

Our project aims to explore why young, single men are attracted to controversial online environments focused on masculinity and men's issues. We seek to understand what motivates these young men to engage with these communities and how this involvement might impact their mental health and attitudes toward women.

The rising trend of loneliness among young men, especially those who are single and sexually inactive, is becoming a serious social and health concern. These men often feel heightened stress due to societal stereotypes stigmatizing their lack of sexual activity or absence of a romantic partner, leading them to seek understanding and support in virtual communities. The 'manosphere', an online space focusing on male interests such as masculinity norms, social relationships, dating, and personal development, is one such environment. However, alongside offering social support, manosphere communities are also known for promoting content that can intensify social tensions, deepen the gender divide, and even incite violence.

The research examining the impact of these virtual environments on young men's mental health and views is complex and inconclusive. While these spaces can offer support and a sense of belonging, they may also propagate harmful content that reinforces low self-esteem and spreads misleading information about interpersonal relationships. Moreover, these platforms sometimes foster radical views against women, although some theories suggest they might also reduce violent tendencies in the real world. We believe that previous studies have not sufficiently accounted for the fact that the manosphere is not a homogenous environment – identifying with various ideologies present in this space can lead to different consequences for attitudes and mental health. Furthermore, we still don't fully understand what causes young men to initiate and continue contact with the manosphere.

In our project, we are using the State Authenticity and Self-Environment Fit (SAFE) theory. This theory posits that the sense of fit in the environment we find ourselves in, or in other words, the compatibility between an individual's characteristics and their surroundings, is key to creating a sense of authenticity and freedom to express oneself in a given place. The SAFE theory explains why people are attracted to environments where they feel authentic, and why they avoid those perceived as prejudiced or discriminatory. We assume that young, single men may view their real-world environment as negatively oriented towards individuals in their life situation. In contrast, the manosphere may be perceived as more accepting and consistent with their personal experiences and viewpoints.

In the project, we will answer three main questions: 1) Are the lack of sexual activity and romantic loneliness of young men indeed related to a lack of perceived fit between them and their environment and a reduced sense of authenticity? 2) Does lesser fit and authenticity in the real world make these men more open to contact with communities associated with the manosphere? 3) How do the dynamics between fit and authenticity in the real world and in virtual manosphere communities influence mental health and views about women?