting here lying if I said that that [music that included lyrics that were degrading towards women] couldn't have an influence, especially on a young mind, of how they see women. […] But it's a weird one… It's always been a part of the music. Men and women both sing to the lyrics as well, where they are degrading women."

Toyin, 30s

Others felt that for themselves, music was a form of entertainment, and lyrics should be interpreted more as stories rather than endorsements of beliefs.

"[On violent rap lyrics] I definitely think it's more of a story than something to agree or disagree with"

"Do I think it influences people and their perception of women. Yes, I do. […] I don't believe myself to be as easily manipulatable, but I do think that the general population would just kind of succumb. I don't know, I just don't really have much faith in people."

Mervyn, 30s

Some participants reflected on other types of content, that while they felt it didn't impact them or their views, it could for others, particularly if they were younger or more vulnerable.

Goal-oriented mode | Content consumed in this mode was more actively engaged with

Sometimes participants described engaging with online content with a more specific purpose in mind or driven by an underlying goal. Often this was more proactive, driven by curiosity, deliberate engagement and research.

When participants were exploring a subject or were more goal-oriented, they tended to approach content in a more personal and focused way. They were more critical of content and more often seemed to compare sources. There were cases where it seemed participants felt they had been misled, but generally they described being sceptical of content that clashed with their values or life experience.

Participants described approaching content in this way when they had an actual goal, and therefore advice and information seemingly had a greater potential for impact. For example, this mindset seemed more common among those in the sample who consumed a lot of 'Looksmaxxing' content. Despite this, many participants expressed scepticism about some of these claims and techniques.

"This [Looksmaxxing server] is a bit weird… It's into mewing [a technique that involves flattening your tongue against the roof of your mouth to improve the appearance of your jawline and face] and whatever…It's just unproven, really. Like it's just pseudoscience. It's piggybacked off [the idea that] it's better to breathe through your nose than your mouth and just taking it to a weird conclusion."

Jacob, 20s

It may be that when participants are consuming content with a goal in mind, they are more inclined to try things to attain their goals, and therefore more likely to be susceptible to unfounded advice. For example, one participant, for a short period, chewed a specific brand of chewing gum that is particularly dense in order to strengthen his jaw muscles after seeing it recommended in a Discord server. However, as above, the participants who displayed this mode the most were those involved in Looksmaxxing who were also the most likely to reference and compare a variety of sources they had engaged with before trying anything themselves. It was also the case that the participants mostly drew the line at the more extreme recommendations sometimes found in these environments, such as bone-smashing or surgery.

Community or identity mode | Content consumed as part of identifying with a community had potential to shape views more directly

When participants became invested in communities, they seemed much less prone to challenging the behaviour or views of others. This appeared to be particularly true for those who were socially isolated offline.

The most isolated individuals talked about adopting the language and concepts within communities they participated in. This also meant they were aware of in-jokes and were sometimes better able to identify the intent behind language or the use of in-group references.

Once identifying as a part of a community, participants described there being perhaps a greater sensitivity to external threats and increased likelihood of being defensive or abusive to outsiders, particularly if they felt they were being attacked or threatened.

Some of these online communities set barriers to entry, and exclude, or ostracise, those who break with community norms, potentially reinforcing in-group loyalty and affinity.

[On seeing misogynistic content on incel spaces] "Yeah, definitely. But that's even harder to challenge, right, because I can talk someone and be like, you look fine and that kind of stuff. But it's a lot harder to be like, women aren't the source of all evil in the world."

Theodore, 30s

Personal experience

Content shaped participants' views the most when it resonated with their personal experiences

Positive relationships

Participants' offline lives, relationships and real-world experiences seemed to be a significant factor in shaping their engagement with online content and how they assessed it when they came across it. When asked why they agreed with or disagreed with content they encountered, particularly if it was controversial, the most common response was that it aligned with, or didn't align with their lived experience. Positive relationships with women were regularly cited as a reason participants rejected sweeping negative statements about women.

"But, yeah, it was always like, 'women are narcissistic', 'women are evil', 'women are pigs', 'women keep men'. And of course, she's [ex-partner] keeping my [child] from me. So, I'm seeing all these accounts pop up that go, women do this to keep the child from the dad… And that really affected me because those people are saying that and I'm like, yeah, I'm experiencing that. So, it made it more legit because I'm experiencing these things people are talking about."

"Understandably with what's happened with me and my ex, I could go down the path of going, all women are shit. I just don't think that's the case at all. […] The people that have helped me through the slump are all female. So, for me to go 'my ex is a dickhead, that must mean all women are dickheads', it wouldn't be right."

Dylan

"Even though I don't consider myself to be a feminist, I'm not gonna hate on them for what they're doing. And then I guess also because I was raised by a single mum and my two sisters lived in my house, so I spent a lot of time around, women. And I've always had quite a lot of female friends as well. So, it's hard to square the two together to be like, yeah, 'women are just awful'. I was like, half the people in my life that I love are women."

Theodore, 30s

Ollie had engaged with Red Pill, Black Pill, and Looksmaxxing content online, and come into contact with Incel communities and forums, including a dedicated Incel website where researchers witnessed extreme misogynistic content.

Ollie, on encountering this more extreme content, found that it conflicted with his personal experiences of growing up with positive, supportive relationships with female family members.

"I went on the site like once, but I never participated on it. […] It's a lot more extreme. A lot more extreme. So, I was never an active user on the site."

"I mean the one post that I clicked on, it was basically like, you know, it was in a post about 'inceldom', hating woman, etc. Like they would use terms like 'foid' [a derogatory term for a woman, abbreviated from fem-oid]."

"I have friends that are girls, you know, my siblings are, my mum. I just stopped caring. Women are just normal beings. Like they're just normal human beings."

Ollie, 16-19

Negative or narrow personal experiences

In contrast, participants with negative or narrow experiences may be more at risk. Mapping the journeys of participants, it appeared that mostly participants' involvement or depth of engagement within different manosphere communities lasted only while the content they were seeing continued to resonate with their personal experiences.

Similarly to Ollie, Daniel came into contact with Incel communities on a dedicated Incel forum site, which he ended up engaging with because what he read resonated with his personal experiences.

> *"It was…a video … he was kind of making fun of it.*
>
> *But most of the stuff I remember seeing I agreed on. Because it wasn't all the hateful stuff, it was analytical stuff. I was like, oh yeah, he's right about that."*
>
> **Daniel, 20s**

Daniel didn't find some of the analytical content about 'Inceldom' he came across as shocking as Ollie. He was not convinced the more extreme discussions about 'Incel uprising' were serious and believed the participants on the forum to be joking.

Both Daniel and Ollie had histories of struggling to forge strong social connections and friendships, but Daniel was more socially isolated offline, reporting almost no in person social interaction in his day-to-day life. He was also more disconnected from family members.

Ollie, 16-19

"Red pilled", self-improvement content

"I started watching YouTubers and creators that would make self-improvement content [...]. This is when I first learned about the pills. And it was to do with success in life when it comes to money, girls, and just general success."

More instructive looksmaxxing content

"There was this trend on TikTok called 'looksmaxxing'. [...] Then I found [a looksmaxxing forum]. It had a lot of valuable information on it."

Black pill content

"Nothing was working. I tried so many things and nothing worked. And I was still short. I slowly started disassociating myself with the red pill. And saw a lot of black pill content [...] I really agreed with it."

Incel forum

"There was a [dedicated Incel forum]. But I never participated. It's a lot more extreme. The one post I clicked on was about hating women. I was involuntarily celibate [...] but not [...] woman hating."

Daniel, 20s

Exposure to an Incel forum through YouTube

“But most of the stuff I remember I agreed on. Because it wasn't all the hateful stuff, it was analytical stuff. It was like, oh yeah, he's right about that.”

Explored Inceldom more through X and and image-based bulletin board

“I got on Twitter when I was like 16. I remember because that's when I started to realise, oh yeah, this stuff is actually bad for me. So then I got onto it then I was just very truthful about just like, oh yeah, this is how my life is.”

Joins dedicated Incel forum

“I was kind of hateful [towards women] at first, but that was mainly because I feel like they went out of their way to disrespect me. However, the more I've looked into the psychology of women, I feel like it's the ways they act are more like hardwired into them. I kind of understand them more now after looking at the psychology.”

Feels part of a community

“Because I’m on this website, it’s so kind of ingrained into me that I am not attractive and I have no worth. So I feel like that’s unhealthy. But I feel for people who truly are, who [think] no woman would want to interact with them. I feel it's healthy to have some sort of a community where they can have people who value them or just have a sense of like friendship or communion or brotherhood, something like that.”

Conclusion

With growing concern cited in the wider literature over the potential for online communities to promote misogyny, Ofcom commissioned this research to explore how people come to engage with the manosphere and what role it plays in their lives. 39 interviews with 38 men and one woman, who consume or create content across the manosphere explored what attracted or led them to it, what they thought of it, and what impact, if any, it appeared to have on them.

Relating to the manosphere

Many participants felt the term manosphere was unhelpful because it grouped together a very wide range of content - from what they saw as benign self-improvement advice to extreme misogyny – tarring all with the same brush. Some saw this as a reflection of how they felt 'toxic masculinity' discussions have evolved: originally describing specific negative behaviours, now in their view criticising masculine traits in general. This perceived lack of any positive conversation about masculinity was why many valued the self-improvement and personal agency messages in certain manosphere content.

Applying media literacy

Participants regularly encountered opposing viewpoints across the manosphere, with different groups often holding conflicting positions (for example, Incels tend to disagree with and dislike Andrew Tate). Participants valued this diversity and the willingness of content creators to discuss difficult topics, especially when done with irreverence and humour. Rather than categorising online figures as entirely good or bad, most participants were comfortable with the idea that they may have something useful to say about some subjects but be unhelpful or cross the line with others. Many had turned away from mainstream media because they felt it fell short of this approach. When faced with conflicting arguments, participants evaluated them against their own values and real-life experiences – as they did in any other area of their life.

Risk of harm

A minority of participants described encountering extremely misogynistic content online, which our researchers verified. The most extreme examples were found on dedicated forums relating to Incel communities. While most online users are very unlikely to encounter this content due to the insular nature of these online spaces, the current lack of age verification[28] means anyone, including children, could potentially access it. These spaces were also notably full of messages promoting depressive and even suicidal outlooks. Those engaging with these closed communities may be at greater risk of adopting harmful views or mindsets due to strong group identity and wider vulnerability.

Final reflections

This research highlights that engagement with the manosphere is complex and nuanced, and as such provides an additional perspective to the literature that we reviewed prior to conducting interviews for this research. Concerns about specific isolated communities such as Incels, or those directly encouraging harmful practices such as Looksmaxxers, are evidently valid. However overall, participants were engaging with diverse and often conflicting messages – with most demonstrating a capacity for critical engagement that allowed them to navigate content selectively, taking what resonated with their values and personal experiences, and discarding the rest. The sample for this research is, to a degree, inevitably self-selecting and therefore this report doesn't claim to represent all consumers and creators across the manosphere. It is possible that those with more extreme views would have been reluctant to speak to researchers. However, this research does challenge

[28] On 16 January 2025 Ofcom published their statement on Age Assurance and Children's Access and gave services 3 months to carry out a children's access assessment. In April 2025, Ofcom stated that services likely to be used by children will need to assess the risks they pose and take action to protect them – which may include using highly effective age assurance to prevent them from accessing harmful content. Ofcom expects the riskiest services to use highly effective age assurance to protect children from harmful content. If services have minimum age requirements and are not using highly effective age assurance to prevent children under that age using the service, they should assume that younger children are on their service and take appropriate steps to protect them from harm. From 25 July 2025, subject to the Codes completing the Parliamentary process, providers will need to take the steps laid down in the Codes or use other effective measures to protect children.

assumptions about the experiences and perceptions of individuals consuming manosphere content and points to a range of risk factors that may increase the likelihood of harm.

Ofcom afterword

The findings set out in this report highlight a diverse range of experiences of, and responses to, the manosphere. Indeed, many of the participants in the sample expressed discomfort with the use of the term 'manosphere', as they felt it grouped content that they enjoyed with content that they chose to ignore or with which they actively disagreed.

Some of the participants reported navigating content in the manosphere on topics such as self-improvement and fitness content selectively: consuming and engaging with content which resonated and aligned with their own views and experiences and dismissing content that did not. Many reported that much of the content they encountered in the manosphere was helpful and positive for them. That said, a small number of participants reflected on the impact that some of the content they encounter, such as Looksmaxxing content directly encouraging harmful practices, could have on younger or more vulnerable individuals.

The report identifies factors that may make someone more vulnerable when encountering manosphere content, with engagement with manosphere communities and social isolation being important components. While many participants engaged somewhat critically with the content that they encountered, they described different 'modes' of engagement to meet their different needs, and when engaging via closed or semi-closed communities ('community / identity mode') the participants said they were less prone to challenging the behaviour or views of others. The more extreme examples of misogynistic content encountered in this project have come from quite closed, insular groups. Participants that were more socially isolated tended to have greater depth of engagement within such closed 'manosphere' communities, as they didn't have positive real-world experiences to counter the views being put forward. We know from our research into media literacy and mental health (Listening to experts: Mental health and media literacy) that, when set up appropriately, online communities can be a positive source of support and information. However, when an individual seeks support, information and a sense of belonging from a harmful and extreme environment, any hateful content encountered is likely to have a greater effect.

Humour had the effect of making the content more engaging and seem less harmful to participants, with perceived humour and irreverence making the content more attractive. Some participants in this research told us that they themselves did not take content encountered in 'entertainment mode' seriously. We cannot say from this research whether this would be the case for all who encounter such content, and it may be that younger or more vulnerable individuals are more likely to take such content at face value. Measuring the long-term impacts of repeated exposure to content (such as any potential to normalise derogatory views of women and girls) was beyond the scope of this research.

The individual experiences and journeys outlined in this report and the accompanying annex provide valuable insight into the spectrum of content and experiences in the manosphere, and our policy work will reflect this spectrum.

Our media literacy programme will build on the understanding of vulnerabilities and communities provided by this research with a series of expert roundtables. This evidence base will then inform our commissioning of mitigating projects later in the year. Our aim will be to support programmes across the spectrum of experience, from digital citizenship for men and boys, through to perpetrator interventions.

Of course, media literacy is just one of a range of measures against harmful activity that disproportionately affects women and girls. We address illegal content in our Illegal Harms Register of Risks and our Illegal Content Judgements Guidance and address content that is harmful to children in our Children's Register of Risks and in our Children's Harms Guidance. We also set out the measures that regulated services can apply to mitigate the risk of these harms occurring on their platforms in our illegal harms codes of practice and our protection of children codes of practice[1].

We are also producing guidance setting out how providers can take action against harmful content and activity that disproportionately affects women and girls, in recognition of the unique risks they face. Our draft Guidance on Protecting Women and Girls Online explicitly highlighted online misogyny as one of four priority areas for action, alongside online domestic abuse, image-based abuse and online abuse and harassment. We are in the process of reviewing responses to our consultation proposals and currently plan to finalise this guidance by the end of 2025. *If you have been affected by these harms, you can find support services here (Domestic Abuse*

Commissioner) and here (Victim and Witness Information) . If you're worried someone might share your intimate images online or it has already happened to you, see StopNCII and the Revenge Porn Helpline.