

THE MANOSPHERE, REWIRED

UNDERSTANDING MASCULINITIES ONLINE AND
PATHWAYS FOR HEALTHY CONNECTION



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FUTURES
WITHOUT VIOLENCE™

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ABOUT EQUIMUNDO

Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice has worked internationally and in the US since 2011 to engage men and boys as allies in gender equality, promote healthy manhood, and prevent violence. Equimundo works to achieve gender equality and social justice by transforming intergenerational patterns of harm and promoting patterns of care, empathy and accountability among boys and men throughout their lives.

ABOUT FUTURES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

FUTURES is a health and social justice nonprofit with a simple mission: to heal those among us who are traumatized by violence today - and to create healthy families and communities free of violence tomorrow. From domestic violence and child abuse, to bullying and sexual assault, our groundbreaking programs, policy development, and public action campaigns are designed to prevent and end violence against women and children around the world.

ABOUT THE SHIFT_MEN INITIATIVE

This study is part of a larger initiative by Equimundo and Futures Without Violence called Shift_Men, focused on fostering male allyship and healthy masculinities in online spaces. Forthcoming plans include further research and intervention design to build connection and healthy relationship skills for young men in digital worlds.

OVERVIEW

Equimundo's [State of American Men 2023](#) survey found that 48% of young men ages 18 to 23 say their online lives are more interesting than their offline ones. The survey also found that more than 40% of young men trust one or more misogynistic voices online. Even at first glance, one sees much harm online in the form of moderators, influencers, and sites that take young men into versions of manhood that too often promote the worst in all of us. But the story is more complex than that. Coming out of the study, Equimundo and Futures Without Violence recognized the need to deepen our understanding of how to reach men who are “in the middle” – and potentially open to conversations and being engaged in messages about healthy masculinities and allyship for gender equality.

This report presents findings from a six-month deep dive into the lives of young men online, primarily focused on the platforms and spaces used by young men in the United States. For this study, we partnered with the human-centered design firm Puddle to carry out an artificial intelligence (AI) analysis of more than 40 hours of Twitch streaming, 1.5 million lines of chat logs, and nearly 37,000 lines of Discord chat logs. The research also included 15 interviews with moderators and streamers, interviews with seven experts on young men's lives, a context mapping of 14 male-majority spaces, and more than 100 hours spent observing six online male-majority spaces. The findings affirm a complex online universe – much of that monetized, weaponized, and harmful – but also a majority that leans positive (or at least innocuous) for young men seeking information, connection, and community. That key finding points the way to affirming young men's dire need for social connections and potential pathways to connection that bridge online lives and offline ones.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

When two-thirds of young men feel that “no one really knows” them, as *State of American Men 2023* shows, they reveal the fragility of their connections and relationships. This “[crisis of connection](#)” collides with the reality that no one really seems to agree on what a “good man” looks like or how to become one. The combination of these two truths creates the perfect conditions for men to seek connection in the digital world via the manosphere – a diverse collection of websites, blogs, and online forums promoting masculinity, misogyny, and opposition to feminism – which swoops in to provide clear messages around gender and gender roles to make simple sense of an otherwise complicated world. These messages have a real impact, mostly surrounding violence (against oneself and others), mental health, and anti-democratic trends. Amidst rapid macro-level social, political, and economic changes, young men are turning to the internet and finding community and belonging that speak to their unique identities, interests, and fears.

While the masculinities field is already robust in research and programming, online spaces – which are now the primary place young men spend their time – have been largely ignored until recently. There is a clear need to further investigate how online spaces and communities simultaneously are part of the problem and hold immense power in creating solutions. We hope this study provides additional insights and directions for action. To devise online solutions and better understand the broader environment men are living in, FUTURES and Equimundo partnered with the human-centered design firm Puddle to take a deep dive into the gendered narratives and features of several key online platforms and spaces. This research is informing a forthcoming design lab and new efforts to promote healthy masculinities online that build on the positive sources of connection and community that young men already find online.

BACKGROUND

STATE OF AMERICAN MEN 2023 AND SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGE FROM THE FIELD

STATE OF AMERICAN MEN 2023

This current phase of research and initiative building is grounded in findings from Equipundo's *State of American Men 2023* report, subtitled "From Crisis and Confusion to Hope." The report provided research on these and other crucial aspects of men's realities in 2023.

Three key issues drove this study:

1. Against the backdrop of #MeToo and the women's equality and feminist movements, some men - particularly younger men - are moving backward in their support of gender equality.
2. Issues in the lives of boys and men - employment, health, sense of purpose, educational aspirations, mental and emotional well-being, loneliness, and relationship challenges - are creating a state of precarity that makes them vulnerable to the appeal of reactionary movements.
3. The precarity of men from marginalized groups is especially acute.

The survey revealed many men are in a downward spiral of loneliness, confusion, economic instability, and relationship challenges, leading many to seek solace in misogynist spaces and trusting influencers such as Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson. In total, 40% of men said they trust one or more misogynist online voices or websites. Men of all ages - but particularly younger men ages 18 to 23 - showed high rates of loneliness, limited life purpose, and suicidal ideation. Nearly one in three said they have either given up on intimate partners/relationships or have trouble forming intimate relationships.

Across the political spectrum, large percentages of men said feminism has "gone too far," and a majority feel their reputations can be destroyed with a single comment or complaint from a woman. Men who reported the highest level of economic stress were even more likely to oppose women's rights.

In addition to findings on an overall sense of loneliness and political sentiments, *State of American Men 2023* highlights the growing shift to prioritizing online life. It found that 48% of young men say their online lives are more rewarding than their offline ones. Additionally, an earlier Equipundo study on masculinities in gaming communities [found that](#) two-thirds of older gamers (ages 16 to 26) feel more like their "true self" in gaming spaces than in "real life" and that they feel like they fit in more in virtual gaming communities. They also feel people outside the gaming community fail to understand the genuine support system within it: Three in four gamers said that people who do not play video games do not understand how meaningful these experiences can be.

Despite the otherwise worrying statistics, the research did find an area of opportunity. About one in five men reported carrying out or participating in some advocacy or action on behalf of gender equality, racial justice, abortion rights, healthy masculinity, and related themes, even with limited efforts in such spaces to reach men as allies. These men - who already show some allyship - serve as a potential target audience for our initiative.

THE SCOPE OF YOUNG MEN'S CRISES

Beyond the *State of American Men 2023* report, extensive research informs us on the broader social contexts and challenges that men face, which compound the “crisis of connection” highlighted in our study. Today’s American men grapple with a uniquely heavy and rapidly changing lived experience, in which their societal expectations aren’t meeting their economic reality. Many men are unable to meet the traditional expectations of being a provider, are more isolated, and are connected but not connecting. In one [US national survey](#), over 70% of men and women believe that men need to financially provide for their family to be a good husband, yet the share of households where men earn more than women continues to decline.

These challenges compound and reinforce the rising crisis in men’s mental health, as evidenced by Equipundo’s finding that [44% of men](#) in the US had thoughts of suicide in the prior two weeks, with younger men (ages 18 to 23) showing the highest levels of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. These conditions lend themselves to explain another of Equipundo’s findings, that 53% of men agree that “in America today, men have it harder than women.”

These conditions and outcomes are not exclusive to the United States: [International Men and Gender Equality Survey \(IMAGES\)](#) data on gendered attitudes among men across 15 countries showed that the youngest generation of men is going backward on support for gender equality. [Two surveys](#) conducted by Women’s Aid in the United Kingdom found that among young people aged 7 to 25, boys are more likely than girls to be exposed to gendered hateful content on social media, and such exposure is linked to unhealthy attitudes toward relationships. Further, children exposed to misogynistic content on social media are five times as likely to view physically hurting another person as acceptable.

Much of the nascent research about gender online emphasizes the harms, and for good reason. We’re only just beginning to understand the scale and scope of issues with tech-facilitated gender-based violence and gendered disinformation, which can have enormous impacts on gendered social norms by providing new strength to misogynistic language and narratives that had been latent in society, [disseminating and normalizing them at scale](#). This research has set out to better understand the drivers behind these phenomena - how and where young men are learning about gender in digital spaces, what impact it’s having on them and their communities, and what opportunities exist to shape digital landscapes for health, safety, and equity.

Digital spaces and channels are important places in which young people socialize and interact with others, including friends and family, as well as public figures, such as online content creators. As well as enabling social connection, digital spaces provide access to entertainment, online multiplayer gaming, flows of information (of varying degrees of accuracy), and opportunities for learning and skill development. The research for this report sets out to better understand the gendered narratives and features on several key online platforms and spaces to help develop solutions that can nurture communities facilitating empathy, care, and better relationships on- and offline. Considering the porous edges of the manosphere and the blending of healthy and harmful content within current masculinity messaging, approaches to reaching young men where they are at must lead with curiosity and empathy in order to achieve the twin goals of addressing [radicalized misogyny](#) as well as young men’s disconnectedness and “crisis.”

METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

Online spaces and communities are part of the problem and the potential solution. They control men's attention, leverage their preferred ways of interacting through shoulder-to-shoulder activities, and speak to their interests - and often, to their confusion. We immersed ourselves in male-dominated online spaces to understand their potential for creating safe, inclusive digital communities. This included observing behaviors online and interviewing platform users, moderators, creators and experts to evaluate the desirability and feasibility of our prototypes. We conducted:

- **Digital scraping and AI analysis**, including AI analysis of over 40 hours of Twitch streams and over 1.5 million lines of chat logs and an analysis of 36,963 lines of Discord chat logs. Within each chosen context, we obtained data in one of two ways: based on convenience given our conduit or access point (e.g., invitations to particular Discord rooms) or based on a particular subgroup's use of relevant keywords.
- **15 interviews with men, moderators and streamers** within predominantly male online communities
- **Expert interviews** across the domains of media, mental health, parenting and workplace allyship
- **Context mapping** of 14 in-person, male dominated spaces
- **Analysis** of 60-plus relevant gray literature and journal articles
- **Over 100 hours spent observing** six online male-dominated digital channels

Working with open-source intelligence (OSINT) experts, we collected tens of thousands of exchanges between users on these platforms across specified channels. OSINT professionals write code to extract the data within certain time or volume parameters. The interactions were collected and cleaned, and the data were analyzed through a coding system that identified major topics of conversation, common challenges shared, engagement with the responses given and resources or names shared.

The data scraping consisted of three filters:

- **Platform selection** (Twitch, Discord, Reddit, YouTube, etc.): Many of these platforms link to each other and we focused on certain platforms primarily based on their popularity, activity, and reputation for harboring "advice" environments.*
- **Online context selection:** Group, channel, subreddit or streamer selection within the platform
- **Prompts design** for AI to ensure the right analysis including keyword analysis

In addition to the more intensive data scraping and analysis via these three filters, researchers also sought to gain a deeper understanding of the environment in which online misogyny thrives: the manosphere.

*Disclaimer: These platforms are almost entirely anonymous. This is a feature, not a bug and a large reason why men speak so freely while there. However, the anonymity makes it impossible to analyze the demographic of the men within the contexts.



ZOOMING IN ON FILTER 1: PLATFORMS

There has been a [well-documented decline](#) in face-to-face socialization, and even though researchers and psychologists have developed frameworks to try to build “social fitness” skills, it’s not in the spaces where men are - they’re online. The best way for us to understand the landscape was through observing behaviors online, reading and analyzing chats, and interviewing men and experts. We chose the following channels due to their scale, relevance to the target audience, and distinct features.



YOUTUBE

YouTube, founded in 2005, has grown into the world’s largest video-sharing platform. With over 2 billion logged-in monthly users, it offers a vast array of content spanning entertainment, education, lifestyle, gaming, and more. The platform’s algorithm tailors recommendations based on user activity, aiming to keep viewers engaged. Creators leverage YouTube to build communities, share expertise, and monetize content through ads, sponsorships, and memberships. Its influence extends globally, impacting trends, pop culture, and social discourse.



REDDIT

Known as “the front page of the internet”, Reddit is one of the most visited websites online, with an estimated 57 million people visiting daily, and over 130,000 communities. The US accounts for the biggest traffic share. Created in 2005 as part of a counterculture movement to the advertisement-based internet economy, Reddit stood for free-speech, free-data, zero ads, volunteerism, and empowered community members. The core purpose of the platform is to let ordinary people push content up.



TIKTOK

TikTok, launched in the United States in 2018, revolutionized the social media landscape with its innovative short-form videos, breaking away from traditional content formats. The platform serves as a creative hub, attracting a diverse range of contributors, and American men play a significant role in shaping its dynamic and engaging content.



DISCORD

Launched in 2015 to solve for a communication problem amongst gamers, Discord allows users to communicate via text, video calls, and voice chat through its mostly invitation-only “servers.” Discord exploded in 2020 as the pandemic pulled in a new and large user base far beyond its original gaming community. In 2023, an estimated 19 million servers were active, with Midjourney being its biggest community at about 18 million members. Servers can be private or public and created by anyone. Though “freemium” for most, the company’s business model is anchored on its subscriptions, games sales, and server boosting.



FANTASY LEAGUES

Fantasy leagues, pioneered in the 1960s, create immersive sports experiences for enthusiasts. Participants assemble virtual teams of real players, competing based on statistical performance in actual games. These leagues cover various sports like football, basketball, baseball, and more, drawing millions of players globally. Online platforms like ESPN Fantasy Sports, Yahoo Fantasy Sports, and Sleeper offer user-friendly interfaces for drafting players, managing teams, and engaging in competitive leagues. Participants strategize, trade players, and vie for championships, fostering community interaction and intense rivalries among players.



TWITCH

Launched in the United States in 2011, Twitch stands out as a gaming-centric platform, redefining live-streaming and community interaction. With over 30 million daily active users, it has become a powerhouse in the live streaming arena, attracting a significant audience of American men who are avid gamers. What sets Twitch apart is its real-time engagement during live broadcasts, creating a space for gaming content, esports, and discussions. American men actively contribute as both viewers and content creators, fostering a dynamic and interactive ecosystem.

ZOOMING IN ON FILTER 2: DIGITAL COMMUNITIES

FROM > 500 TO 3.4 MILLION USERS*

FIRST STEP SOLUTIONS

A Discord server dedicated to mental health

Created three years ago by a 16-year-old nursing student, this server caters to adolescents facing mental health challenges. Topics discussed include self-harm, depression and anxiety.

Nano-influencer: 2,000 users

r/CFB

A subreddit for college football fans

In the top 1% of Reddit communities and top 200 non-porn subreddit communities, this sub is for college football-related discussion. Tied to nostalgia and identity, the sub has users of a wide range of ages.

Macro-influencer: 3.4 million users

r/STAYATHOMEDADDIT

A subreddit for stay-at-home fathers

Created eight years ago by a stay-at-home dad, it's a space for dads to seek support for the lifestyle, challenges, and social stigma associated with stay-at-home parenting.

Nano-influencer: 8,700 users

NEXT GEN MEN

A Discord server dedicated to adolescent boys

Launched during the pandemic as a non-programmatic approach to gender-based violence prevention, it offers youth (grades 7 to 12) a supportive peer community as a buffer for mental health adversity.

Nano-influencer: 160-plus users

WOLFPACK

A Discord server dedicated to men's healing and support

Inspired by his own struggles with romantic rejection, the creator started the server to offer support and guidance to men seeking advice, wanting to vent, or needing to talk about dating.

Nano-influencer: 500-plus people

SONOKET

A Twitch stream that games and fosters friendship

In 2020, the stream's creator noticed most online communities were full of hate and decided to start a community that fosters respect.

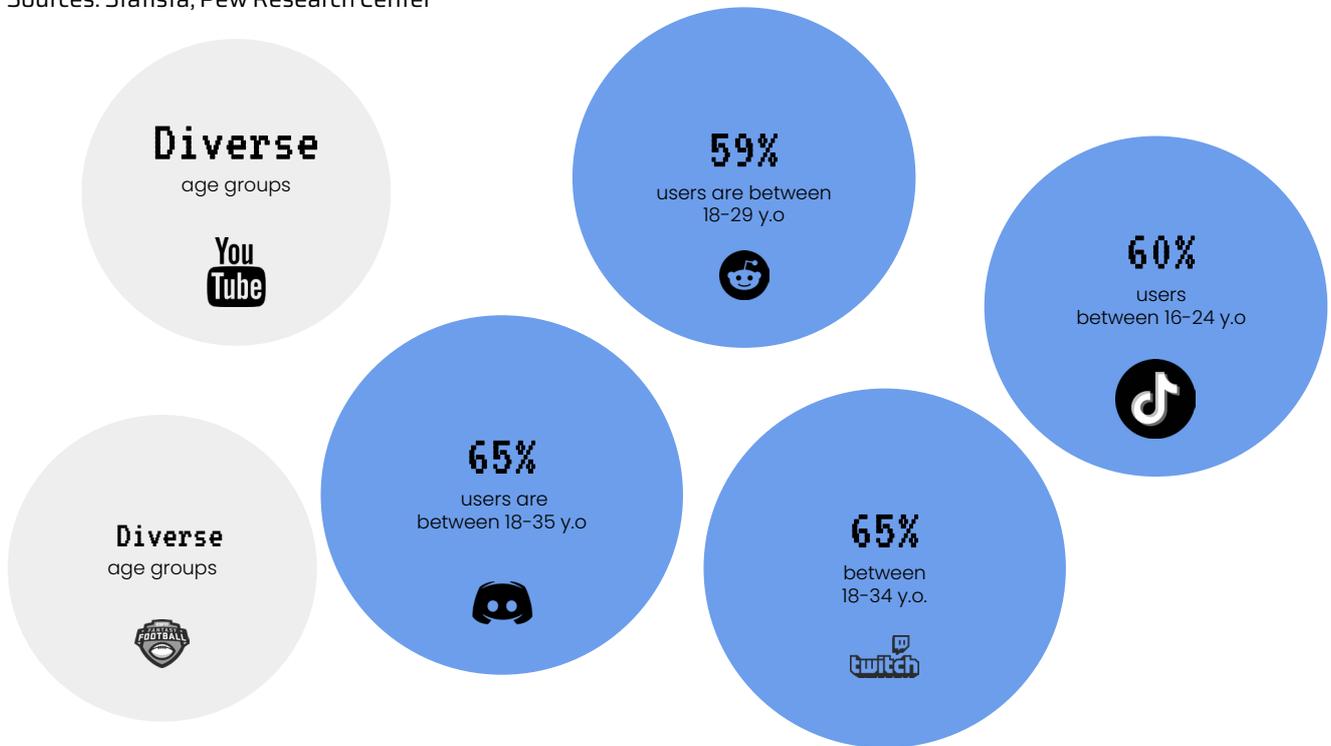
Nano-influencer: 6,500 followers

* Number of users as of drafting in June 2024

PLATFORM AUDIENCES

Skew towards younger audiences

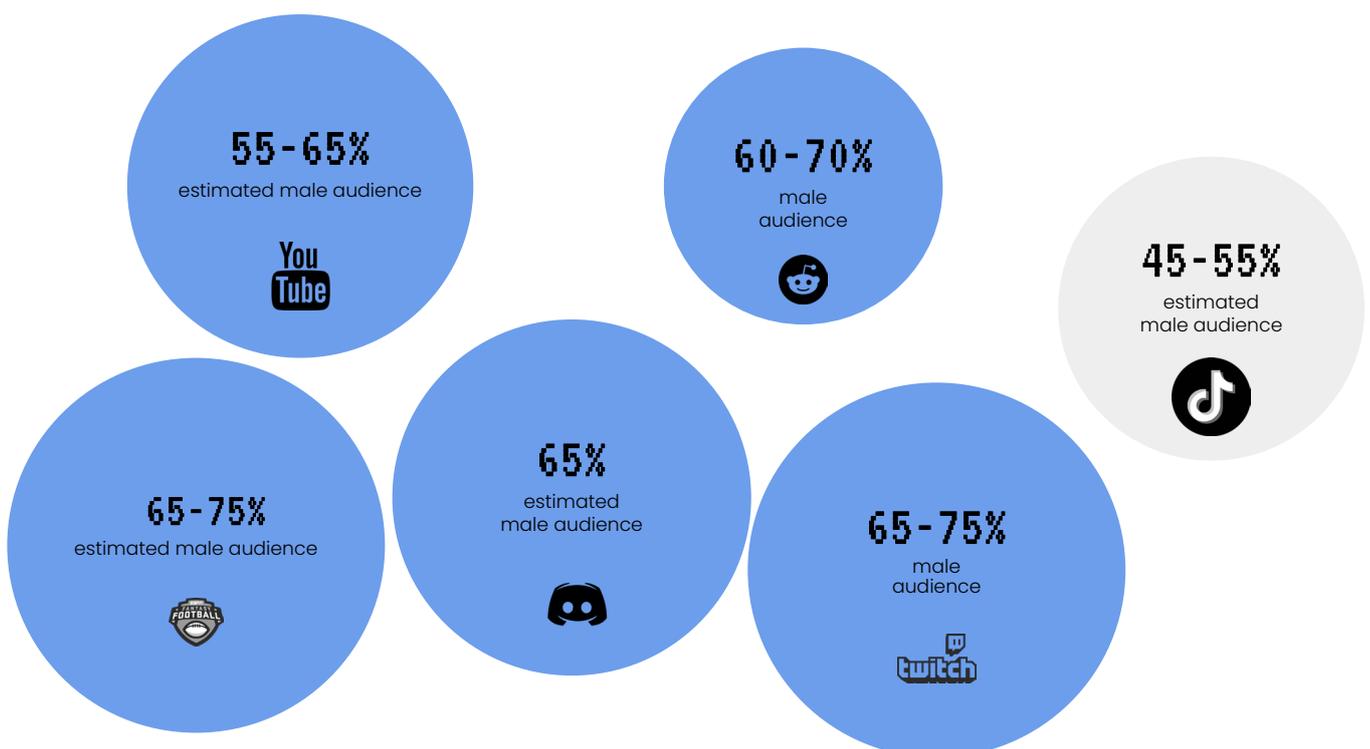
Sources: Statista, Pew Research Center



Primarily target male audiences

**Other demographic information not available for overall audience due to data privacy laws.*

Sources: Statista, Pew Research Center



UNDERSTANDING THE MANOSPHERE:

DIVING DEEPER



While misogyny predates the digital era, researchers point to the role of digital technologies in facilitating new and more virulent strains of hatred and violence directed at women. Referred to as “[networked](#)” and “[post-truth misogyny](#),” the mass circulation of anti-women and anti-feminist sentiments through online connectivity and scalability is [unprecedented](#). The “men’s rights” movement has been [expanding for some time](#), and social media and online communities offer a much larger audience. Digital media and gender scholar Debbie Ging [has mapped](#) the loose confederacy of interest groups that make up the so-called “manosphere,” identifying five primary hubs: men’s rights activists (MRAs); men going their own way (MGTOW); pick-up artists (PUAs); traditional Christian conservatives (TradCons); and gamer/geek culture (although unlike the other categories listed, only a subsection of the gamer/geek culture is part of the manosphere). Though there are internal differences and conflicts within and between the groups, each tends to abide by the red pill “philosophy,” or the idea of awakening men to feminism’s supposed misandry and brainwashing.



Manosphere communities can be thought of as a chain of interlinked but distinct groups, starting from extreme groups like incels (short for involuntary celibate) and inching toward more mainstream misogyny. Author Laura Bates [has tracked](#) the mobility of ideas from the manosphere, observing how its rhetoric and ideas are passed along a chain of interconnected ideas, gradually gaining a veil of normalization as they go. She says, “Each community can interact with the ones directly above or beneath it on the chain, thus maintaining the overall mobility of ideas, but insulating the higher



links from the public censure and criticism associated with those at the bottom.” Having more centralized figureheads who present slightly more sanitized versions of harmful ideologies can open the door for more fringe ideas to emerge in mainstream discourse.

THE MANOSPHERE’S METHODS: DISSECTING THE FORMULA

These content creators are capitalizing on algorithms that incentivize extreme or sensationalized rhetoric. In an attention economy where many profit models are driven by capturing viewers and eyeballs for as long as possible, research has emerged that demonstrates how algorithms meticulously curate and prioritize content to [maximize user engagement](#). The more attention-grabbing the content, the more likely it is to be promoted and shared, [creating a feedback loop](#) that perpetuates extreme viewpoints and sensationalism. Despite attempts at content moderation policies, these platforms have paid little attention to how incentives to encourage continued attention (and exposure to advertising) are structured into both the operation of algorithms and features that provide social rewards (e.g., likes). This neglect of the wider context and of the incentives that drive social media companies means that important entry points for tackling harm are being missed.

Content creators in the manosphere have perfected platform optimization tactics that engage young men, including search engine optimization. They reinforce the ideological talking points that resonate with trolls and others deeper in the manosphere while also packaging their messaging with a veneer of “respectable” debate or reason, thus avoiding the alienation of a more

mainstream audience. Influencers using strategic search engine optimization can capitalize on a well-intentioned search by a young man or a boy - for intimacy, a peer group, or information about a life need - in order to direct them to increasingly extreme content. **The challenge, then, is to understand that boys and young men step into these spaces often with good intentions and that our approaches must identify and respond to those developmental needs being met in online spaces.**

Emerging from the search for identity and purpose mentioned earlier in this report, the manosphere has successfully leveraged male pain points and digital spaces via strategic messaging that speaks to young men's lived challenges. By falling back on old gender stereotypes that provide solace in times of crisis, the manosphere has attracted vulnerable men, offering them direction, communities, and a pathway to success. Some of the vulnerabilities include:

- Men who are **isolated** and want to **belong to a community**
- Men thirsty for **definitions of success** and a roadmap to get there
- Men who feel **rejected** or have experienced **failure in their relationships** with women

Manosphere influencers construct a compelling story that frames contemporary social changes as a direct threat to the status and identity of young men using emotionally charged language and imagery designed to provoke fear, anger, and a sense of urgency, and they often accelerate indoctrination through immersive or interactive experiences. Following rules, norms, and visual cues, men understand what is expected of them - according to the manosphere.

Communities often viewed from the outside as dark, extreme, or violent can be seen from the perspective of a teenage boy as "fun," edgy, or provocative and create a sense of common purpose, belonging, recognition, or encouragement, **offering the following elements:**

1. EMOTIONAL VALIDATION

Leverage male insecurity and exploit weakness

e.g., a man thinking, "I was taught to be feminine, but women reject 'the nice guy.'"

Blame others and fuel resentment

e.g., a man thinking 'My school made me feminine, and I have an absent father figure and no reference point for what it means to be a man.'

2. ASPIRATIONAL OUTLOOKS

• **Offer role models and clear ideas of what to aspire to**

e.g., Hamza's "[Adonis School](#)" charges \$199 per month and offers instructional videos in "productivity" and "alpha male sex," the "get a girlfriend course," the "aesthetic body course," and the "make money online course."

• **Offer a clear path to success, step by step**

e.g., YouTube videos on "how to have sex in a masculine way," "how to be productive and make money online," or "how to improve your physique and health."

3. ACCOUNTABILITY TO A GROUP

• **Offer a community to keep you in check**

e.g., active groups on social media, and (paid) Adonis school members.

• **Create sense of progress through metrics**

e.g., a podcaster identifying behaviors as clearly associated with "feminine energy" or "masculine energy."

FINDINGS

UNDERSTANDING MEN'S BEHAVIOR AND REACHING THEM ONLINE

The intent of looking more closely at the manosphere is primarily to understand and reach men in order to provide care, connection, and (re)direction toward gender equality. To achieve this end, it is imperative to deepen our analysis of why men are engaging in manosphere spaces, what they're speaking about, and where opportunities for intervention exist. But what if the story of young men's online lives is more complicated than we think?

The simple and widely accepted narrative is that online lives and young men's gaming are sources of risk, harm, misogyny, racism, and violence - that harm is amplified algorithmically online. And as our research and that of many others affirms, there is no shortage of that. But in listening to young men, we see that the story is more complicated. They repeatedly told us about feeling connected and finding friendship online. How could we be looking at spaces of such deep and prevalent harm while so many young men told us they found

connection? In our *State of American Men 2023* survey, 76% of men said the internet allows them to connect with like-minded people they wouldn't meet otherwise.

WHAT ARE MEN TALKING ABOUT AND WHY?

Amidst the uncertain landscape of masculinity, young men have used online platforms to connect and seek answers. These are primary topics that manosphere influencers leverage to build their platforms. We looked at:

What questions are men seeking answers to?

What pains and fears are men expressing online?

What topics provide an opportunity for healthy engagement and redirection?

To dive into the manosphere is to spend hours reading these kinds of messages, threads and sites in which men openly discuss ways to manipulate women.

Source: [r/SelfImprovement](#)

6. Turn It Back On Her

Imagine this dialogue:

Her: *You're so into yourself (with a haughty look, turning away as if to refuse him)*

Him: *Me? I'm so into myself? (turns to her, gets closer to her face, raises his voice but smiling: it's a friendly counterattack) Look at you, with the slim fit biker leather jacket (reaches out to her scarf), the Italian scarf, the coiffed hair... (touches her hair) I think if there is anyone into himself around here that's not me (then pats her head as if to say "but nice try, kiddo")*

Her: *(lowers her eyes, smiles, she's happy of the compliments... And for being social out-powered)*

This is similar to an exchange that happened to me some time ago, and a little later we went back to my place.

I cannot re-run the interaction to test it, but I'm fairly confident this was the biggest turning point on the way to bed.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Dating is hard. To land a date requires skills in verbal/visual communication as well as emotional awareness, skills that men are often not taught by family, friends, or public education. Further, men may struggle to interpret romantic cues, pushing them to seek advice online. Men struggling with acute changes like divorce, breakups, or loss are also eager to find support.

SUCCESS AND SKILL-BUILDING

Being independent, setting goals, building wealth, and developing skills in hobbies (e.g., betting, home improvement, mechanics, or fishing) are avenues to feel accomplished and assuage uncertainty (or cope with change). Men are eager to seek online help to reach their goals and get practical tips and tricks.

ISOLATION AND DISTRESS

Mental health is a frequent concern across other topic areas that men gravitate to online. Sense of self-worth, loneliness, suicide, lack of purpose, depression, and discrimination are all topics that arise when men open up about how they feel. Reddit's r/MensLib (men's liberation) page, for example, has a Tuesday mental health check-in, and r/AskMen hosted a Friday megathread dedicated to helping men voice the reason and moments in which they have cried:

"I feel like I have just really deeply internalized this idea that I (especially as a man) have no value. My value is determined by what I can do for the people around me and right now that is nothing. This feels particularly true in relationship scenarios. I feel like I have spent all my relationships and dating life convincing other people that I'm worth something, but I never felt like anyone else did that with me." (From an [r/MensLib Tuesday mental health check-in](#))

"I was drunk, dancing crazy like never before, generally enjoying the time with my group of friends. Then, suddenly, I totally broke down and in a matter of seconds I started crying like an angry small kid. My bro was holding and consoling me all the way home for like 40 minutes (and it normally takes five minutes). Reason: few weeks before that, some rather big family stuff had happened, which made me sad for a few days but then I thought I got over it. I did not. And that night, it all came to me as well as other things." (From an [r/AskMen FAQ Friday on crying](#))

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Self-worth is highly tied to physical appearance and societal approval. Men see a path toward success and purpose in life by meeting societal and female expectations of what "handsome" looks like. Men turn to fashion and strength-building in attempts to increase their desirability. Often, manosphere influencers reinforce unachievable and unhealthy attitudes in the process, such as the importance of men being able to "physically dominate" women.

SEXUALITY

Sex is deeply tied to men's ideas of masculinity, and men want to learn to perform. Porn consumption can reinforce unrealistic performance expectations and spread misinformation, but it can also offer access to non-heteronormative sex practices, as spaces to talk, learn about, and question "mainstream" sex are scarce. Content creators in the manosphere and online spaces often focus on "getting laid" and beating pornography addiction in order to be a "real man."

FATHERHOOD

As research finds more men involved in caregiving - with more than [2 million stay-at-home fathers](#), as one example - fatherhood is another huge online community and space. There are many organizations and individuals [focusing on men's fatherhood and caregiving](#) from bloggers, individual authors, and activists to small and large organizations to university-based researchers to workplace-funded initiatives. But numerous factors are contributing to clustering, isolation, or other shortfalls in terms of connecting around their common cause.

Our analysis of this space online finds that millions of fathers vent, find connection, and seek and exchange advice. They express how they feel judged as dads, discuss what scares them about fatherhood, and seek resources and suggestions. Topics range from fears to general parenting skills to gender norms and beyond. Sample topics asked about include:

How can I save for college, and what financial instruments exist to plan?

What advice can be offered for kids' mental health challenges?

How can I foster reading skills in my kids?

HOW ARE MEN TALKING ONLINE?

Collaboration or initiatives in online spaces must reflect the language and tone that men connect with. Although topics may be serious, the language and the communication style and tone usually aren't. The primary tones found across multiple platforms are:

HUMOR AND BANTER	TikTok challenges, sports-based Discord servers and subreddits, joke-sharing on r/AskMen
CHALLENGE-BASED	Looksmaxxing on Discord, bodybuilding and wealth-building on YouTube, measuring progress in gyms, and competing in fantasy leagues
VENTING	YouTube comments and Reddit threads
STRAIGHT TALK	Prescriptive, clear pathways or answers offered by influencers
ASKING FOR HELP	Asking for emotional support and advice on Discord or Reddit

A Reddit post on success and skill-building (Source: [r/SelfImprovement](#))

92 **Eight months ago, I started self improvement and it changed my life**



Vent

Exactly 8 months ago I asked out a girl and got rejected. I don't know why it hurt so much but I decided to change my life. I know it sounds kind of corny, but this rejection was the catalyst for my life being better than it's ever had I immediately, after the break up went and did research on how I can improve myself physically mentally and spiritually although I was a Christian I was not very close to God so that is one of the first things I fixed. I also started going to the gym, at least four days a week mainly hitting heavy lifts, but also engaging in cardio like basketball and running, then I try to lock in on my skin care although this journey was not easy my skin still has some pimples. I think it's improved a lot. I just went online and looked for skin care routines until I found one that works for me. I think the last thing that helped me significantly was a brand called Dvyn Image that had bunch of good products that I tried that were mostly oriented for the face although the catalogs are incomplete they had some decent products. But what I can definitely say off this journey is that although these eight months were hard, my life has permanently changed for the better I feel better I look better and I'm definitely out of that girls league now thank you for self improvement and thank you for everyone in this group that inspired me to start this journey to become better I hope this post inspires you have a blessed and wonderful day.

A Reddit post on fatherhood (Source: [r/MensLib](#))

7.1k



Weird looks and comments when I take my son out.

Taking my boys out by myself has turned into a surreal experience. I've gotten women giving me weird looks before or under breath comments, but today was different. I was in a Dicks sports store with my 4 year old. He was just on the other side of the short 4 foot display with me plainly in sight. A woman came over and asked where his mommy was. I said that he was my son. She scowled at me and asked him again where his mommy was. He said at home. I went over and grabbed his hand shuffling him away from her. I repeated that he was my son. She left in a huff.

It's so weird, I've heard stories like this before, but I didn't think it would happen to me.

There is something wrong with society that a father gets questioned like this. I've posted before here about my troubles finding changing tables in men's rooms while my boys were in diapers. It's like we cannot accept that fathers could be out, taking care of their kids.

Have any of you guys had these kinds of issues with your kids while you were out?

WHO ARE MEN ASPIRING TO BE?

Our research and observation have led us to identify a series of performed - and ideal - male identities online. These shifting, and overlapping categories help us to understand some of the motivational schemas and narratives - as well as sectors of the internet - that exist for men online that any future initiative must be aware of.



GEEK MASCULINITY



MUSCLE MASCULINITY



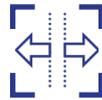
SPORTS MASCULINITY



DAD MASCULINITY



MAKER MASCULINITY



MASCULINITY "IN THE MIDDLE"



While being a "geek" may not be a *claimed identity*, being technically savvy, succeeding at gaming, having niche gadgets, or wearing unique styles certainly is. Being "in the know" and being able to debate or share arcane information on a subject can earn credibility in specific online spaces as a member of the "in-group."

Tone: Humor, banter, tech-jargon, challenge-based (competition, points accumulation)

Metrics: Points you win, followers you have, games you play



Masculinity in sports requires a deep understanding of the game's ethos and community. Competitiveness is not just about beating opponents but also involves strategic thinking, knowledge of professional sports, and coachability. Intergenerational bonding adds another layer to this masculinity, as fathers impart a profound "love for the game" to their children.

Tone: Humor, banter, challenge-based (competing and betting), sport-specific knowledge

Metrics: Games you win, games you watched, knowledge of sports history, bets won





Being strong is associated with a masculinity that protects, fights, and intimidates. How strong your body is communicates how powerful and potentially violent you can be. Although the manosphere has hijacked the positive elements of physical fitness toward more exploitative aims, there are still positive influencers that promote strength training as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Tone: Challenge-based (competing to have the best physique), venting (complaining about expectations), straight talk (clear instructions, pathways)

Metrics: Muscle mass, body fat percentage, beauty ratings



A smaller, but still meaningful, sector of the internet makes clear the association between masculinity and conquering the outdoors, surviving emergencies, protecting others, and building things. These activities encourage developing skills that are associated with survival and protection, themes and aspirations that often blend into other categories.

Tone: Skills-based, asking for help

Metrics: Furniture built, repairs made, money saved



There are multiple sides of “dad masculinity” online. There are vulnerable sides that demonstrate how men can transform in fatherhood, struggle with imposter syndrome, or worry about overly conforming to gender roles, not being emotionally expressive enough, or being able to financially provide. They get rewarded for their “dad reflexes” and being a # GirlDad or # dadprincess. Other sides, however, communicate the values of strength, defending children (with violence, if necessary), and reinforcing rigid gender expectations.

Tone: Ask for help, straight talk (there is way of doing things, a path to follow), humor + play (e.g., [r/DadReflexes](#))

Metrics: Congratulated by spouse, sees their teaching reflected in children’s behaviors

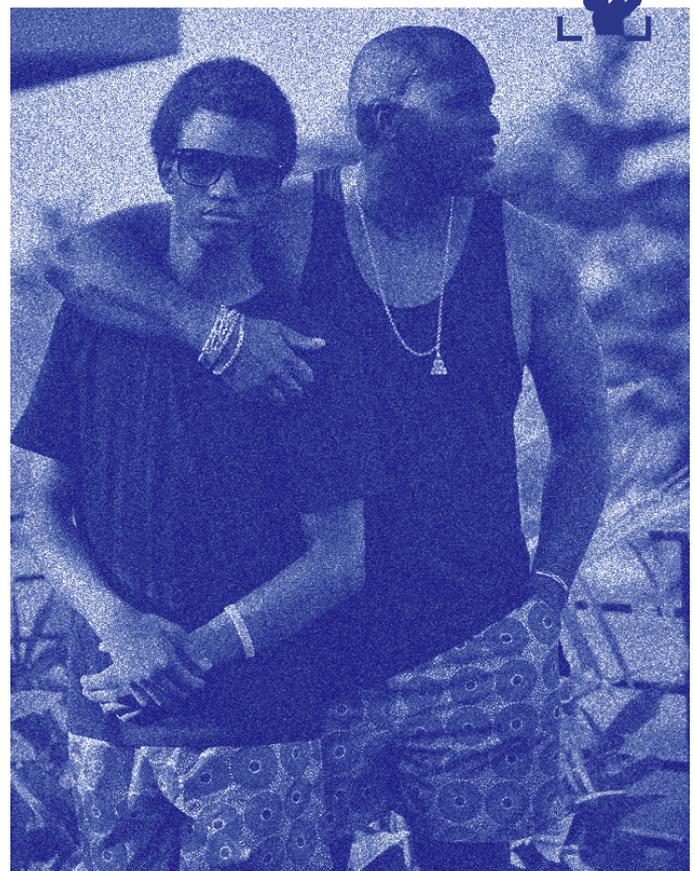


As previously noted, these categories of masculine identities and aspiration have edges and blend. Metrics of success shift constantly, and individual men rarely adhere to a single identity.

While it is difficult to identify what percentage of men online fall into a Frankensteined “men in the middle” category, it is no doubt very high. Strategies to engage men online must acknowledge the uniqueness with which men understand themselves and tailor these existing tropes/ narratives to their needs and interests.

Examples include:

- *A man who participates in the “looksmaxxing” community and believes the associated regimen will give him the [“Chad bod”](#) he needs to attract his next romantic partner. He is also eager to learn to be a loving father to his children. He has recently decided to join a men’s group at a nearby church to see if other fathers can help him improve his dad skills.*
- *An ex-“red piller” who wants to foster meaningful romantic relationships with women but also believes [wealthmaxxing](#) is necessary to attract them (and participates in wealthmaxxing bootcamps). He likes the clear “points system” in betting and investing and is focused on getting better at it. He believes if he improves his skills, he can start to make money from it, and in turn, be more romantically successful.*



HOTSPOTS:

MAPPING RELATIONSHIP JOURNEYS (AND OPPORTUNITIES) IN ONLINE SPACES

As our digital and physical worlds become more deeply intertwined, it can be an inaccurate – and misleading – binary to categorize relationships as either “online” or “in real life.” Adding nuance and specificity as to how relationships take place online is key.

Our research points to the need for digital social change strategies to understand not just the functions of different platforms but also the migration across platforms and possible degrees of social connection and intimacy. Each platform has its place: Users advance from one level of intimacy to another by migrating from one platform to another. For example, Reddit is commonly used to fish for potential friends, whereas Discord integrates them as part of one’s daily routine.



In particular, the platform – and sub-channels – on which the friendship takes place say more about the intimacy and depth of friendship. By recognizing people’s existing paths to friendship, we can support deeper connection.

Here are some examples of the degrees and kinds of intimacy across common platforms:

LESS INTIMATE

100% anonymous **Reddit, Twitch**

No personal information, comment log, online communities you are a part of

Voice **Discord**

No personal information, avatars, tags, profile information, voice

Geographical and personal information **Strava**

Exercise data, daily routine, physical location, self-inserted profile information

Sports affiliation and related activities **Fantasy leagues**

Competitive data, betting data, location, self-inserted profile information

Synchronous engagement **Twitch, Discord, Reddit**

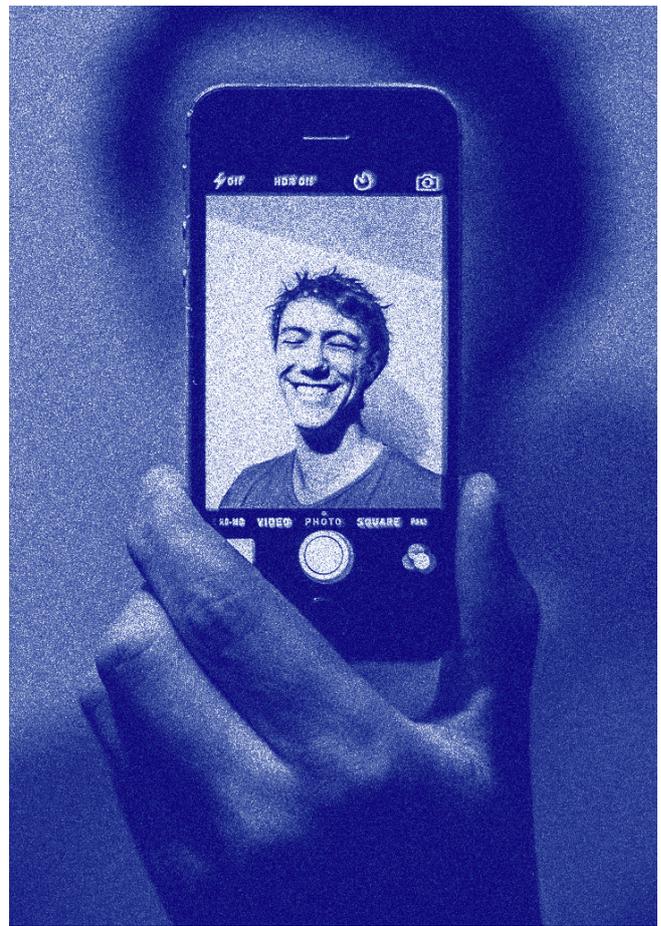
Immediately available to react

MORE INTIMATE

Friendship online often progresses across platforms, propelled by a desire for increasing closeness. Closeness is limited by concerns around the acceptability of wanting male friendship and a fear of rejection or ghosting.

The image below represents a pathway of typically observed friendship-building online.

Men are highly motivated to create friendships online, yet they often lack the capability or opportunity to develop closeness, build trust, tackle fears, progress from one step of the journey to the next, and ultimately reap the benefits of in-person encounters.



Online friendship-building journey



MAPPING RELATIONSHIP JOURNEYS IN ONLINE SPACES

OPPORTUNITY MAPPING

Despite being motivated to reduce their isolation, men lack the opportunity and capability to build flourishing networks of care and solidarity online. Many of the men we spoke to were motivated to deepen friendships and romantic relationships, but creators and platforms rarely build their communities to facilitate the growth of social support.

Online relationships are often discussed as surface-level compared to in-person networks, but psychologists emphasize that “weak ties” are just as important. Researchers [found](#) that “having a close friend or confidant is undeniably good for us, but...interactions with acquaintances—and even strangers—can also give our mental health a boost.”

Moderators, influencers, fantasy leagues, and fitness apps are crucial partners in building communities of solidarity, safety, and care through highlighting and rewarding supportive behaviors and relationships. To reverse the loneliness epidemic, we need to form positive relationships built on care and connection.

As we think about what positive or supportive relationships look like online, it is useful to think about what the [critical attributes](#) of positive relationships are:

- Trust and honesty
- Effective communication
- Shared values and interests
- Quality time together
- Support and encouragement
- Celebration of achievements

Online friendship-making is often intentional and informed and includes these attributes. We perceived men wanting to make friends online; they search for common interests and state their expectations. Yet once initial contact is made, passing from one stage to the next requires skills not all men have. The rules of in-person connection are less clear. Men do not know if they can approach a stranger to spark conversation or how to build a more in-depth conversation. Recent reflections on the frustrations of young men and women in online dating platforms [have affirmed this](#): As we spend more time online, we often lack the skills to turn a like or a swipe into a meaningful connection, whether intimate or for friendship.

“It can be very easy to get caught up and lose personal relationships because you’re chasing a broader, bigger audience, you can very easily fall into an impersonal social media reality. **But it also has the opportunity to be a beautiful space.** You can connect with the individual. **You can find a small niche in the communities.** You can mute the things that don’t make you happy.”

- 34-year-old man, Atlanta
Discord and Reddit user



ENABLE SAFER SPACES

Safe spaces have strong moderation, community support, and resources that enable men to seek peer-to-peer advice and emotional support. These spaces provide resources and venting opportunities around topics that are intimate, personal, and otherwise hard to talk about.

Strategy: Tap into the existing online and IRL (in real life) spaces frequented by men to support the scaffolding they need to be vulnerable, able to vent, and open to thoughtful feedback. Leverage anonymity, moderation systems, and onboarding processes that allow men to express themselves and cultivate impactful interactions.

Themes: Taboo topics like self-worth, sexuality, mental health

NUDGE INFLUENCERS

Influencers are the most visible role models of our time. They broadcast their lives, share their worldviews, sell everything under the sun, and create communities of followers. Influencers offer their opinions on everything from dating to dad-ing, and they run the gamut from harmful to hopeful. Influencers are highly attuned to what will draw the largest audiences.

Strategy: Train the teachers. Influencers are the educators of the 21st century and in some cases determine which behaviors are replicated by men and women.

Themes: Loneliness, romantic relationships, mental health, fatherhood, online lives

GIVE A WIN

All games leverage points systems plus strategy. Most games are cooperative and real-time, requiring coordination and communication. Even on Reddit, there is a value system that nudges certain behaviors. In the most exclusive communities, you need to have karma (points) to be a contributor. These are earned by posting.

Strategy: Create a pathway, lexicon, and community of role models that offer a clear path to success. Men appreciate a clear value system and visible opportunities to win and level up while socializing and strategizing.

Themes: Isolation, mental health, online lives

ENCOURAGE SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER CONNECTION BETWEEN MEN

Men value being part of a team, rooting for each other, competing against others, winning, building skills, and crafting strategy. These experiences pull men in and are replicated in online contexts.

Strategy: Men don't directly seek to "make friends"; instead, they play sports. The selling point is the primary activity, not the secondary one of making friends. Leverage spaces where men gather to compete, strategize, win, and work together toward a shared goal to enhance a valuable byproduct - friendships.

Themes: Friendships, fatherhood, romance, mental health

HELP WITH ROMANTIC SKILLS

Friends and relationships are no longer (just) made in person. They are made predominantly online. Men are flocking to the internet to find companions tailor made and on-demand. These can be paid companions via chat or AI-enabled chatbots that learn what you like and are available around the clock.

Strategy: Partner with online spaces where men are already testing dating and social skills with virtual girlfriends. Offer guides or experiences that help men practice relationship-building, dating, and sex in a risk-free environment.

Themes: Dating and romantic relationships, isolation and friendship, mental health, online lives

LEVERAGE IDENTITY EXPERIMENTATION

The internet is increasingly niche-ified. Visual markers of identity proliferate and help people understand their values, aspirations, and even how they want to interact, contributing to a hyper-flexible construction of identity. Many contexts offer people the opportunity to reform their identity, experiment with different identities, and define how they'd like to interact.

Strategy: Help men experiment with new and shifting identities by supporting them to play flexibly with their appearance and behavior in an experimental and shame free environment.

Themes: Success and skill-building, online lives, caregiving

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR ACTION

1. THE MAGNITUDE OF YOUNG MEN'S ONLINE DIETS EXCEEDS THEIR OFFLINE LIVES BY AT LEAST 1,000:

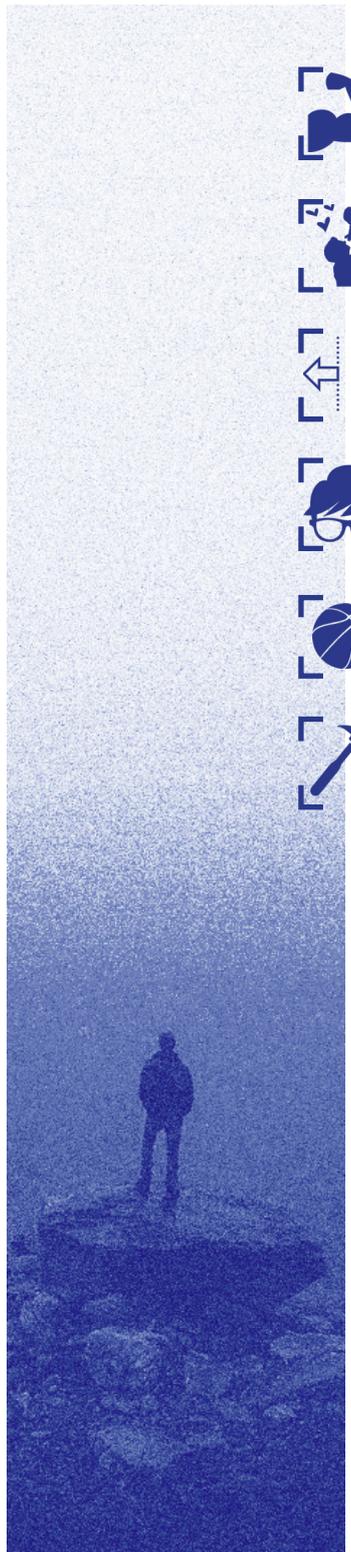
Online life for young men is often a bigger influence than their offline social spaces. YouTube, the mothership of online platforms, has 2 billion monthly active users (more than half to two-thirds of whom are men). Fantasy sports had [62.5 million users in North America](#), with more than two-thirds being men. By contrast, consider membership in the largest in-person groups where young men and boys gather: [7% of American men say they have been members of a college fraternity](#), and about [1 million boys and young men](#) are in Scouting America (formerly Boy Scouts of America), after years of steady decline in enrollment.

Any strategy that seeks to make social change around gender equity, misogyny, or men's well-being cannot overlook the necessity of engaging online, as our movements to end violence have largely done. Investment and initiatives that meet young men where they are - online - grow every year.

2. YOUNG MEN'S DESIRE FOR BELONGING IS EXPLOITED:

Previous research has made clear that boys and men are struggling. Connection, community, and a sense of purpose have all been strained and compounded by the competing messages on masculinity. In response, manosphere influencers have nailed the messaging and platform optimization to reach young men. These influencers frame contemporary social changes as a direct threat to men (e.g., "the system is rigged against you"), along with messages that emphasize hyper-independence and violent masculinity as answers to men's real pains. In effect, narratives pushed in the manosphere allow for disinformation campaigns and online misogyny to metastasize.

It's imperative to recognize why manosphere influencers have been effective, including their ability to define a strong "in-group" community as well as provide structure and simple answers. If our movements toward justice and equity don't identify how to frame our messages around, and provide concrete avenues to, belonging and care for men, men will continue to turn to these exploitative backlash actors. Important opportunities exist to leverage search engine optimization and "redirection" (e.g., buying ad space) to interrupt pathways into the most harmful manosphere spaces - and point young men to healthier ones.





3. DIVERSE STRATEGIES ARE NEEDED FOR DIVERSE PLATFORMS & THEIR LEADERS:

This research points to the incredible diversity of online platforms connected to the manosphere. In turn, it identifies the diversity of non-traditional “leaders” and “influencers” across these spaces. Of course, there are the highly public, visible content creators on TikTok or YouTube. However, there are those who hold immense influence online who are important to spotlight, like gaming streamers and moderators. These individuals regulate language, share resources, and cultivate culture.

The nature and functions of online platforms inform their culture – their levels of intimacy, their lexicons, the topics men seek to discuss, and the (masculine) identity-based aspirations of their users. Social change strategies online should hold paramount that approaches within one community or platform may not work in another. Similar to relationship-centered community organization strategies (in person), leaders like moderators and streamers must be engaged authentically via the ethos of “nothing about us without us” and not told *what* to do.

4. MEN WANT TO SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION & RELATIONSHIP SKILLS:

Amidst our research with men on the flow of users between online platforms and the relationship journeys outlined in this paper, it is clear that men often lack the essential relationship skills needed to thrive and connect. Dating and friendship are clear topics that men crave information and companionship around – whether the subject be how to build a dating profile, understanding what a prospective partner will find attractive, or how to ask a potential friend to hang out.

Across the continuum of these online relationship “steps” are numerous opportunities to support and teach, building on young men’s positive and healthy desires to connect and find friendships, identity, and purpose. A great deal of online communities and their leaders (moderators, streamers) outlined in this report have shown interest in collaboration. This report suggests working with them to co-create tools and leverage their influence to support skill development and offline connectedness. Rather than only calling out harm – which we must – there is an urgent opportunity to call young men into their best, connected selves.

Harmful masculine norms that can be woven into every aspect of men’s and boys’ lives – family life, schools, sports, and other community spaces – are ballooning online, depriving young men of more caring alternatives and leading to backsliding on feminist progress. To make further strides toward full equality and human rights for women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, men’s commitment to equality is paramount and cannot be considered a given. We must build and support pathways for men and boys to confidently determine their identities as caring, emotionally connected, cooperative people – for the good of all.

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FUTURE
WITHOUT VIOLENCE™