

# What Parents Should to Protect their Kids and Youth Online

## Online Misogyny: The Manosphere

### Abstract

Online misogyny has evolved into a pervasive digital crisis, amplified by social media algorithms that can radicalize users in as little as 23 minutes. As of 2026, researchers and international agencies like [UN Women](#) have identified it as a critical threat to gender equality, characterized by the rise of the "manosphere" and technology-facilitated violence.

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for the



## ONLINE MISOGYNY: THE “MANOSPHERE”

### EXTREMIST DIGITAL SEXISM WITH DANGEROUS REAL-WORLD CONSEQUENCES

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<https://humanrights.ca/story/online-misogyny-manosphere>

A growing number of men spread hateful ideas about women, trans and nonbinary folks online. Some internet communities even encourage and celebrate gender-based violence. How did we get here? Why do some men and boys get drawn into – and even seek out – extremist influencers and groups?

#### WHAT IS THE MANOSPHERE?

The "manosphere" refers to a wide variety of men's groups operating on the internet and offline. Many describe themselves as fighting against progressive (or "woke") ideas about gender equality. Manosphere influencers often assert the unfounded idea that men are naturally dominant. They distort biology and evolution to argue that restrictive gender norms are "natural."<sup>[1]</sup>

Extremism watchdog groups call this set of ideas "male supremacy."<sup>[2]</sup> Like white supremacy, male supremacy appeals to men who feel alienated in a changing world. Manosphere influencers promise men support and meaning. But they deny rights and respect to women, trans and nonbinary people. They also advance a narrow idea of masculinity that puts harmful limits on what it means to be a man.

These sexist attitudes can lead to sexual harassment and abuse. At their worst, manosphere groups promote gender-based violence and celebrate mass murder. In recent years, the manosphere has been growing more popular and more radical.<sup>[3]</sup> The Canadian Security Intelligence Service now identifies violent misogyny as a form of ideological extremism.<sup>[4]</sup> In 2020, a young man was – for the first time in Canada – charged with terrorism in a violent attack targeting women.<sup>[5]</sup>

But manosphere influencers and believers aren't just weird cultural outsiders. Many of the sexist beliefs that motivate them are all too common in modern society. The manosphere takes everyday biases and magnifies them to misogynist extremes.

#### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “SEXISM” AND “MISOGYNY”?

**SEXISM:** The idea that women, trans and nonbinary folks are inherently inferior to cisgender men.

**MISOGYNY:** Hateful or controlling attitudes toward women, trans and nonbinary folks, especially as expressed in harmful prejudices, barriers and behaviours.

## WHAT MOTIVATES THE MANOSPHERE?

Sexist ideas and organized male bigotry are nothing new. The fight for gender equity has faced backlash from men's rights activists for decades. They often draw on very real concerns:

Changes in the global economy have reduced the security and availability of many traditionally "manly" jobs.

Gains in gender equality and 2SLGBTQI+ rights are challenging and changing traditional ideas about gender roles. Some men find these shifts unsettling. They are dealing with new social expectations. They are being asked to share power and privilege for the first time.

Men have high (and rising) rates of mental health problems, including loneliness, depression and suicide.

These are all complex issues. They result from decades of political, economic and technological change. But the manosphere blames them all on women.

These groups share a fixation on women and feminism as the cause of men's personal and social problems. Historian Michael Kimmel calls this emotional reaction "aggrieved entitlement."<sup>[7]</sup> It happens when people with power and privilege see improvements in equality and inclusiveness as a loss of status and thus a personal attack on themselves.

Male supremacist ideas circulate widely online. Memes about taking the "red pill" are very common. They refer to the choice Morpheus offers Neo in the film *The Matrix*. It often implies that learning male supremacist ideas (being "red-pilled") will wake you up to the feminine forces secretly oppressing men.

The common claim that there's a "war on men" ignores most of the social, economic and political forces that affect everyone's lives, regardless of gender. It also ignores the unequal power and privilege men still enjoy around the world. It amounts to an unfounded conspiracy theory.

Seemingly very different manosphere groups – such as pick-up artists and misogynist incels – ultimately share similarly misogynist beliefs.

## PICK-UP ARTISTS AND "HUSTLE BROS"

The pick-up artist (PUA) world is sometimes called the "seduction community." It includes influencers, companies and forums that teach men how to meet, manipulate and have sex with women. Their tactics include emotional manipulation and physical coercion. Many tacitly encourage date rape and sexual assault.

Through the late 2010s, Roosh V was one of the most famous PUAs in the world. He self-published a series of sexual tourism books that have been called "guides for rape."<sup>[8]</sup> His internet forum, *Return of Kings*, was rife with misogyny, racism and antisemitism. Roosh made headlines in 2015 when he wrote an article about legalizing sexual assault.

Pick-up artists have given way to "hustle bros" in recent years. These influencers combine misogynist relationship advice with get-rich-quick schemes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Andrew Tate emerged as the latest face of the "hustle bro" manosphere. He was kicked off TikTok, YouTube and other platforms for advocating violence against women. Regardless, videos of him have racked up billions of views. Tate performs and sells a model of hyper-macho masculinity. His version of male supremacy emphasizes violence, wealth and competitiveness.

Like Roosh and other PUAs, Tate expresses outright hostility towards women. He openly identifies as a misogynist.<sup>[10]</sup> He denies women's agency and humanity. He advocates violence against women and downplays the seriousness of sexual assault.<sup>[11]</sup> In 2022, Romanian police arrested Tate for human trafficking, sexual assault and exploiting women to make pornography.<sup>[12]</sup> He's not alone in being accused of gendered criminal acts. Pick-up artists have been convicted for illegally filming women, rape and threatening women with violence and murder.

These guys literally make money by taking advantage of the insecurity and inexperience of young men. They sell subscriptions, courses and products. Roosh sold books and workshops. Tate is even more aggressive in exploiting his followers for profit. He created a mentorship site to collect expensive subscription fees. It operates much like a pyramid scheme, rewarding members for recruiting new members.<sup>[13]</sup>

The "hustle bro" approach to life turns other men into opponents and women into objects. Influencers discourage men from making meaningful social connections and developing healthy emotional lives. Instead, they promote a macho myth of silence and aggression. This can make many of the personal problems that draw men to the manosphere even worse.

The manosphere claims to provide men with tools for professional and sexual success. But the ideas they offer are damaging for both men and the women they treat as targets for conquest and abuse.

## MISOGYNIST INCELS

Incel culture evolved in reaction to the pick-up artist community. One of the largest early incel forums (since shut down) was PUAhate.com. PUAs believe that learning special techniques will lead to more sexual conquests. In contrast, incels see themselves as doomed to loneliness and misery. This has made incel culture distinctively hateful.

The word "**incel**" is a contraction of "**involuntary celibate**." Incels are almost exclusively straight men who have been unsuccessful in finding relationships with women. Many of them discover incel forums and websites while seeking support for their feelings of sadness and alienation. From there, they are drawn into a world of despair and anger.

Incel culture is violently antifeminist and misogynist. Incels often describe women as subhuman objects of desire who are hated and resented because – incels claim – feminism has given women power over sex and romance.

Many incels identify as "black-pilled," an intensification of the "red pill" metaphor. They believe that sexual and romantic attraction is purely physical and determined by genetics. And they see themselves as doomed to permanent solitude by their physical appearance. This perspective leads them to feel desperate, inferior and victimized. They often express this in abusive misogynistic rants and violent revenge fantasies online.<sup>[14]</sup>

Some incels look to their community for mutual support, but many are very cruel to one another. Incel forum comments often include personal attacks and insults. Members routinely encourage one another to die by suicide. And many posts and comments express a desire for revenge against women and society in the form of widespread rape and murder.

A small minority of incels have acted on these violent ideas. Self-identified incels have killed more than 50 people in Canada and the United States since 2014.<sup>[15]</sup> There have been at least four incidents of incel murder in Canada. The deadliest was the 2018 "van attack" in Toronto that killed eight women and two men. Many of these murderers explicitly call for a violent incel uprising. They

also identify previous incel mass murderers as inspiration. The perpetrators are routinely praised on incel forums and referred to as “saints” to be emulated.

## RECRUITMENT AND RADICALIZATION

Few men set out to become hateful misogynists. They often discover manosphere groups online because they’re looking for help and community. But the algorithms that determine what we see on social media platforms can present users with more and more radical content. Men just looking for support can start encountering increasingly extreme ideas.

It doesn’t take much for someone looking for answers or a sense of belonging to get drawn in. Men are pushed toward fringe groups when they feel rejected and excluded by their peers and mainstream society. Being welcomed and validated by the manosphere is a powerful draw that can set men on the road to radicalization.

The manosphere also actively recruits vulnerable young men. The terms “red pilling” and “black pilling” describe the practice of introducing newcomers to extremist ideas. Male supremacists groom and recruit new followers online, including on bodybuilding forums and gaming livestreams.

Manosphere influencers offer impressive-sounding pseudoscientific and mythic support for their beliefs. They can be compelling and charismatic. Their conspiratorial messages try to turn feelings of sadness and confusion into anger and aggression. Their logic and solutions are built on the denial of the rights and humanity of women, trans and nonbinary folks. This can lead men to commit harassment, abuse and violence.

## ESCAPING THE MANOSPHERE

People do leave these communities, but often with difficulty. In April 2023, a long-time moderator on an incel forum announced he was resigning his role because he had a girlfriend. The response from the group – his supposed peers – was furious.[\[16\]](#)

At least two Reddit forums – r/IncelExit and r/ExRedPill – support men leaving the manosphere. Former members offer support and conversation to men questioning their misogynist worldviews.[\[17\]](#) Twitch streamers and YouTubers who challenge “Red Pill” myths and beliefs have also offered some men a route out of radicalization.[\[18\]](#) The messenger matters when it comes to talking about identity and misogyny. Former misogynists and other men could and should play an important role in conversations about masculinity, equality and wellbeing.

Researchers have called for a variety of regulatory and technical improvements to reduce the reach and harmfulness of radical, hateful internet content. Simply banning users who engage in hate speech – deplatforming – has been shown to reduce their reach. YouTube adjusted its algorithms in 2019 to reduce radicalization, to mixed success.[\[19\]](#) And all social platforms should offer human-rights-affirming content policies supported by robust reporting and blocking tools.

Preventive interventions include school programs addressing gender identities and healthy relationships. These allow boys and young men to explore and express their feelings and experience about what kinds of men they want to grow up to be. They can work through questions, assumptions and myths about masculinity and gender.

Taking action on male supremacy also includes resisting everyday acts of misogyny. Much of male supremacy is different in intensity but not in kind from everyday sexism in Canada. Many popular influencers and pundits sound very similar to the PUA and incel communities when they talk about a strictly defined gender hierarchy based on male dominance. Challenging sexist assumptions

helps us recognize and welcome a wider variety of gender and sexual identities. This includes the many and varied ways to be a man.

## FREEDOM FROM MISOGYNY

The message of male supremacy ranges from dehumanizing objectification to hate speech intended to repress and attack women, trans and nonbinary people. Some men who believe these messages commit crimes as serious as mass murder. Even when things don't go that far, the false belief that men are inherently superior and dominant leads to everyday harassment and violence. The actions and ideas of the manosphere constrain and threaten women's lives.[20]

Male supremacist ideas also harm the men who believe them. Men today suffer from an increasing burden of mental illness, including depression and anxiety. Many young men are insecure and lonely but unsure how to ask for help or work through their experiences. The rigid masculine values championed in the manosphere demand they stay independent and stoic at all costs. This leaves them isolated and suffering in silence.[21]

There are alternatives to the manosphere's bleak and harmful vision of human life as constant competition. The feminist challenge to women's subordination is also an opportunity for men. As men, we can find freedom, community and identity by escaping the gender stereotypes and traditions that limit us. Men don't have to find agency and meaning by dehumanizing and controlling others.

## RESOURCES

Various programs operate in Canada to offer boys and men tools to develop a healthy sense of self and a good relationship to gender identity. Parents and teachers can also find reports and how-to guides for talking about gender and misogyny.

- Next Gen Men: <https://www.nextgenmen.ca/>
- WiseGuyz: <https://www.centreforsexuality.ca/programs-services/wiseguyz/>
- MANifest change: <https://www.manifestchange.ca/>
- Healthy Relationships for Youth: <https://awrcsasa.ca/prevention-education/healthy-relationships-for-youth-hry-program/>
- Empreinte – Agir ensemble contre les agressions à caractère sexuel : <http://www.programmeempreinte.com/youth-workshops/>
- White Ribbon Campaign: <https://www.whiteribbon.ca/>
- Moose Hide Campaign: <https://moosehidecampaign.ca/>

## THE MANOSPHERE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Boys and young men are the target of the Manosphere, but gender-based violence, hate, and discrimination against vulnerable communities have a negative impact on the mental health and well-being of everyone.

### **Mental Health Commission of Canada**

<https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/fact-sheets/public/the-manosphere-and-mental-health/>

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Less than a year ago, a survey conducted by the gender-based violence prevention organization White Ribbon and pollster Angus Reid found the majority of Canadians were completely unfamiliar with the “**manosphere**”— a digital space that watchdogs say is being used to promote hateful and misogynistic views amongst young men.

Likely the number of Canadians who are aware of the manosphere is higher now, thanks, largely, to the widely viewed *Adolescence*, a critically acclaimed British crime drama that aired on *Netflix* in early 2025 and sparked a conversation about the manosphere.

Despite this, there are still significant gaps in understanding this unwieldy space and the impact that some of the discourse spread within it might have on gender-based violence, women, 2SLGBTQI+ people, and other vulnerable communities, and the well-being of boys and young men.

### WHAT IS THE MANOSPHERE?

The “manosphere” is the name given to a large, but loose, network of men’s groups that communicate online via these tools and spaces:

- Podcasts and webcasts
- Blogs
- Websites
- Online forums, such as Reddit
- Gaming platforms
- Social media, including (but not limited to) TikTok and Instagram

There’s no one philosophy uniting the manosphere. Broadly speaking, most of the content creators and influencers trade in a combination of anti-feminism, misogyny, and a distorted view of self-improvement rooted in hypermasculinity, dominance, and control.

While a few groups frame their content as serious reflections on masculinity, much of the manosphere thrives on sensationalism – selling male victimhood and hyper-masculine posturing as both identity and profit model.

Since digital media is an attention economy, influencers are incentivized to be more extreme to increase engagement. Many influencers use abusive language and promote misogyny, anti-2SLGBTQI+ rhetoric, transphobia, and hatred of refugee and other newcomer communities.

## HOW DID THE MANOSPHERE START?

The [origins](#) of the manosphere have been traced back to men’s rights movements established in the 1970s and 1980s as part of the backlash against Second Wave Feminism that saw women make some gains. Many members of men’s rights groups singled out feminism as the main cause of a range of social problems.

## THE BACKLASH GOES DIGITAL

Men’s rights groups eventually migrated online and were joined by others, including fathers’ rights groups, pick-up artists, and incels (involuntary celibates) and, by 2009, it was being called the “manosphere.” Compared with the 1970s backlash that used face-to-face meetings, print media, radio, and television to make its argument, the manosphere has a much wider reach, especially with young people, many of whom own tablets and smartphones and have unsupervised access to the internet.

“It’s the reach, but it’s also the private aspect of digital media, so parents don’t necessarily know what their kids are doing online,” says Kyle Ganson, Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto’s Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work.

Since the algorithms are built around engagement and play a major role in what we see on digital media, Ganson says you can very quickly get “thrown down a rabbit hole without really intending to.”

Since the manosphere can be big business, its always targeting new members, no matter what their age. **“We’ve seen reports that show boys getting involved in these kinds of groups at ages younger than 14, so we’re talking about eight- to 14-year-olds who are already active members,”** says Humberto Carolo, White Ribbon Chief Executive Officer.

## THE MANOSPHERE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Online discussions of masculinity don’t inherently pose risks to mental health, but some of the specific sites and content can have an impact on the well-being of boys and young men. In addition, there are negative mental health outcomes felt in communities impacted by increased discrimination, stigmatization, and gender-based violence that is encouraged in some parts of the manosphere.

Here are some of the negative mental health outcomes that experts are concerned about.

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### Body Dysmorphia and Self-Harm

The “looksmaxing” community is a corner of the manosphere that sees six million users per month visit looksmaxing sites in the hopes that they’ll get tips on how to become better-looking, more masculine – as defined by other users, who also rate photos of men to determine their attractiveness. Recent [research](#) at Dalhousie University has found that the looksmax community “subjects users to masculine demoralization, wherein they are seen as failed men and encouraged to self-harm.”

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### RAGE AND AGGRESSION

A certain amount of rage is built into some discourses found in the manosphere. “Young people start believing that 2SLGBTQI+ people, women, newcomers, and refugee communities are to



blame for men’s challenges and problems,” says Humberto Carolo. “They start to think they’ve been left behind and don’t have access to resources, and a rage starts to emerge.”

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## VIOLENCE AGAINST VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Because the algorithm rewards engagement—both good and bad—and content producers are trying to grow an audience for profit; some influencers slowly drift into extreme territory. Dehumanization, hate speech, and violent rhetoric aren’t uncommon.

There’s plenty of concern that some young men and boys are radicalized and prompted to violent actions by what they see and hear. In 2018, a 25-year-old man, inspired by an online misogynistic community, posted that the “Incel rebellion had begun” before he used a van to run over pedestrians on a sidewalk in Toronto’s North York. Ten died; 16 were injured.

Gender-based violence, hate, and discrimination against vulnerable communities have a negative impact on the mental health and well-being of everyone. Negative content can lead to serious ramifications.

## HARM PREVENTION: WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE

Learning more about the manosphere, including some of the language commonly used, can help parents identify potential problems early.

A good introduction is the “My Friend, Max Hate” [campaign](#) launched earlier this year by White Ribbon. It contains an introductory glossary of words from the manosphere, including terms like “red pilling,” and “hustle bros”. Max Hate is also on [TikTok](#).

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights has an [excellent primer](#) on the manosphere.

- Parents, families, educators, guardians, and all role models can help young people navigate digital media by having open and honest conversations and teaching them media literacy, says Kyle Ganson. Here are a few of Ganson’s concrete tips:
- Explain to kids that social media is just a very small snippet of what the real world is actually like.
- Teach them how to *unfollow* and *unlike* particular things to train the algorithm to be more attuned to what they actually want.
- Instead of making it about oversight, make it more like going on a journey with them that you can help navigate, Ganson says. “Remember they’re trying to figure out their place in the world, their identity and fit in with their peers, so not stigmatizing or shaming them is really important.”
- One guideline Ganson suggests is a “no screens in the bedroom rule.” If it’s used in an open space like the living room, it’s a little less private. It will also curb tech-induced sleep disorders.
- Concerned parents should consider joining other parents in the friend group and talking about setting social media rules and boundaries as a group.
- “I think the other thing is actively promoting what you want your kids to do,” says Ganson. “So that means, for parents of young boys, how do you teach them the values of manhood and masculinity? Ultimately, kids learn by viewing. They learn by seeing their parents and other male figures in their lives.”

And that falls to more than just parents, says White Ribbon's Humberto Carolo.

**“We need men, in particular, to speak out against this so that we help to drown these hateful ideologies and provide young men with good examples of what it means to be supportive and what it means to live healthy masculinities,” says Carolo.**

**“We need examples for how to open up and talk to those around us about our issues and deal with our emotions in healthier ways.**