

What is misogyny?

Misogyny is a form of sexism that is defined by hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women or girls. It can involve objectifying, threatening, harassing, belittling, controlling, humiliating or abusing women. It can also involve discrimination, by viewing and treating women as less competent than men.

How is misogyny fueled online?

It's almost impossible to use the internet today without being exposed to abusive or harmful content. In fact, it takes less than 3 minutes for a new account, set up with a new email address and fresh smartphone cache, to be recommended harmful content on TikTok.



Once some of this content is interacted with (by pausing to view the video, liking or sharing), the algorithm will begin to show related harmful content to a user every 39 seconds. Misogyny has always existed, but now that algorithms are flooding people's feeds with these harmful ideas, it's becoming hard to recognise that such behaviour isn't normal or okay.

This flood of online misogyny has its own name: the 'manosphere'. It's a term for the online community dominated by misogynistic views that promote male supremacy, traditional gender roles and violence against women and girls.





There are different groups of men within the manosphere, such as MRAs (Men's Right's Activists), Incels (Involuntary Celibates), PUAs (pick up artists) and MGTOWs (Men Going Their Own Way). These groups all tend to use similar language and 'code words' to describe men and women:

- **Alpha males (often referred to in a dismissive way as 'Chads')** represent masculinity, success, power and attractiveness. They are the ideal that every man strives to be—but many in the manosphere believe this is purely a result of genetics instead of hard work. This creates a sense of bitterness and envy toward men who supposedly 'have it easy'.
- **'Stacys'** are seen as the beautiful, but shallow and unintelligent, girlfriends of 'Chads'. This stereotype fosters intense hatred toward women, as men in the manosphere blame their rejections and failures on all women being shallow and fickle.
- **Beta males** are considered to be kind, supportive and passive, and therefore less 'desirable' to women. Many comments about beta males in the manosphere suggest a kind of transaction between men and women—that if men are kind and friendly, women should repay them with sex. When this inevitably doesn't happen, anger, hatred and threats are often expressed toward women as a whole.
- **Sigma males** are 'lone wolves' who refuse to buy into the norms of society, rejecting the Chads and Stacys who try to establish the social hierarchy. Many interpretations of how to become a sigma male involve rejecting the 'control' of women, which can lead to violent attitudes and behaviours against them.

'Taking the blue pill' refers to 'weak' men who are not part of the manosphere. The 'red pill' refers to accepting the 'truth' about the world; that feminism is manipulating society and emasculating men. The 'black pill' suggests an even more harmful 'truth'—that success is only available to attractive, masculine men, and men who are 'genetically inferior' are doomed to be alone and powerless.

This can lead to the development of violent attitudes and behaviours toward women, as these men blame women and feminism for their perceived failures. This ideology is often cited by men who threaten or commit extreme acts of violence (such as Elliot Rodger, who killed six people and injured 14 others in his self-proclaimed "War on Women" in 2014, or Jake Davison, who killed five people in 2021 after previously being referred to the Prevent scheme for his participation in incel-related online forums).



Why is the manosphere so engaging?

Many researchers argue it's because of the way it is fed to us: with memes, jokes, or genuine 'self-help' content disguising attitudes that are deeply harmful. This makes the damaging content easier to accept and believe.

Misogynistic influencers may also speak to real anxieties felt by boys and men today, including financial instability, job insecurity, changing expectations of masculinity, difficulty in forming and maintaining relationships, mental health challenges and increasing male suicide rates.

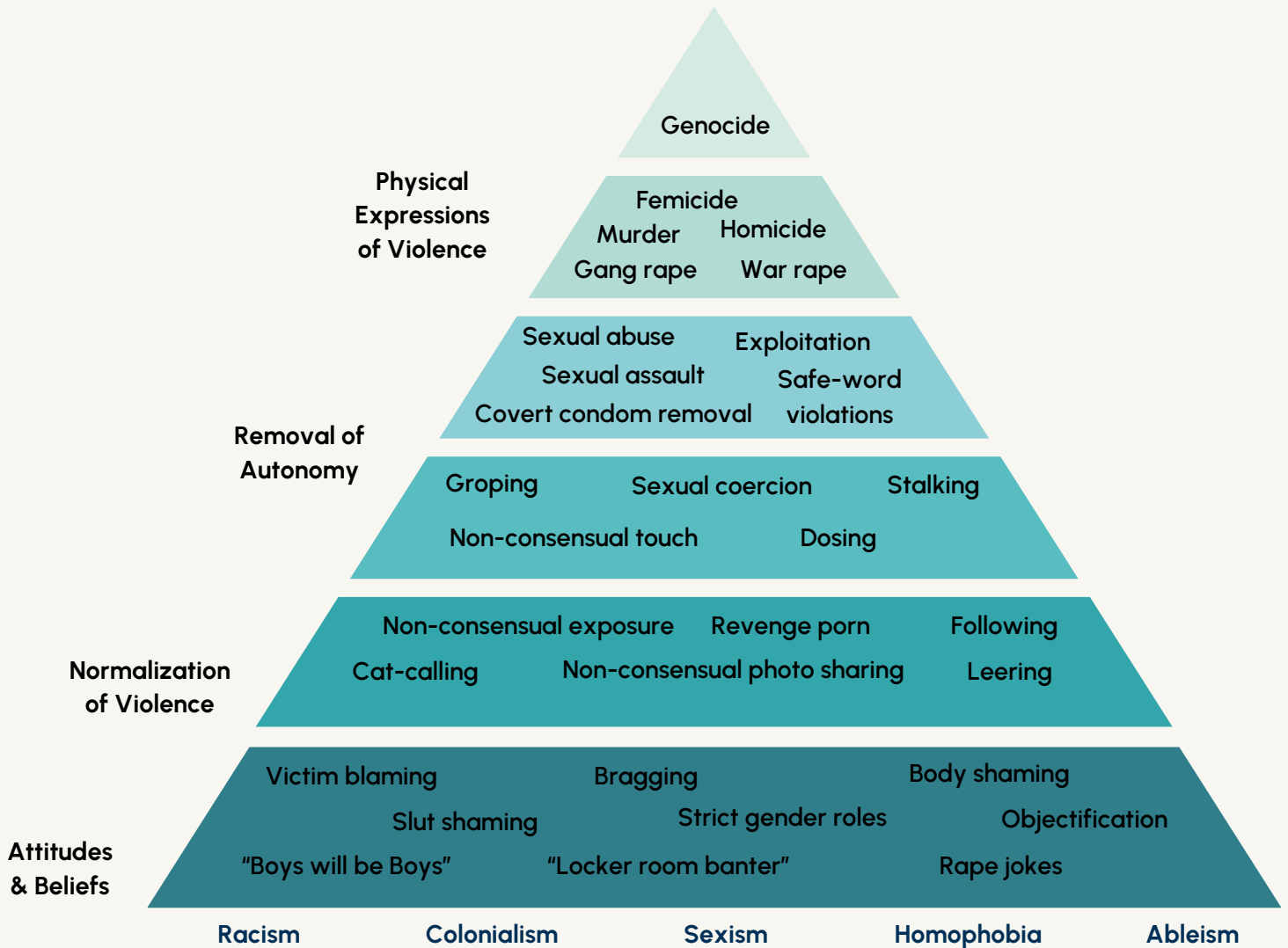
The manosphere tries to offer a solution to the problem by blaming this all on feminism, but feminism does not advocate for women to have higher status than men, or wish harm on men. Feminism is simply the call for equality, justice, and respectful healthy relationships between all—and with rising rates of violence against women and girls, it's more important than ever.

How does misogyny lead to violence and abuse?

The pyramid of sexual violence is a way to understand how unfair treatment and power imbalances in society can lead to violence against women and girls.

The base of the pyramid represents the attitudes and beliefs that dehumanise certain groups, such as sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination. When these attitudes are common, in regular conversations or especially in online communities, people start to think it's okay to express them verbally. This can lead to thinking of girls and women as objects and treating them in a different way to men. As we move up the pyramid, we can see these attitudes becoming stronger, leading to violence or even murder.

Pyramid of Sexual Violence



Reference: Sexual Assault Centre, University of Alberta

What can I do?

Think critically about what you're seeing online

What you're seeing online isn't the real picture. Algorithms show you what they think you want to see, even if that content is harmful to you. Before you agree with something you see online, ask yourself:

- 1. Who created this message?** Is it an influencer acting individually, or are they being paid by someone with more influence?
- 2. Why is this message being sent?** Is someone trying to sell me something? To gain power, money or subscribers? How does it benefit them?
- 3. How am I receiving the message?** Is it a general message like a tv advert, or a more specific one like a DM? Did I already follow this account, or has someone paid to 'push' it to me?
- 4. How might others feel about this message?** Parts of it might appeal to your lifestyle or beliefs, but how would your family members feel about it? Your teacher? Someone from a different background, religion, or gender?
- 5. What values, beliefs and demographics are represented in this message?** Who is the target audience for this message? Whose voices are missing? If there are voices missing, could the information be biased or untrue?

Talk to your children and friends about how to identify harmful content online

Ask questions about what others are seeing online and be open to discussion if it's something that worries you.

Internet Matters has some great advice about how to talk to children and teenagers about online safety. Visit <https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/>

Thinkuknow has several age-specific websites which give advice about staying safe online. Resources are available online for children and young people between the ages of 4 – 18 years old, as well as for professionals working with children and young people and parent/carers. Visit <https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/>



Call in misogynistic attitudes when you see them

'Calling in' means respectfully inviting someone to have a conversation about their attitudes or behaviours. It's not about getting angry or shaming them in front of others. It takes a lot of courage to go against ideas that other people think are cool, but if nobody says anything, those ideas will grow.

If someone you care about is starting to talk or behave in a way that worries you, it can help to follow this strategy to talk to them about it

Understand: Don't get angry if someone you know or love is being drawn into the manosphere. High-profile influencers in the manosphere draw people in by suggesting they can help you feel stronger, healthier, and more in control of your life—which isn't itself a bad thing! They pose as role models and allies to boys and men who feel underrepresented, and offer a community to be part of. They also offer an alternative for boys and men who feel blamed for problems they don't feel they contribute to, like sexual violence. Understanding the issues to which misogyny provides a 'solution' is the first step in addressing it.

If someone you know is being drawn in to the manosphere, ask them what part of it appeals to them. You might be able to find a way for them to fill that gap in their life in other ways, like starting a new hobby, going to the gym, volunteering in their community, or becoming involved in politics or activism.

Explore: Saying nothing only allows the influence of the manosphere to grow. Make space to discuss these ideas with your friends and family, and ask questions of those who are engaging with misogynistic content. Getting angry, telling someone they are wrong, or becoming aggressive or defensive, won't change anyone's mind, and might actually reinforce the beliefs that pushed them toward the manosphere to begin with. If you stay calm and listen to their views, they might be more willing to listen to yours.



Challenge: While boys and men might be drawn into the mansphere for the positive self-help content, hearing those misogynistic attitudes and opinions constantly shared will likely invoke an emotional response. That's what the videos are designed to do, to keep people watching and subscribing. It does not mean they have to agree with what is being said. By thinking critically about these views when you hear them, or talking to others about things you see that make you uncomfortable or unsure, you can start to break down the power of mansphere.

Challenging someone on these topics can be difficult, but by approaching conversations with curiosity, you can gently challenge harmful attitudes without causing someone to feel attacked. Try sentence starters like "I'd like to understand... because..." or questions like "How do you think your mum/girlfriend/sister/female-identifying friend would feel about that?"

Seek support if you need it

If you, or someone you know, is struggling with mental health or how to understand what you're seeing online, there are a variety of resources and services you can contact:

Childline is a 24-hour service for anyone in the UK up to the age of 19 to discuss anything they are struggling with or unsure about. It is completely anonymous, free to call and will not show up on any phone bill. It also offers Signvideo for those who are deaf or have a hearing impairment and would prefer to video chat with sign language.

Call 0800 1111 or webchat at www.childline.org.uk

The Mix is the UK's leading support service for young people under 25. They are there to support you with any challenges you are facing - from mental health to money, from homelessness to finding a job, from break-ups to drugs. You can talk to them via their online community, on social media, through their free, confidential helpline or their counselling service. Call 0808 808 4994 or visit www.themix.org.uk



Samaritans is a free 24 hour helpline for all ages. It provides confidential, non-judgemental emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that could lead to suicide. The number can be called from any phone, even a mobile with no credit, and will not show up in a phone bill. You can also email, webchat or write a letter. Call 116 123 or webchat at www.samaritans.org/

Mind provides confidential mental health information service. It has a helpline Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm, but also has a website full of information about looking after your mental health and dealing with a mental health crisis.

Call 0300 123 3393 for information or 0300 102 1234 for support, or visit www.mind.org.uk

Shout is a free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone, of any age, who is struggling to cope.

Text 'Shout' to 85258



tender.org.uk



[@Tenderuk](https://www.instagram.com/Tenderuk)



[@Tenderuk](https://twitter.com/Tenderuk)



[@TenderEducationArts](https://www.facebook.com/TenderEducationArts)



[@Tender](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Tender)

Registered charity 1100214