

Development and application of the Masculinity Content Classification Framework

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ABSTRACT

The manosphere, once confined to fringe online communities, has now evolved to infiltrate mainstream social media platforms. Research operationalising manosphere content on these platforms is limited, with previous definitions relying on iterations from fringe spaces. Additionally, research has yet to investigate this content within young men’s social media data. This study aimed to (1) develop the first operationalised coding framework for mainstream manosphere content on TikTok, and (2) apply and refine this framework using real-world TikTok data from young men. A qualitative framework analysis was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 involved social media monitoring to inductively develop the Masculinity Content Classification Framework. In Phase 2, the framework was applied to manually code 2,414 videos from 142 young men’s (aged 16–25) TikTok data. The framework comprised three categories: *Cultural touchpoints*, *Procuring masculine status (masculine status)*, and *Degrading social and emotional well-being (degrading health)*. The cultural touchpoint category did not meet criteria to be viewed as part of the manosphere, but served as an innocuous entry point to manosphere themes covered in the *masculine status* and *degrading health* categories. Application of the framework illustrated the presence of these latter two categories in young men’s data (5.76% of videos), while *cultural touchpoint* content was most common (37.74% of videos). This study provides the first operationalised framework for analysing manosphere content on mainstream social media platforms, providing researchers with a comprehensive framework to investigate the relationship between manosphere content and young men’s social and emotional health.

1. Introduction

Social media is now an integral part of young people’s lives. With rates of youth mental ill-health and suicide steadily rising, understanding and examining how social media usage contributes to these trends is increasingly urgent (Haidt, 2024; Hickie et al., 2024; McGorry et al., 2025). To date, most research has focused on associations between social media screen-time and poorer mental

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health outcomes, but consensus on causality or long-term effects remains limited (Ferguson et al., 2022; Appel et al., 2020).

Addressing these questions for gendered content and young men is urgent. Young men spend upwards of six hours online everyday (Nawaz et al., 2025). These digital spaces construct, contest and commodify masculine norms (e.g., male dominance/power, protector/provider roles, hyper-muscularity, self-reliance), with early empirical evidence suggesting far-reaching implications on young men's social and emotional wellbeing (Ging et al., 2019; Fisher et al., 2025b).

The term 'manosphere' originated in 2009 to describe a collection of fringe anti-feminist online communities, though ideological roots are traced back almost five decades (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Early iterations centred on men's rights activists, pick-up artists, involuntary celibates (incels), and male separatist groups ('men going their own way'; Tierney et al., 2023) which were often galvanised on anonymous fringe platforms (e.g., 4chan, Telegram), and forums (e.g., [incel.is](#), /r/foreveralone, [Looksmax.co](#)) espousing misogynistic, white supremacist and sometimes violent ideologies (Ging, 2019).

In recent years, manosphere communities have converged into mainstream culture, often interrogating and dictating what it means to be a man. The hegemony of rigid, often traditional norms masculinity (e.g., toughness, aggression, heterosexuality) within this online content reifies gender essentialism and maintains patriarchal structures of power over women and marginalized men or subordinate masculinities (e.g., Roberts et al., 2025; Ging et al., 2019; Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022). This gender essentialism justifies and promotes misogyny. For example, feminism is often opposed as something which "oppresses" men, with the construction of a monolithic contemporary male victimhood used in a way which undermines violence against women through conspiracy-like devaluations of harm (e.g. all women lie about being raped; Dickel & Evolvi, 2023; Renström & Bäck, 2024).

1.1. Empirical research on the manosphere

Research has confirmed that many influencers and ideologies linked to the "manosphere" (e.g. 'alpha' masculinity, male victimhood, gender essentialism) are now mainstream in men's lifestyle and culture, with large portions of boys and men regularly engaging with these narratives on social media, podcasts and in gaming communities (eSafety Commissioner, 2024; Fisher et al., 2025b). This shift in social normativity has resulted in widespread social consequences, with research most tangibly detecting behaviour change in schools, with teachers identifying an increase in male students expressing misogynistic opinions and behaviours, often repeating manosphere talking points and ideologies (Haslop et al., 2024; Wescott et al., 2024). Socially isolated young men appear particularly vulnerable to core manosphere ideologies (Wilson et al., 2024). Young men identifying as incels consistently demonstrate increased rates of mental ill-health and suicidal ideation relative to non-incel young men (Whittaker et al., 2023; Thorburn, 2023). In addition to individual and social/relational injustice, harassment and abuse, more extreme ideologies disseminated in the manosphere (e.g., male supremacy, black pill ideology) have been linked to multiple acts of alt-right violent extremism (e.g., mass shootings inflicted by white supremacists; Braddock et al., 2022; Mamié et al., 2021) and violence towards women and girls (e.g., acts of mass violence [gun shootings]; Zimmerman, 2022; O'Hanlon et al., 2024 and domestic and family violence; Saptura & Boyle, 2020; Nicholas et al., 2024; Rothermel et al., 2022).

Looking beyond select manosphere communities to consider masculinity content and influencers as a mainstream phenomenon, a recent multi-country study of over 3,000 young men found nearly two thirds of participants regularly engaged with masculinity influencers creating content on topics and themes central to the manosphere (e.g., dating, gender roles, financial success, physical appearance enhancement). Young men regularly who engaged with these masculinity influencers reported worse mental health and higher rates of risky health behaviours – including steroid use, diet restriction and testosterone use – relative to young men who don't engage with these influencers (Fisher et al., 2025b).

1.2. Conceptualising the mainstream manosphere

The manosphere has shifted in recent years, from once-niche or fringe subcultures into a broader phenomenon on mainstream platforms that engage most young men online (e.g., TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat; Lott et al., 2025). This expansion reflects technological evolutions (e.g., algorithms, artificial intelligence) and cultural trends (e.g., rise of podcasts, commodification of health and wellness) that together deliver hyper-curated, personalised content to young men around the world (Fisher et al., 2025b; Bujalka et al., 2022). Simultaneously, masculinity and the manosphere now permeate the cultural zeitgeist evident in mainstream media (e.g., the Emmy-winning series 'Adolescence', the Joe Rogan Experience [now the most listened to podcast in 2025]). This prominence is mirrored in academia and policy: the number of peer reviewed publications containing the term "masculinity" rose from 316 in 2000 to 2,480 in 2024 (Scopus database search, September 2025), while the UK government pioneered the first national men's health strategy in 2024 (Department of Health and Social Care & Streeting, 2024).

Gerrand et al. (2025) conceptualise the modern day 'neo-manosphere' as both an ideology and an industry spanning ubiquitous men's lifestyle interests (e.g., gym and exercise advice, financial education, self-optimisation) through to extremist or radical material (e.g., explicit misogyny, hate-speech, self-harm and violence). Seminal analyses of fringe platforms (e.g., 4chan; Maloney et al., 2022) and manosphere-specific forums (e.g., the "r/incels" subreddit; Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021) have advanced foundational knowledge and evidence. Albeit most of this research examines text-based content on platforms such as Reddit, Twitter, Discord, 4chan (e.g., Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022; Jones et al., 2020) rather than the algorithmically driven visual material that dominates social media platforms frequented by most young men (Fisher et al., 2025a, Ging et al., 2025).

1.3. The TikTok algorithm

These dynamics are complicated by the diversity of digital spaces where young men encounter such content, most notably TikTok, now one of the most used social media platforms (Pew Research Center, 2024; Fisher et al., 2025a). Unlike earlier forms of social media requiring users to subscribe or follow creator profiles, TikTok's "For You" page (FYP) delivers an algorithmically-curated feed based on passive engagement (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022; Griffiths et al., 2024). Experts argue this creates a feedback loop engineered to maximise user attention and reinforce viewing patterns (De et al., 2025; Herman, 2024). While effective in prioritising longer scrolling times and engagement, it can amplify harmful material and maladaptive engagement patterns (e.g., Griffiths et al., 2024). For the manosphere specifically, algorithmic amplification exposes young men to content reinforcing anti-feminist and male-victimhood narratives, regardless of users' intent. Such content often taps into young men's insecurities tied to traditional masculinity (Maloney et al., 2022; O'Gorman et al., 2025) in ways that draw, sustain and ultimately commodify their time and attention (Bujalka et al., 2022). Using 10 researcher created 'dummy accounts' (TikTok and Youtube profiles set up as a male aged 16 to 18 years), Baker et al. (2024) sought out a range of typically "masculine" content which was both closely aligned to the manosphere (e.g. Andrew Tate, Red Pill) and more general content often consumed by boys (e.g. gym content, sports, etc), Baker and colleagues found these 'dummy accounts' were exposed to "toxic" manosphere content within 23 min of use, affirming young men's algorithms direct them down this content pipeline regardless of explicit intent or active engagement with content.

1.4. Gaps in our understanding

These developments underscore the urgent need for a clear, operationalised framework to define and categorise the full spectrum of men and masculinity content on TikTok. This is particularly important given growing research and media efforts to track the spread and influence of the manosphere. To examine TikTok's algorithmic systems, many researchers have used 'dummy accounts' or public data to simulate young men's experiences on the platform (e.g., Regehr et al., 2024; Ekō, 2023). Such studies have revealed that accounts can encounter manosphere content related to violence, suicide and misogyny (e.g., videos celebrating mass-murder) within just 10 min of account activation (Ekō, 2023) and that misogynistic content can increase fourfold in just five days (Regehr et al., 2024). Other studies demonstrate incel narratives being reframed into more implicit and widely palpable messages (Solea & Sugiura, 2023). However, industry representatives argue that dummy accounts do not reflect the actual experience of users (Milmo & Hern, 2023). This rebuttal is reinforced by the scarcity of ecologically valid data derived directly from young men themselves.

The lack of clear standards for classifying manosphere and masculinity content online continues to complicate research and public debate. The ambiguity hampers replicability of coding and research at scale, fuels miscommunication and risks downplaying harms, as seen when Ofcom's 2025 report and related media initially minimised the manosphere's threat – a claim later retracted after expert criticism (Booth, 2025; Koller et al., 2025). While often well-intentioned, the politically charged nature of this field has fostered polarised views that bypass empirical research with young men, entrenching problem-oriented perspectives, rather than constructive solutions.

1.5. The present study

An operationalised framework of the mainstream manosphere is essential to align research, media, and policy/interventions through a systematic, rigorous and scalable approach. Mapping the full breadth of men and masculinity content (from popular cultural and lifestyle material to infiltrating manosphere ideologies) allows researchers to rigorously and accurately identify when such content shifts from benign to harmful and to assess health and wellbeing impacts. Given the lack of ecologically valid data, research must engage directly with young men to understand the men and masculinity content they encounter online. Accordingly, this study aims to (1) develop an operationalised coding framework for mainstream manosphere content on TikTok, and (2) apply and refine this framework using real-world TikTok data collected from young men.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design

This cross-sectional, qualitative study formed one arm of a broader longitudinal project examining young men's exposure to manosphere content on TikTok (full project description and respective arms: osf.io/jgk7m/). To achieve the first study aim (framework development), an inductive, exploratory approach was used to identify key categories of manosphere content on TikTok. The framework was then used to deductively code TikTok videos (aim two) viewed by young men over one month. Videos were collected through TikTok datafiles supplied by participants at the beginning of the project.

2.2. Participants

To participate in the study, participants had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) identify as male, aged 16–25 years; (2) reside in Australia, the United Kingdom, or the United States; and (3) have regularly used TikTok in the past month (i.e., almost every day or multiple times per day). No exclusion criteria were specified. Participants were reimbursed for their participation.

2.3. Recruitment

Participants (N = 142) were recruited from a variety of online platforms with the aim of including young men with diverse characteristics and social media diets. This included TikTok paid advertisements, posts on university message boards, and snowball sampling via social media posts on X, TikTok, Instagram and Facebook. Participants were also recruited via study promotion posts on Discord servers, Reddit forums, online forums and moderated groups either affiliated with the manosphere or frequented by young men. Where possible, all posts were made with administrator/moderator approval.

2.4. Procedure

The University of Melbourne STEMM 1 Ethics Committee (ID: 27925) granted ethics approval for this study. Young men read the Plain Language Statement, provided informed consent, registered for the study and completed an online survey on the research platform (hosted by [Unforgettable.Me](#)). This survey included measures of age, sexuality, employment status, relationship status, education level, subjective socio-economic status, country of residence, sexual orientation, and racial/ethnic identification (including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identification). Participants requested their data from TikTok (via an in-platform profile request), downloaded it, and uploaded it to the [Unforgettable.Me](#) research platform for processing. The TikTok data files participants provided contained a complete history of all videos watched (including video URL, caption, hashtags, time, date ect.) comments history and profile settings/security.

URLs of all videos the participant had watched in the past-month were scraped from participants' TikTok data files using a script that incorporated a dynamic set of IP addresses mimicking human behaviour to avoid detection from TikTok's anti-scraping algorithms. In addition to video URL's metadata scraped for each video included; the video title, the delivery timestamp, video hashtags and captions, whether the video was liked or not, and the number of likes for each video. Participants did not need to fully watch a video for it to be counted within the dataset.

2.5. Analysis

Analysis proceeded in two phases: Phase 1: framework development and Phase 2: framework application. Our analysis was guided by similar research using framework analysis ([Foster et al., 2024](#)). In Phase 1, qualitative framework analysis ([Ritchie & Spencer, 2002](#)) was used to develop a framework of manosphere content on TikTok. This phase was exploratory and inductive in nature. An expert research team (co-authors KF, RB, KO, KT [Diverting Hate]) undertook a process of TikTok monitoring over a 4-week period to ascertain common, organically occurring algorithmic trends of manosphere content. Manosphere content was identified by searching for hashtags, terms, trends, topics, influencers, and communities identified in past research (e.g., [Baker et al., 2024](#); [Brooks et al., 2022](#); [Ekō, 2023](#); [Farrell et al., 2020](#); [Horowitz, 2024](#)) or discussed in the media (e.g., influencers such as Andrew Tate and Hamza Ahmed or trends such as 'looksmaxxing'; [Das, 2022](#); [Hall, 2025](#); [Farrell, 2024](#)). Authors created simulated manosphere TikTok accounts (i.e., registering as a young male aged 18 years) to search for, and engage with, manosphere content (by viewing, liking, and sharing videos). The monitoring team met regularly during the monitoring period to refine and discuss the salience of the framework.

In Phase 2, the framework (developed in Phase 1) was used to deductively code a random, representative subset of videos in each participant's TikTok data file. Given a population of 1,108,463 (the total number of videos across all participant's data files at baseline), we estimated, using [Cochran's \(1977\)](#) sample size formula, 2,397 videos would need to be reviewed to achieve a representative sample at a 95% confidence interval with a 2% standard of error. To ensure participants who watched a greater number of videos were not overrepresented, an equal number of videos were sampled per participant. Therefore, 17 videos were randomly selected from each participant's data files ($n = 2,414$ videos), with inclusion criteria being: a) the video was still available on TikTok and b) the video URL was unique (i.e., it had not already been randomly selected for any other participant). Videos were coded based on their alignment with the description of a given category in the framework. If they did not align with any category, they were coded as such (e.g., not manosphere content or content oriented towards men). In addition to these broader categories, all videos that met framework category inclusion were coded to a subcategory which described the content in greater detail. Each video could only be coded to a single category and to a single corresponding subcategory. If the content of a video spanned multiple codes, the video was coded based on the code which was a greater focus of the video in terms of time and emphasis. Given the structured approach of deductive coding and categorical nature of framework analysis, video count frequencies were also determined to distil relative prominence (and provide transparency) of thematic categories across the dataset.

Videos were coded by authors RB and KO, who each coded half of the total participant videos. To assess inter-rater reliability, 10% of all videos (i.e., 242 videos) were randomly selected for coding by both KO and RB. After removing unavailable videos (e.g., videos that had been removed by the creator or by TikTok for violating Community Guidelines; [TikTok, 2024](#)), 8.6% of videos ($n = 208$) were dual-coded. Inter-rater reliability at the category and subcategory level was calculated between the two raters (KO, RB). Weighted Cohen's kappa was used to account for the ordinal nature of the tiered categories, with quadratic weighting applied to penalise larger discrepancies between ratings more heavily. For the category level, inter-rater reliability was found to be moderate ($k = 0.676$), as outlined by benchmarks set by [McHugh \(2012\)](#). For ease of interpretation, the percentage of agreement at the category level was found to be 83.17%, also meeting benchmarks for acceptable interrater agreement in health research ([McHugh, 2012](#)). At the subcategory level (where raters were required to match each video to the specific sub-category as well as overall category), inter-rater reliability was found to be moderate also ($k = 0.643$), with the percentage of agreement between the two raters once again meeting minimum benchmarks (80.29%). Disagreements were discussed by KO, RB, and KF, with the final coding decision being made by KF.

Reflexivity statement

Although objectivity was exercised as much as possible, we acknowledge that our coding and analytic approach was inevitably shaped by authors prior experiences and potential biases (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Although a set of criteria (and framework) was used for coding, the subject matter of this data was often politically charged, reflective of social and cultural normativity, and thus open to subjective interpretation. This was mediated by internal negotiations and discussions between the authors when coding this content, ensuring the inclusion of their diverse perspectives to best represent a more informed interpretation of the data. Although each researcher brings their own professional and personal perspectives to this piece, it is particularly necessary to note that all co-authors RB, KO and KF (who undertook Phase 1 and Phase 2 coding) align with left-wing political perspectives, and remain critical of many features and impacts of online masculinity content. Further, these co-authors have also encountered and consumed manosphere-type content and influencers at some point in their personal lives (although not always intentionally). Finally, RB, KO and KF are currently, or have previously worked in the field of men's mental health for a number of years and thus take on an empathetic perspective when it comes to men's social and lived experiences. To find more detail on each researchers disclosed characteristics, please see [Supplementary File 1](#) Coder Characteristics.

3. Results

In total, 1,450 young men registered for the study. Of these, 142 met eligibility criteria, completed the demographic survey, and provided a valid TikTok data file (which contained past month user data). The demographic characteristics of our study sample ($n = 142$) are reported in [Table 1](#). Participants were predominantly young men from Australia (65%) and the United Kingdom (29%), aged between 16 and 25 years (M age = 18.85 years, $SD = 2.64$). The majority identified as white or Caucasian (73%). The median age of the sample was 18.85 years ($SD = 2.64$), with a greater representation of young men aged 16–17 years (43%) compared to those aged 22–25 years (21%). The mean number of TikTok videos shown to each participant over the past month was 7806.08 ($SD = 6548.98$), with participants ranging between seeing 513 to 50,892 videos. Participants did not need to fully watch a video for it to be counted within the dataset.

3.1. Overview

The Masculinity Content Classification Framework ([Table 2](#)) consists of three-tiered categories: *Cultural touchpoints*, *procuring masculine status (masculine status)*, and *degrading social and emotional wellbeing (degrading health)*. These categories exist on a spectrum demonstrating the range of content that moves from men's lifestyle and entertainment videos (cultural touchpoints), towards more

Table 1
Participant characteristics.

Demographic	n (%)
16–17 years	61 (43.0)
18–21 years	51 (35.9)
22–25 years	30 (21.1)
Country	
Australia	93 (65.5)
UK	41 (28.9)
USA	8 (5.6)
Ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	104 (73.2)
Asian	12 (8.5)
Black	6 (4.2)
Indian	6 (4.2)
Middle Eastern	5 (3.5)
Aboriginal	2 (1.4)
Hispanic/Latino	1 (0.7)
Other	6 (4.2)
Subjective household income	
Do not have enough money	14 (9.9)
Just enough money to get by on	38 (26.8)
Enough money to get by on	70 (49.3)
More than enough money to get by on	20 (14.1)
Sexuality	
Straight	117 (82.4)
Gay	12 (8.5)
Bisexual	10 (7.0)
Prefer not to say	1 (0.7)
Undecided	2 (1.4)
Relationship status	
Single/never married	73 (51.4)
In a relationship	66 (46.5)
Married/de facto	3 (2.1)

Table 2

The masculinity content classification framework.

1. CULTURAL TOUCHPOINTS

Men's lifestyle and entertainment content focused on general interest areas common amongst young men such as professional sports, gaming, and fitness.

Subcategory	Operationalised Definition	Exclusion Criteria	Example Video Description
1.1 Physical exercise and athleticism	Content focused on fitness, exercise and/or nutrition as a men's lifestyle interest and/or health-related activity without reference to these behaviours as a source of masculine value, status or dominance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocating for muscularity and athletic performance as a means for achieving masculine status (see subcategory 2.3). ● Advocating use of steroids, medications or other performance enhancing substances (see subcategory 3.3). 	A man records himself responding to a viewer comment asking for advice on a pre-workout that has been making them feel lightheaded and sick after working out.
1.2 Men's grooming	Grooming (skincare, hair/facial hair, fragrance, supplements) content for men reviewing beauty/health products or providing tools/tips to improve their physical appearance or personal hygiene.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explicitly linking grooming to masculine or dating/mating value and a way to pick up women (see subcategory 2.6). ● Promotion of prescription medications/illegal or performance enhancement substances (see subcategory 3.3). 	Camera pans between three young men [before and after a barber visit] while they turn their heads and ask audiences to rate their hair styles. Text overlay on the video says "Who pulled off the fringe the best".
1.3 Men's fashion and clothing trends	Content related to men's fashion, style and clothing including cultural commentary on men's fashion trends and step-by-step 'how to' style guides for men.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clothing and accessories being depicted as markers of financial success (see subcategory 2.2). 	Male content creator comments on a GQ article about short shorts for men, showing celebrity still photo examples and explains how he would style this trend. Text overlay says: "I think a 5-inch inseam is the most approachable and best place to start if you're trying to experiment with a shorter short".
1.4 Men's pop-culture content	Content popular with (or primarily marketed towards) male audiences covering topics including professional sport, music, gaming, podcasts. Often uses male 'banter' or colloquial terms (e.g., fellas, bro).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Content that framed gender differences as innate or hierarchical (see subcategory 2.5 or 2.1). ● Content that positioned male dominance/ muscularity or female subordination as desirable or normal (see subcategory 2.5). ● Degrading others (girls/women) under the guise of humour (see subcategory 2.1 or 3.4). ● Implicit or explicit normative claims around gender roles or masculinity (see subcategory 2.1 or 3.4). 	Man acts out being various F1 drivers, parodying a recent incident where Lance Stroll crashed into Daniel Ricciardo. Text overlay says: "Safety car boys, safety car... Just slow down Stroll we've got a safety car... Stroll!?".
1.5 Men's dating and relationships discourse	Dating and relationships content for men that is primarily light-hearted, comedic, anecdotal or observational in tone (e.g., portrayals of couple dynamics, interpersonal misunderstandings). Gender stereotypes were sometimes described in anecdotal reflections/storytelling or skits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocating for traditional or unequal gender dynamics in dating/relationships (see subcategory 2.5). ● Framing of girls and women as deceptive or inferior (e.g., promotion of dating young women or women's attractiveness/appeal decreasing as they age; see subcategory 3.4). ● Promotion of male entitlement, dominance or control (see subcategory 2.5 or 3.5). ● Pushing gender-essentialist claims as objective truths (see subcategory 2.1 or 2.5). 	Video filmed as a male-POV. A young man walks towards the end of a pier where two women in mini-dresses and heels are drinking cocktails and taking photos of one another. The video then cuts to one of the women giving him a hug and kiss on the cheek late in the night. Text overlay says: "Dad told me to stop playing fort [Fortnite] and start talking to girls...how did I do?".

2. MASCULINE STATUS

Procuring Masculine Status: Content that promotes traditional masculinity under the pretence of enhancing boys' and men's social standing in areas like dating, appearance, and financial success.

Subcategory	Operationalised Definition	Exclusion criteria	Example Video Description
2.1 Undermining Gender Equality	Content that undermines or critiques feminism, gender equality efforts or women's rights through a lens of male victimisation. Content that frames these issues (gender equality) as hypocritical, illegitimate, and an existential threat to masculinity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explicit misogyny (overt hostility or rage towards women as a group; see subcategory 2.4). ● Explicit reference to male supremacy (see subcategory 2.4). 	Video footage from the Johnny Depp v Amber Heard defamation trial (31st May 2023). Depp's attorney cross examines Heard, critiquing the legitimacy of her domestic violence testimony and advocacy efforts. Depp's attorney asks Heard to confirm the date that she publicly accused Depp of physical violence. Heard says "I was intending (continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

1. CULTURAL TOUCHPOINTS			
Men's lifestyle and entertainment content focused on general interest areas common amongst young men such as professional sports, gaming, and fitness.			
Subcategory	Operationalised Definition	Exclusion Criteria	Example Video Description
			<i>to keep that private. I had not ever publicly accused him of that.</i> " Depp's attorney shows a screenshot of Heard's tweet which linked an article titled " <i>Amber Heard: I spoke up against sexual violence and faced our cultures wrath. That has to change.</i> " Text overlay on the video says: " <i>Camille Vasquez destroys AH in court #IstandwithJohnnyDepp #JohnnyDeppisInnocent</i> ".
2.2 Wealth attainment	Content that conflates wealth and financial abundance/prosperity with masculine status/value and self-worth. Videos may encourage financial risk taking and oversimplify wealth accumulation through the provision of unsolicited financial advice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Normalisation or encouragement of gambling (see subcategory 3.3). 	A young man (under 30 years of age) carrying a leather bag and wearing designer clothes walks along a tarmac and boards a private jet. Text overlay on the video says " <i>How can you sleep when mfs [mother fuckers] have \$300,000 cars. Are you sleeping or getting to work?</i> ".
2.3 Muscularity and athletic dominance	Diet or exercise content that idealises and glorifies a "superhero" body type (mesomorphic: extremely muscular and low body fat). Content conflates male physical appearance (particularly muscularity) with athletic and sexual prowess. Strength, fighting and "softmaxxing" (e.g., non-invasive practices to improve physical attractiveness) is positioned to assert status (particularly over other men).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotion of steroid use (or other performance enhancement substances e.g., TRT; see subcategory 3.3). ● Endorsement of non-FDA or TGA-approved peptides and sharing information about how to purchase compounds from online vendors or research laboratories (see subcategory 3.3). ● Invasive looksmaxxing content that includes physical appearance augmentation (surgery, bone smashing, restriction of nutrition; see subcategory 3.1). 	A lean man is shown doing a tricep pushdown on a machine at the gym with text overlay saying " <i>I only eat chicken, rice and broccoli...</i> " The video then pans to a male builder flexing his muscles. The text overlay says: " <i>can I please get a large double quarter pounder meal with a coke zero.</i> " The caption of the video says: " <i>Man food</i> ".
2.4 Relentless mental fortitude avoiding weakness or emotion	Content encourages relentless emotional suppression, self-reliance, independence and stoicism in men and glorifies/idealises male suffering.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nihilist or hopeless narratives (see subcategory 3.2). ● Suicide or self-harm content (see subcategory 3.2). ● Promotion of self-punishment or self-hate (see subcategory 3.2). 	Short-form segment from a podcast interview where a well-known male content creator responds to the hosts question " <i>are you happy?</i> " The male content creator responds " <i>I don't know. I never really thought about it, I don't really care about it. All I care about is that when I looked in that fucking mirror, I saw a piece of shit. Happiness wasn't on the mirror at 16. You have to struggle. The bigger the struggle the bigger the peace. Every fucking day I wake up I don't want to do some shit; I'm like okay well do you want to be a bitch today? Do you want to walk around feeling like a bitch?</i> ".
2.5 Protector and provider roles	Content that prescriptively frames men's value as contingent on protecting, financially providing for, or being responsible for women and families. These messages are often justified through gender essentialist ideologies or reverence of traditional gender roles in relationships (e.g., women as homemakers, men as breadwinners). Often references biological determinism, inherent sex differences, and/or evolutionary psychology to support the above (e.g., a woman will leave if you can't provide for/protect her").	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotion of male supremacy (see subcategory 3.4). ● Denigration of women's value/worth (see subcategory 3.4). ● Presence of coercive control/abuse tactics (see subcategory 3.5). 	A man faces the camera and explains how he believes a household should be run: " <i>I am not going to have a girl pay half my rent. Half my mortgage. Half my car payment. Half the food bills. If my wife works, that's all her money. She doesn't have to contribute anything. There are a lot of men out there going 'screw that' well listen you're just not traditional. You're just not old fashioned like I am. I think the man of the house should provide for the house and the people in it.</i> " Text sits atop the video: " <i>Men should provide.</i> ".
2.6 Playboy	Dating, relationships and sexual promiscuity content ('pick-up' tips, tricks and advice) that frames women and girls as a homogenous group wanting the same things. Content sexualises women and girls as status objects or arm candy. Content implicitly or explicitly defends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explicit reference to women and girls' worth being linked first and foremost to their appearance, age, sexual appeal or reproductive ability (see subcategory 3.4) 	A photo slideshow (of 10 + screenshots) showing a flirtatious Instagram direct message exchange where a male user responds to a photo of a young woman taking a mirror selfie and proceeds to ask her on a date and express his romantic interest. The final photo is an advertisement for an

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

1. CULTURAL TOUCHPOINTS			
Men's lifestyle and entertainment content focused on general interest areas common amongst young men such as professional sports, gaming, and fitness.			
Subcategory	Operationalised Definition	Exclusion Criteria	Example Video Description
	the notion that a man's masculinity is validated through the ability of men to attract and bed as many women as possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Content that trivialises or endorses sexual coercion and harm (see subcategory 3.5). 	application/tool called PlugAI (formally known as Wingman) designed to "boost your confidence and effectiveness in the game of love #reverserizzler."
3. DEGRADING HEALTH			
Degrading Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Content that glorifies nihilism and suicide, risk-taking, misogyny and violence towards women.			
Subcategory	Operationalised Definition	Exclusion criteria	Example Video Description
3.1 Physical appearance augmentation*	Content that depicts or encourages male physical appearance augmentation (e.g., cosmetic surgery, genioplasty [chin surgery]) as a way for men to improve their physical appearance/attractiveness. Contains the embedded assumption that physical attractiveness is the most important factor in men's worth and potential happiness/success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● General men's grooming and self-care practices (see subcategory 1.2). ● Evidence-based information or discussions about cosmetic surgery without endorsement or encouragement. ● Body dissatisfaction content without promoting physical appearance modification as the solution. 	A before and after video of a man turning his head to show his jaw line at a side on and then front on profile. The text overlay on the video says: "Me before bonesmashing. Me after bonesmashing".
3.2 Hopelessness and suicide	Content that encourages suicide and self-harm (ideation and behaviours), normalises this behavior, and/or includes explicit messages of self-hate, nihilism, hopelessness, and shame (e.g., sentiments of "I hate myself," "I am never going to be good enough")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Suicide/self-harm prevention content. ● Lived experience story telling framed around education, recovery, hope, and support. 	A black and white video of a famous man walking around and taking photos with people. The text overlay on the video says "If someone wants to rope do people tell them don't do it because they truly care about that person, or because they don't want to deal with guilt or sadness afterward? Do friends really care about you as a person, or do they just enjoy they feel when they're around you? If people couldn't get anything at all from others, would anyone actually care? Therapists only care as long as you're paying them, doctors only treat you if you can afford it. Most people only help others because it makes them feel good not because they care."
3.3 Risk-taking and health behaviours	Content that glorifies (both implicitly [e.g., actionable instructions] and explicitly [e.g., before and after transformations]) risk taking in the context of men's health and wellbeing. This includes content relating to binge drinking, problematic gambling, substance misuse, non-prescribed medications and peptides use, extreme exercise (to the point of physical harm) and criminal activity (e.g., scamming, tax evasion, drug dealing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Health promotion/lived experience stories of substance use recovery (or harm-minimisation). ● Alcohol-related content not framed through a lens of excessive consumption or as a source of masculine validation. ● Men's diet and exercise content that does not promote working out or endurance activities to the point of injury or physical/mental harm (see subcategory 1.1 or 2.3). 	A video of a shirtless man talking to camera. The man says: "Everyone wants to do peptides and steroids and get jacked but they're like 'oh no I'm scared I don't know what's going into it, it's not FDA-approved' brother you just came off a 3 day fucking bender did somebody FDA approve the eight ball you just brought...God forbid you did anything good for you. Pick up the fucking pin and jab it brother."
3.4 Explicit misogyny	Content that directly expresses hostility, contempt, distrust or dehumanisation toward women as a social group (and women's rights efforts). Includes female-directed slurs, explicit male supremacy, direct opposition of feminism/women's right's/bodily autonomy efforts or the reduction of women's worth to appearance, sexuality, or reproduction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implicit stereotypes of women (or endorsement of traditional gender roles) without explicit hostility or dehumanisation (see subcategory 1.5 or 2.5). ● Criticism of individual women (e.g., sharing conflict with an ex-girlfriend) without generalised assertions to women as a social group (see subcategory 1.5). ● Satirical content or videos made under the context of 'comedy' where misogynistic language is condemned or made light of rather than endorsed (see subcategory 1.5). 	A video recording of a podcast with 10 women and 5 men sitting around a table having a discussion. One woman says, "why would I want to be with a bum," to which one of the hosts replies, "how come no man in this room has ever said that about a girl he dated...because you're all gold-digging skanks."
3.5 Violence towards women and sexual and gender minorities	Content that normalises, justifies, endorses, or trivialises physical, sexual, mental, financial, or coercive harm toward women or sexual/gender minorities, including symbolic threats and coercive control framed as protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Survivor or lived experience stories of violence perpetration not framed as acceptable, humorous or justified. ● Relationship advice that does not involve dominance/control, coercion, threat or trivialise abusive behaviour (see subcategory 1.5). 	Video footage of a young man looking at the camera. The text overlay on this video says: "Imagine u threw ur girl on the bed tryna be sexy but her head hit the wall n she died."

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

1. CULTURAL TOUCHPOINTS			
Men's lifestyle and entertainment content focused on general interest areas common amongst young men such as professional sports, gaming, and fitness.			
Subcategory	Operationalised Definition	Exclusion Criteria	Example Video Description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Content endorsing traditional gender roles in relationships (e.g., men are the financial providers, women are the care takers) without reference to removing autonomy, threat or coercive control (see subcategory 2.5). 	

Note. Each video could only be coded to a single category and to a single corresponding subcategory. If the content of a video spanned multiple codes, the video was coded to align with the most dominant and prevailing theme of the video (e.g., focus of the video in terms of time and emphasis). *Physical appearance augmentation was a sub-category identified in Phase 1 (social media monitoring) but did not appear in Phase 2 (validating the coding framework on participants' videos). As such this sub-category is retained in the Masculinity Content Classification Framework but not in the below results.

hateful, divisive, and harmful content (degrading health). The Masculinity Content Classification Framework captures themes in video and audio-based content that presents ideologies, narratives, and influencers originating from known manosphere sub-communities. This framework does not aim to comprehensively capture all aspects of the broader manosphere, nor does it assess the intent or endorsement of the content by the creators. Instead, it provides an operationalised lens for identifying and categorising themes present in a video and manosphere ideological trends on TikTok. [Table 2](#) quantifies the frequency of participants' videos within each category and subcategory identified in Phase 2 (application of the framework to real-world data). Of all participants videos included in the Phase 2 manual coding ($n = 2,414$ videos) 43.5% aligned (and were thus coded) to a particular category of the Masculinity Content Classification Framework (37.74% *Cultural touchpoints*, 4.89% *Masculine status*, 0.87% *Degrading health*). More than half (56.5%) of the videos coded did not align with any category or subcategory within the framework (e.g., these videos were not manosphere content and/or not orientated towards men; See [Table 3](#)).

3.2. Cultural touchpoints

Cultural touchpoint content covered the spectrum of mainstream interests for young men today. These videos did not meet inclusion criteria for the other two-tiered categories (*masculine status* and *degrading health*), but the topics and tone of videos constituted *cultural touchpoint* onramps to specific manosphere themes. Professional sport/athletes, music, gaming, men's fashion/grooming and physical exercise featured prominently. This included step-by-step guides to recreate popular clothing trends, hairstyles, daily gym or exercise routines and skincare product or supplement reviews (e.g., vitamins and protein). Content tended to be warm, informative and entertaining with content creators calling-in young men (e.g., "which fit are you choosing", or "let me know what you guys think") establishing a mentorship, big-brother dynamic with audiences. Light-hearted banter and skits were used to comment on more serious topics affecting boys and men's lives including relationships, school/work, news and politics. Promotional content (e.g., paid partnerships) was also prominent, with influencers using covert storytelling and brand discount codes to encourage audiences to buy a

Table 3

Representation of participants' videos across masculinity content classification framework.

Category	Subcategory	<i>n</i> (%) videos
Cultural Touchpoints		911 (37.74)
Masculine Status		118 (4.89)
	Undermining gender equality	17 (0.70)
	Wealth attainment	33 (1.37)
	Muscularity and physical dominance	39 (1.62)
	Relentless mental fortitude avoiding weakness or emotion	6 (0.25)
	Protector and provider roles	8 (0.33)
	Playboy	15 (0.62)
Degrading Health		21 (0.87)
	Hopelessness and suicide	6 (0.25)
	Risk and health behaviours	7 (0.29)
	Explicit misogyny	3 (0.12)
	Violence towards women and sexual/gender minorities	4 (0.17)

Note. Of the videos included in Phase 2 manual coding ($n = 2,414$ videos) 43.5% aligned with a particular category of the Masculinity Content Classification Framework (37.74% *Cultural touchpoints*, 4.89% *Masculine status*, 0.87% *Degrading health*). More than half (56.5%) of the videos coded did not align with any category or subcategory within the framework (e.g., these videos were not manosphere content and/or not orientated towards men). These frequencies should be interpreted as illustrative rather than representative of populations beyond the study sample. Given the dynamic and interactive nature of the TikTok algorithm, the more young men engage with degrading health content the more they are likely to be exposed to more.

particular product.

While cultural touchpoint content did not contain overtly harmful messages about health, relationships or masculine identities, a number of videos nonetheless referenced to (or drew upon) implicit gender-essentialist assumptions. These included immutable differences between men and women, heteronormative relationship scripts, and hegemonic masculinity (emphasising muscularity/athleticism, emotional control, self-reliance) as normative and aspirational rather than hierarchical positions. As such, cultural touchpoints should not be understood as ideologically neutral, but rather as a popularised cultural substrate within which more explicit gender essentialist, misogynistic and problematic health narratives may become intelligible, appealing, or normalised.

3.3. Masculine status

Procuring masculine status content reinforced traditional and rigid ideals of masculinity. Status, dominance, and emotional suppression were positioned as key markers of male success (inclusive of accomplishments, capital, value). Many of these narratives framed masculinity in opposition to feminism, equating wealth, physical prowess, and sexual conquest with masculine capital and men's self-worth. Additionally, content in this category frequently advocated for traditional gender roles and glorified hyper self-reliance. Through the process of applying the framework to participants' videos, this category was refined into six sub-categories: *Undermining gender equality*; *Wealth attainment*; *Muscularity and physical dominance*; *Relentless mental fortitude avoiding weakness or emotion*; *Protector and provider roles*; and *Playboy*.

3.3.1. Undermining gender equality

Undermining gender equality content often criticised perceived hypocritical elements of feminist movements. These included debate-

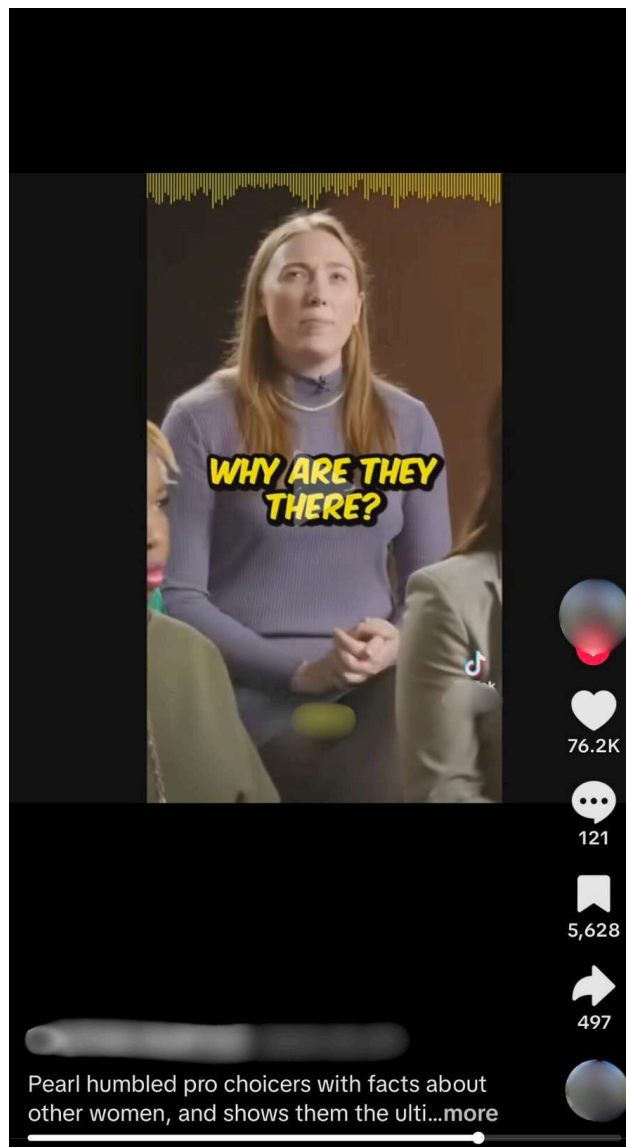


Fig. 1. Influencer Hannah Pearl Davis debating with other women, arguing against pro-choice opinions.

style discussions, framed specifically to position anti-feminism as factual, and the opposing opinion as illogical. This was typically presented as men shutting down arguments from women, though there were a notable number of instances where women held the role of anti-feminist too. This debate-style, combative framing was often explicit in the title of the video or opening caption (e.g., “PEARL [anti-feminist influencer] SHITS on PRO CHOICERS with FACTS!”). Vague quantifiers to uncited data (e.g., ‘many experts believe’, ‘studies show’), or a single specific statistic removed from context (i.e., ‘cherry picking’) were sometimes used to bolster subjective and predetermined interpretations of said data with an illusion of objectivity (Fig. 1).

“40% of women that have had abortions have had 2 or more. ... So what does that say to me? That means you're using it as a form of birth control.”

Other content within this category included satirical videos or heavily edited clips of TV shows and movies that imply negative stereotypes about women (e.g., laziness, hyper-emotional) and criticize or mock women. Similarly, videos making contentious statements about gender roles was also common. For example, in the accompanying screenshot (Fig. 2), manhood was explicitly linked to skill at automotive repairs, while incompetency or reliance on professional mechanics is equivalent to being a woman.

“If your boyfriend has to call the RAC or the AA to get his car fixed and not the boys with a jack and a Halfords advanced tool kit then I'm sorry but you have a girlfriend”

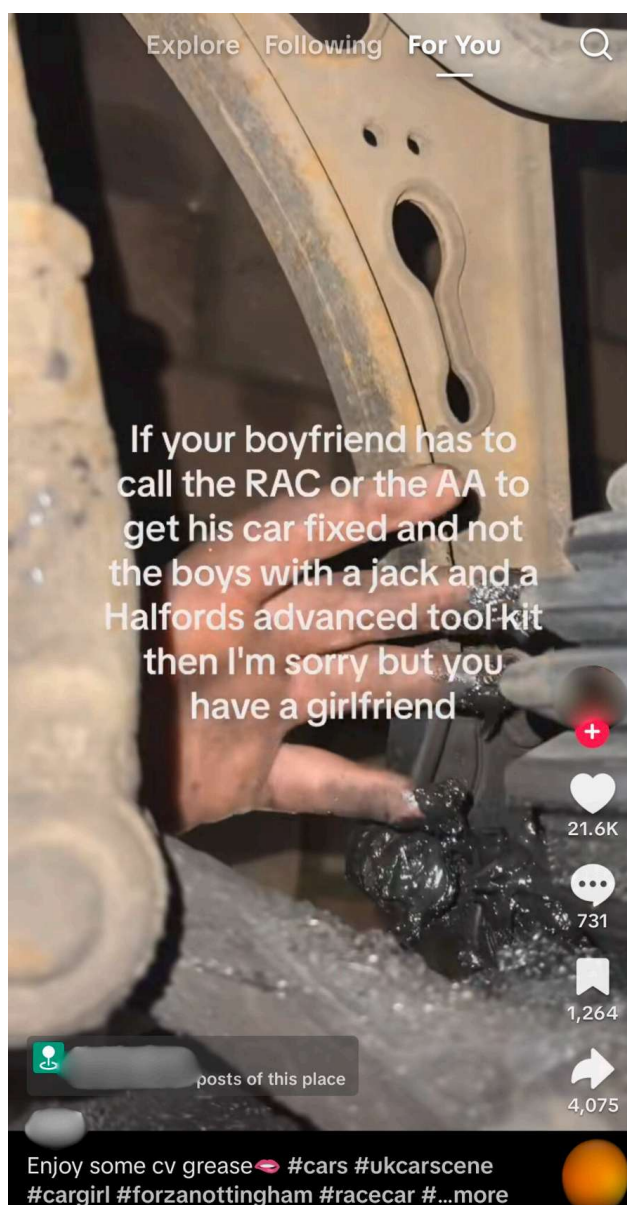


Fig. 2. A short video where a person places their hands on a car engine while a statement about manhood is overlaid.

3.3.2. Wealth attainment

Wealth attainment included depictions of luxury material items (i.e., cars, clothes, watches), in various contexts. An underlying theme across these contexts is the association between these luxury items (particularly cars) and manhood, with an aspirational male figure central to the video (by either driving or making clear they own the car). Videos of luxury cars stitched together and voiceovers expressing sentiments that value attaining wealth above other goals was common (for example “*Fuck your clubs, fuck your parties, chase your fucking dreams*”). In a particularly pertinent example (Fig. 3), a man gets his Porsche repainted from red to black due to multiple women saying “*babe, this car would be so much sexier if it was black*”.

“*Thanks, you too sweetheart*”.

Videos promoting detailed money-making tips (i.e., credit card perks/points) and giveaways in the form of cash, cars, and even houses featured within this category. These videos varied from local “punting club” content, who offer financial advice and community to viewers through likely unsanctioned AI/deep-fake voiceovers of popular male celebrities (such as Joe Rogan). Male camaraderie and masculinity was linked with making money. Other depictions of wealth attainment included influencer giveaways (Fig. 4), that traded competition entries for new followers and encouraged immediate audience engagement:

“*Okay Australia who’s ready to win 600,000 cash instantly, 8:30 pm tonight, the gates are closing, this is our biggest ever cash giveaway and it could be your life that’s changing... you will literally see 600 k.*”

3.3.3. Muscularity and physical dominance

Videos within this category glorified men displaying high levels of muscularity and strength, along with videos that showed men using their physical attributes (e.g., height, weight, muscles) to be physically aggressive towards other men. For example, boxing videos



Fig. 3. A man stands beside a recently repainted Porsche as he makes a joke to a woman off-screen.



Fig. 4. Australian content creator promotes giving away 600,000 in cash in exchange for his followers to click the link below and buy a package.

featured as a way to praise men's physicality, and leverage that physique for aggression and dominance. In some cases (Fig. 5), this included stressing the need to pass on values of violence and aggression to young boys and men, with the view that violence is inevitable in men's lives (*"there's gonna be people trying to punch him in the face, all sorts of stuff"*).

"It's just something that I want to teach them. It's really important for the boys to learn how to box... There's going to be people trying to punch them in the face."

Outside of using their strength and physicality to dominate others, a number of videos featured men simply *displaying* high levels of muscularity/strength, relative to others. This included vlog/interview style content from content creators such as the "Tren Twins" ("tren" being a reference to the steroid trenbolone), men showing off their physique by silently flexing their muscles while rap music played in the background, physical strength challenges such as wood chopping, and interviews with Jiu Jitsu athletes asking them to rate their own skills compared to others. Some content creators advertised products to their viewers to help them improve their physicality and muscularity to attract women (Fig. 6):

"we all know girls like guys with veiny forearms... get your arms popping before the summer"

3.3.4. Relentless mental fortitude avoiding weakness or emotion

Content in this category encouraged men to suppress their emotions and relentlessly pursue toughness, discipline and unyielding resilience. These videos both valorised men who meet these standards and chastised those who do not. The content portrayed the repression of emotions and weakness across a range of contexts in everyday scenarios such as weight loss, athleticism, sex and relationships.

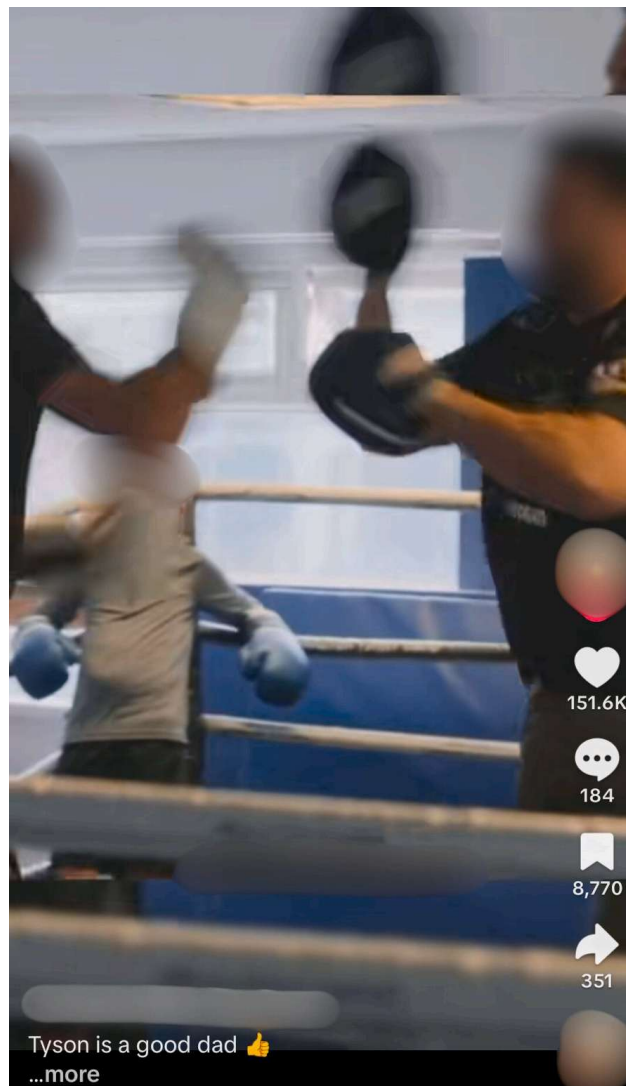


Fig. 5. Tyson Fury (an ex-professional boxer) with his three sons in a gym stating why he thinks it's important that his sons learn how to box.

Male role models such as sports stars were frequently portrayed as embodiments of discipline, mental toughness and masculine capital. In one video (Fig. 7), NFL star Tom Brady passionately urged viewers to push through fatigue and physical limitations: *"Fuck your tired body, fuck that unmotivated mind and get out there and do it anyway."* Similarly, former Navy SEAL David Goggins framed relentless persistence as the antidote to failure: *"When I get done with that run or that study session, if it wasn't good enough, I gotta go back again."*

"I'm tired today. I'm lazy. I don't wanna do it. It's too hard. No one else is doing it. It's a weekend. It's too late. These are already off-hours... You know who [those excuses] are great for? Your competition."

3.3.5. Protector and provider roles

Videos in this category related to expectations around men and women's roles and commitments to each other in relationships. Men's right and their responsibility to adopt protector and provider roles in relationships was in some instances justified through stories of women's infidelity and disloyalty – warning that women without that kind of partner can be manipulative, materialistic and dishonest. Content creators shared advice to young men on the ways to act around young women and spoke authoritatively on ways women should act around men in return. One video portrayed a situation where the woman was trying to express herself by dancing provocatively ("bring out my inner stripper"), but her partner intervened, telling her to stop and to *"get TF [the fuck] up"*.

Content also emphasised the importance of following a traditional blueprint of heterosexual relationships – tying the value of a long-term relationship to marriage and upholding traditional roles (i.e., men being the primary financial providers and women being the primary caregivers). In one video animation, a waiter challenges a man in his restaurant by questioning why he hasn't married his girlfriend after 10 years. Following the back-and-forth interaction, the waiter declares, *"I would have married her,"* making a joke out of the boyfriend who has failed to *"lock it down."* A video short of NFL player Harrison Butker's university graduation commencement speech was one example (Fig. 8) insinuating that women's greatest purpose was to become a wife, mother and homemaker:

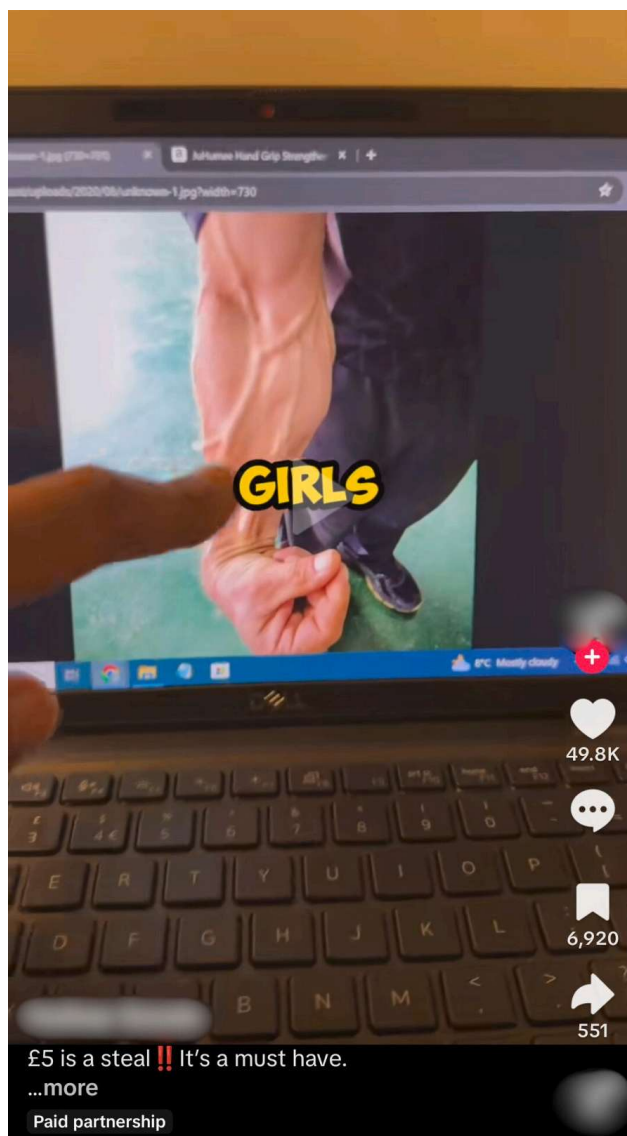


Fig. 6. Video of a man selling hand grip tools by showing pictures of vascular forearms.

“Some of you [women] may go on to lead successful careers in the world, but I would venture to guess that the majority of you are most excited about your marriage and the children you will bring into this world.”

3.3.6. Playboy

Videos in this category centered on the “playboy” ideal of masculinity, wherein ‘being a man’ means seducing and sleeping with many women without regard for emotional attachments. While the specific topics of these videos varied, they were consistent in sexualising women. Insofar as women’s experiences were considered at all, this was only to the extent that a man succeeds in sexually pleasing or exciting them.

Some videos focused primarily on the process of seduction itself – termed “rizz” – colloquially defined as the skill of using speech, behaviour and charisma to hook up with women. One video example followed a young man filming his experiences approaching and flirting with women in public (Fig. 9). Another video presented a series of images showcasing a “pick-up line” dating app where a man used AI to generate messages to flirt with a woman and ultimately succeed in getting her phone number. Another video example used self-deprecating humour to describe how male friends approached women at parties. In this footage a sports coach gives a pre-game pep-talk, with text overlay that read, “*That one bro giving the boys pre-party advice: (we get no b*tches)*” as the coach shouts “*If it moves, hit it! If it don’t move, hit it! And if you’re not sure, guess what? Hit it!*”.

“Best rizz in the UK”.

Other videos focused on sexual interactions themselves. In some cases, sex with many women was framed as a way to assert one’s heterosexuality, a norm closely tied to traditional ideals of masculinity. This was depicted in one video which featured a young man lip-syncing over a popular rap song with the lyrics, “*First of all, I fuck eight bitches a day. How could you ever say [I’m] gay?*” Several videos depicted sound-bites or clips from longer form podcast interviews about sex and intimacy. One video featured an interview between a



Fig. 7. Montage featuring motivational quotes from footballer Tom Brady, basketballer LeBron James (pictured), and former Navy SEAL David Goggins.

male podcaster and a woman implying sensitive caring men are sexually unattractive. The woman relates a story of dating “a sweet, kind-hearted boy” in whom she did not have any sexual interest. The podcaster then summed up this anecdote by saying “So basically, he was drying your pussy up, being too nice?” In another video (Fig. 10) a male podcaster proclaimed that male dominance is essential to making women orgasm:

“If a woman is in her head, she can't climax... This is where dominance comes in. When you're dominant and you're leading and you're sort of being a bit, maybe more like manhandling, it puts a woman in this subspace where she's not thinking anymore.”

Emotional detachment from one's sexual conquests was promoted in videos in this category. In one video a rapper, surrounded by women in a club, claimed “Sometimes, I love how heartless I am; U can do one thing wrong and the next day I won't even know your name.” In another video (resembling a dating competition), a man briefly evaluated a group of women by their appearance and first impression before then deciding whether they stay or leave.

3.4. Degrading health

Degrading social and emotional wellbeing content explicitly advocated for harm or hate towards oneself or others with themes relating to mental ill-health and suicide (e.g., nihilism, worthlessness), risky health behaviours (e.g., self-harm, gambling, substance use) and abuse (e.g., explicit misogyny, male supremacy, violence towards others). This category consisted of four sub-categories. These were: *Hopelessness and suicide*; *Risk-taking and health behaviours*; *Explicit misogyny*; and *Violence towards women and sexual/gender minorities*. An additional sub-category, *Physical appearance augmentation* was identified in Phase 1 (social media monitoring) but no videos relating to this category were found in Phase 2 (validating the coding framework on participants' videos). As such this sub-category is retained in the Masculinity Content Classification Framework (Table 2) but not in the below results.

3.4.1. Hopelessness and suicide

Video themes of hopelessness and self-loathing were compounded by a lack of interpersonal connection. Some videos directly linked this hopelessness and self-loathing to suicide – either suggesting that there was no point to life if others don't accept you, or that

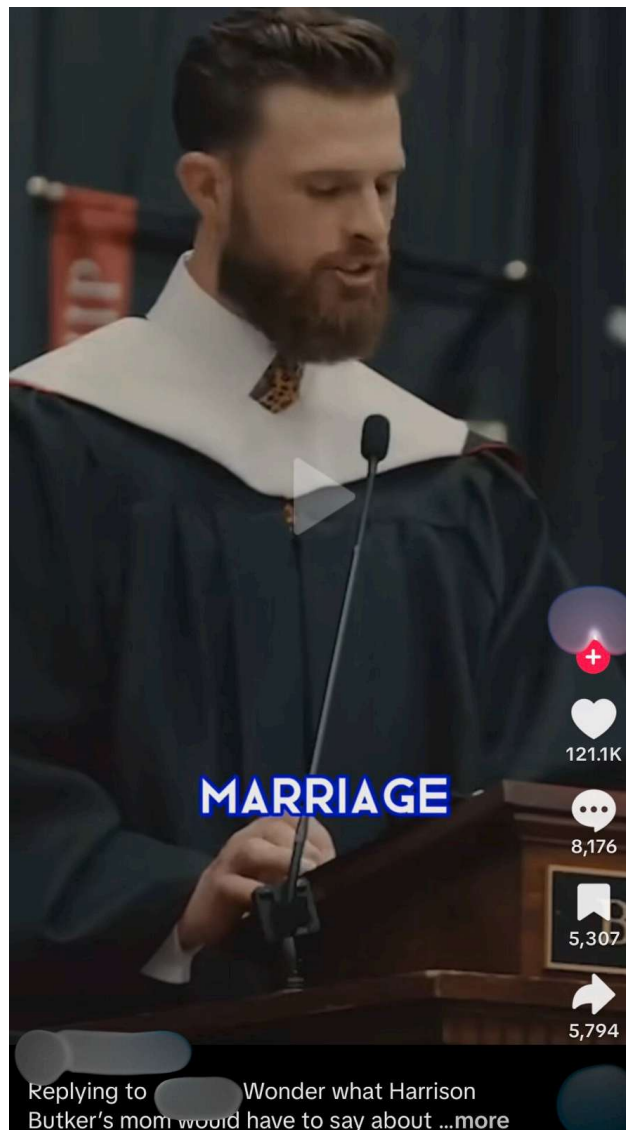


Fig. 8. Harrison Butker delivering a college commencement speech to the graduate students.

suicide was the only option to alleviate feelings of loneliness and sadness. One video contained the text, “*when you see the weird kid go into kiss his gf and realize your...the actual loser*” alongside an image of a dead-faced man and sad music. Another video featured a text-to-speech narration describing a young man who was bullied to the point of becoming suicidal. Relatedly, one video conveyed the experience of being labeled “*different,*” a so-called “*soft boy*” excluded by peers (Fig. 11).

“*I know what is like to feel... different (soft boy)*”

3.4.2. Risk-taking and health behaviours

This content often glorified, normalised, or trivialised risky health behaviours, connecting them to masculinity. Some content emphasised binge drinking and alcohol consumption as male bonding activities, often under the guise of humour. In one video rock icon Liam Hallagher and a podcast host ridicule the notion of having just one beer at the pub dismissing it as pointless. Liam says “*If we’re going out, we’re going to go out to have hundreds [of beers]...or at least ten...you’re not going to have one. I don’t go to pubs to drink soft drink.*” Liam and the podcast host then go on to laugh at the idea of sitting amongst a group of mates and saying no after just one beer. Another video showed a man lamenting his past addiction in which he spent \$15,000 per month on cocaine and alcohol, only to be mocked in a “*stitched*” response by a younger man who ridiculed his story as boastful. Clinic advertising, unsubstantiated health advice and anecdotal stories speaking to the benefits of performance enhancement substances also featured in this subcategory. In other videos young men used substances on camera (steroids, cannabis, tobacco) to show audiences what it was like (Fig. 12):

“*The thing is right Iceberg [snus] is way stronger than this...it’s not too strong. It wasn’t as much of a nicotine rush as I thought.*”

Financial risk-taking through gambling was also valorised. Some videos gave audiences punting tips, while others mocked common public health messaging around gambling. In one video example, two shirtless young men undermined advisory warnings sarcastically

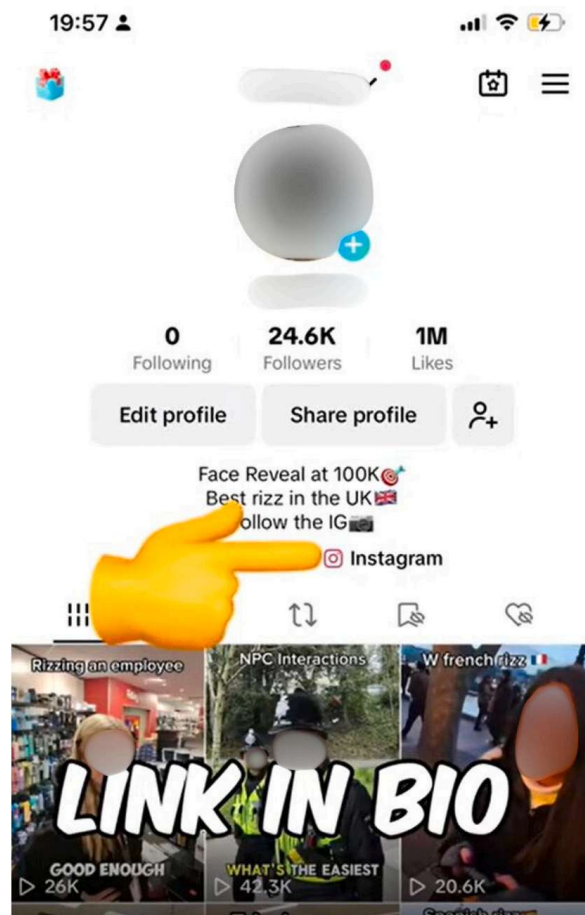


Fig. 9. Young man filming approaching women in public, initiating flirtatious conversations, ending by self-promoting his tiktok account.

implying financial gains were more or less guaranteed having just secured an eight fold return on the money they wagered in an online gambling event (Fig. 13).

“How much are we going for 10? Surely 15? Alright it’s your money...Fuck we are so up. [Sarcastically:] Do not gamble. You will lose money. Yeah by the looks of things you will lose money.”

3.4.3. Explicit misogyny

Content in this subcategory perpetuated misogyny, reinforced male supremacy and reduced women’s worth to their physical appearance, sexual desirability, or reproductive function. One video portrays disdain and frustration towards women as an inevitable development in heterosexual relationships. The text reads, *“You hit the stage of hating your girl,”* accompanied by somber string music and visuals of a man leaning back in a car, anguished, while a woman was looking at herself in the mirror in the foreground. Another video directly engages in fat-shaming and dehumanization, through a story justifying why *“fat girls should be charged more”* in a convenience store (Fig. 14).

“If you know women, you know that they don’t really look at the price of shit, they just buy things and hope that the money fucking, you know, gets to the other destination and ahh two they’re fat. When a person’s fat they obviously desire things more, so they’ll pay more for it...”

3.4.4. Violence towards women and sexual/gender minorities

This subcategory featured content advocating for violent and abusive behaviours towards individuals who are not cisgender, heterosexual men. Herein, videos normalised or excused controlling behaviours and violence towards women in intimate relationships, linking these acts with protection, loyalty or dominance among men. One example video shows a heavily edited excerpt from the show *You*, where the male protagonist, Joe, is being mocked by female characters for not lasting long in bed. Joe then berates the female character before chasing her in a separate scene and motioning to hit her over the head with a brick. In another video, a man discusses how he would prohibit his girlfriend from going to a club, justifying this restriction as a way to keep her safe citing clubs as places where other men might objectify and prey upon her (Fig. 15):

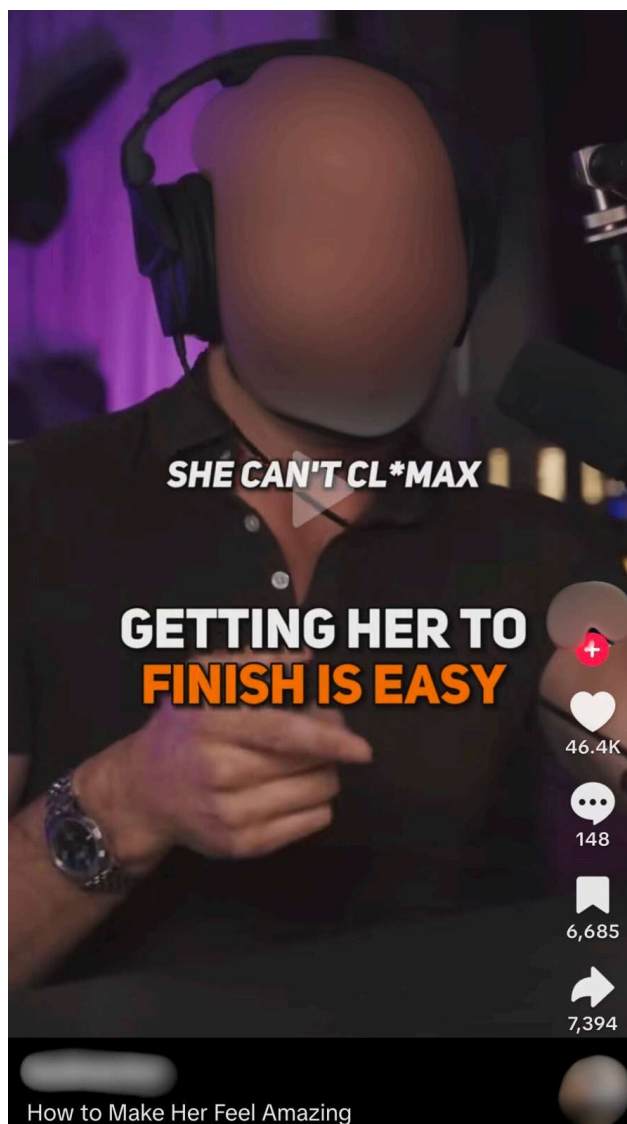


Fig. 10. Male podcasters linking male dominance to sexual prowess.

“If I have a girlfriend, like, she’s not going to the clubs. That’s something big for me...I tell you why, because as your man I feel like it’s my duty to protect you. For me as your boyfriend I am spending my whole life providing for you, so I can demand I don’t want to put you in a situation where you’re in danger. You can call that controlling. You can say I am toxic whatever. But the truth of it is that I know the club for a woman is not a safe place to be...When you want a relationship with a man you have to sacrifice certain amounts of freedom in your life. You’re losing freedom and so am I.”

Another video trivializes physical violence against women, suggesting loyalty between male friends is more important. The text overlay states, *“When bro is beating his girl but he gave you his Crunchyroll account,”* paired with upbeat song lyrics declaring, *“You are my friend.”* This content minimizes the severity of physical intimate partner violence, reframing it as a loyalty test where personal benefit (e.g., access to an anime streaming account) outweighs accountability or intervention. While women were the most prominent subject in this subcategory, there was also some content that advocated for harm towards sexual and gender minorities. For example, one video featured an image of an LGBT + pride parade followed by an image of a gun from the first-person shooter game DOOM, with the caption, *“The only thing they fear ... Is YOU”*.

4. Discussion

This study developed and applied the Masculinity Content Classification Framework using TikTok data provided by young men. Unlike previous research that focused on specific influencers (e.g., Roberts et al., 2025) or manosphere sub-communities (e.g., Men Going Their Own Way; Jones et al., 2020) our approach examined the presence of such content within young men’s own TikTok feeds providing a unique and ecologically valid contribution to the field. This study involved two phases of qualitative framework analysis. First, a social media monitoring approach using dummy accounts (as in Ekō, 2023; Regehr et al., 2024), yielded a three-category

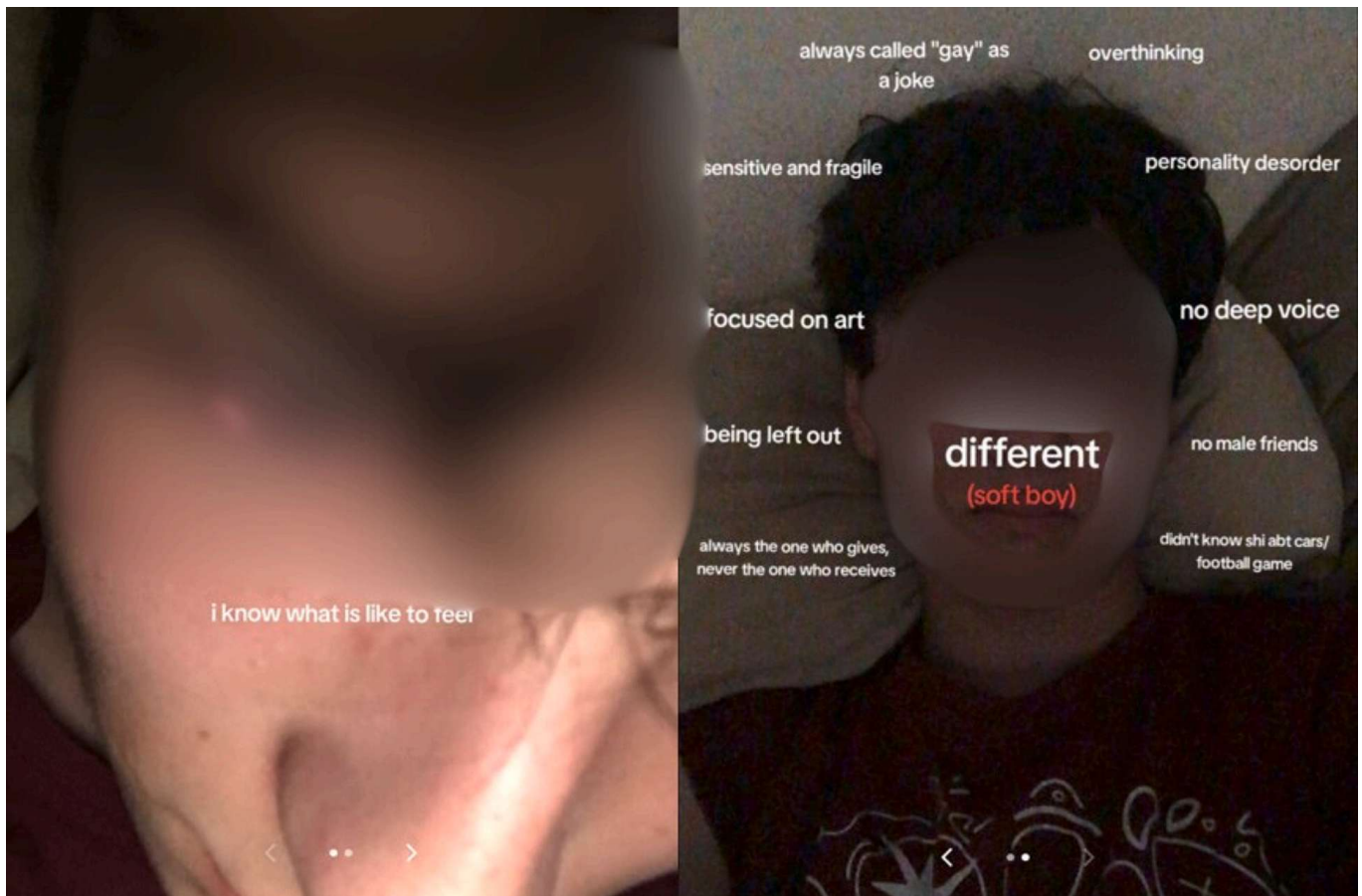


Fig. 11. Slideshow of two images, where the narrator lists a series of attributes that has led to him feeling different.

framework: *Cultural touchpoints*, *Procuring masculine status (masculine status)* and *Degrading social and emotional wellbeing (degrading health)*. Applying this framework to real-world data revealed *masculine status* and *degrading health* content made up just over 5% of videos compared to more than one-third of participants' videos coded as *cultural touchpoints*. A key strength of this study was our data donation method, answering recent calls from scholars for more ecologically valid research (Over et al., 2025). This approach allowed us to capture content that organically arose on young men's TikTok FYP (for you page), rather than relying on researcher-created accounts or artificially curated FYPs.

4.1. Mainstreaming the manosphere

The intertwined nature of men's lifestyle and culture content (*cultural touchpoints*), *masculine status* and *degrading health* content on TikTok signals a shift in the manosphere from isolated and siloed forums (e.g., 4chan) towards mainstream social media. This aligns with emerging evidence that manosphere ideologies are increasingly permeating platforms like TikTok (Solea & Sugiura, 2023; Haslop et al., 2024) and moulding to 21st century neoliberal complexities and socio-economic pressures (Gerrand et al., 2025). Our findings demonstrate that manosphere content frequently co-exists with broader *cultural touchpoints*, drawing on popular men's culture to convey narratives. For example, sport features recurrently across all three framework categories but carried different meanings. Within *cultural touchpoints*, clips of professional athletes and in-game highlights served primarily as entertainment. In *masculine status* content the same professional athletes embodied discipline and emotional suppression as models of masculine success. Finally, in *degrading health* content, sports (e.g., weightlifting, boxing, mixed martial arts) were paired with influencer commentary promoting dominance, control and violence. Broader cultural and political moments (e.g., Harrison Butker's commencement speech that harkened back to the traditional gender roles of men and women) can also amplify and legitimise these narratives.

Manosphere content often tapped into young men's salient developmental concerns (including body image insecurities and a desire for sexual success) which Botto and Gottzén (2023, pp. 7-8) pointed to as a key reason young men shift from firstly "encountering" manosphere content, to then quickly becoming "obsessed," viewing it as "essential" for success. This interplay adds to the existing body of research (Baker et al., 2024; Thomas & Balint 2022; Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2021) which illustrates how algorithmic pathways draw young men toward more extreme manosphere narratives by leveraging relevant and relatable topics embedding these ideas deeper into their digital worlds. This Masculinity Content Classification Framework reflects this trajectory capturing the continuum from ubiquitous to more extreme men and masculinity content. As such, this framework offers researchers and policy makers a valuable tool to examine how exposure and algorithmic radicalisation pathways evolve.

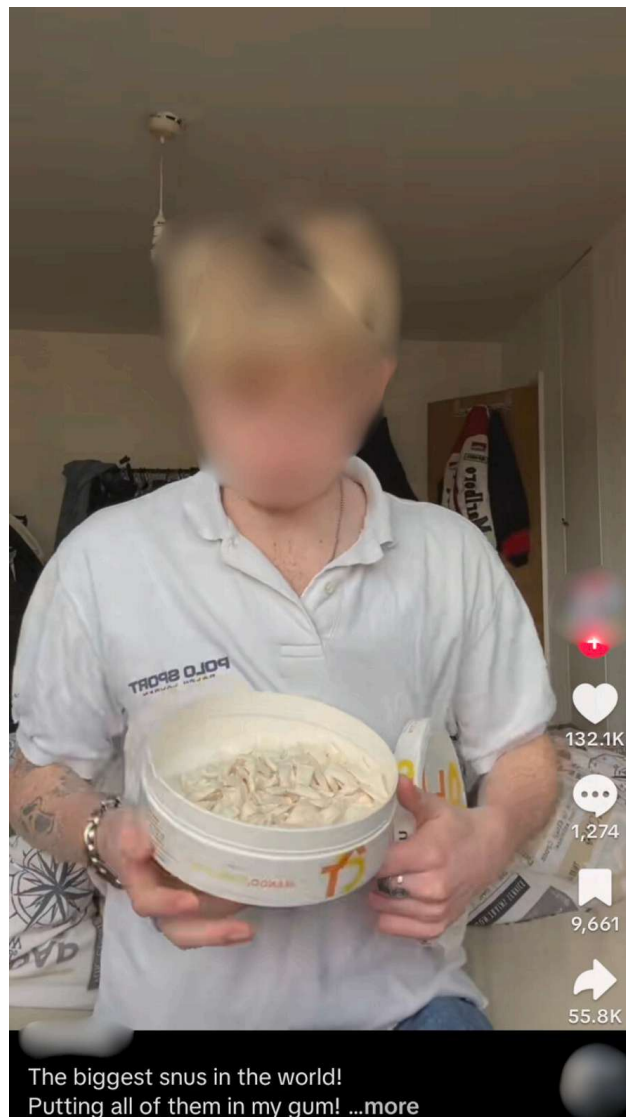


Fig. 12. Young man places multiple nicotine packets under this upper lip to “see what happens” before being nonchalant and disappointed by the absence of extreme effects.

Our findings build upon prior research, such as [Ging \(2019\)](#) and [Han and Yin's \(2023\)](#) delineation of self-identified manosphere sub-communities (e.g., men's rights activists, pick-up artists, incels), highlighting important distinctions in ways these sub-communities translate to mainstream digital spaces. For example, ‘incel content’ (arguably the most studied group in the manosphere; [Wilson et al., 2024](#)) was not a distinct category. Instead, participants' videos often contained blended ideologies and influencers spanning multiple sub-communities illustrating the fluid and interconnected nature of the manosphere in mainstream spaces.

Similar findings were reflected in recent research on Estonian ‘manfluencers’ ([Lott et al., 2025](#)), which identified themes consistent with our framework, including beliefs that society disadvantages men, that masculinity is defined by dominance and endurance, and that men must tolerate pain through discipline. Our analysis likewise revealed recurring themes in participants' videos aligned with mainstream men's culture (e.g., fashion, dating and mateship, sport) and broader masculine grievances, such as shifting gender roles, economic pressures, and changing relationship dynamics.

4.2. Health implications

Engagement with the manosphere content, specifically *masculine status* and *degrading health* content, has important implications for young men's health, wellbeing and relationships. Emerging evidence indicates that young men who regularly engage with masculinity influencers are more likely to endorse restrictive masculine norms, experience poor mental health, adopt risky health behaviours, and hold negative attitudes towards women and gender equality ([Fisher et al., 2025b](#)). Past research has also linked adherence to restrictive masculine norms (many of which are reproduced in *masculine status* content) to adverse health outcomes including reduced help-seeking ([Iwamoto et al., 2018](#)), higher depression and suicidal ideation ([Pirkis et al., 2016](#)), and lower self-esteem, particularly amid unemployment or financial strain ([Gonalons-Pons & Gangl, 2021](#)).

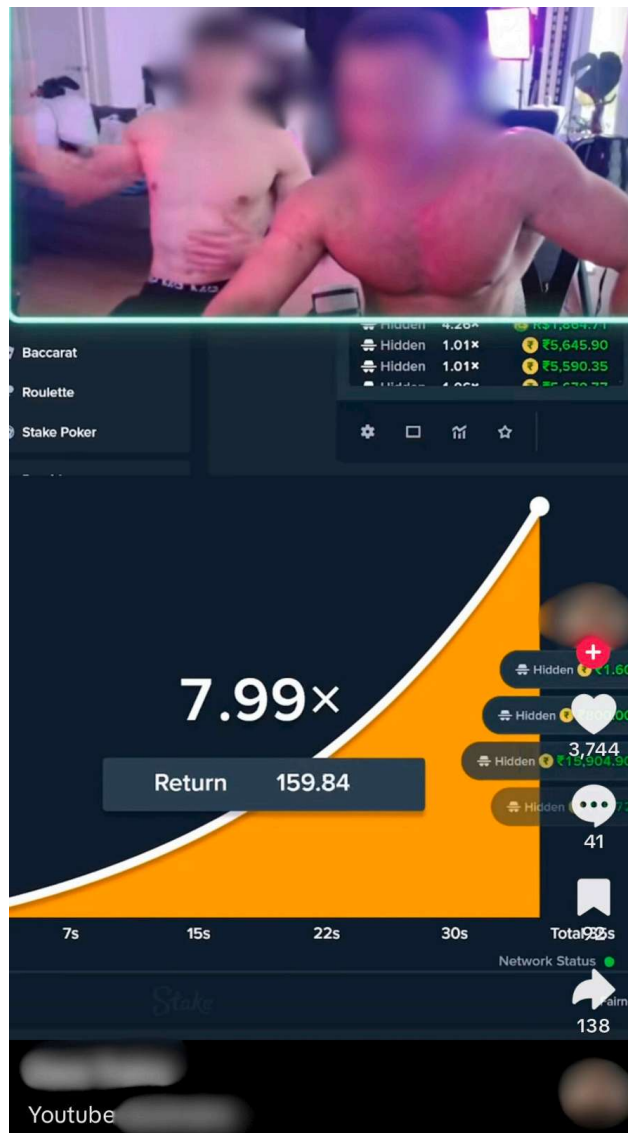


Fig. 13. Muscular men featured shirtless, gambling with Bitcoin, celebrating their wins enthusiastically.

Conversely, young men facing personal or relational challenges may be drawn to *masculine status* content because it validates their struggles and provides seemingly practical solutions. Herein, traditional masculine norms are framed as solutions to young men's contemporary ontological insecurities including anxiety about social status, physical appearance and identity amid rapidly shifting gender relations (Maloney et al., 2022). Despite particular masculine ideals being presented as the solution (e.g., financial success and dominance), these gendered stereotypes can intensify pressures to meet unattainable standards, fostering shame, frustration and poor mental health when expectations go unmet (Equimindo, 2025).

Degrading health content presents arguably the most direct negative links to the health and safety of young men and those around them. For example, hopelessness has been identified as a risk factor for suicide attempts among young men (Miranda-Mendizabal et al., 2019), and social isolation is a stronger predictor of suicide in men compared to women (Motillon-Toudic et al., 2022). Content that encourages rumination or promotes maladaptive coping strategies may therefore heighten suicide risk. Excessive alcohol consumption likewise poses health risks, with established links to poor physical and mental health, including suicide attempts (Fisher, 2024; Amiri & Behnezhad, 2020). Substance use, gambling, and the normalization of performance-enhancing drugs (e.g., steroids) were also common, portrayed as routes to fitness or social capital, yet they carry serious health risks including liver toxicity, cardiovascular issues, and sexual dysfunction (van Amsterdam et al., 2010; Horwitz et al., 2019) and suicide attempts (Benakovic et al., 2024).

Elements of content within the Masculinity Content Classification Framework, particularly *degrading health* content, may also heighten risk of harm to others, notably through the promotion of behaviours associated with intimate partner violence (IPV). *Explicit misogyny* content (subcategory within *degrading health*) propagates a gendered worldview in which men are entitled to dominance and women's obedience and sexual submission. Men who endorse such beliefs are more likely to perpetrate IPV (Hing et al., 2020; McCarthy et al., 2018). This violence can stem from perceived failures to meet rigid masculine standards (e.g., being the primary breadwinner), with aggression used to reaffirm masculine identity (Dahl et al., 2015; Reidy et al., 2014). Relationship breakdown is



Fig. 14. Man narrating about how he increased the price of ice cream for an overweight female customer to discourage her purchase.

also known as a key risk factor for men's suicide, especially in younger men, further demonstrating how degrading relational dynamics (e.g., loss of identity and social connection) can harm self and others (Wilson et al., 2025). Many young men seek out content on relationship advice in the aftermath of a relationship breakdown but exposure to misogynistic or violent material may fuel anger and increase the risk of harm toward women and themselves.

Finally, alcohol misuse (Moore et al., 2011), substance misuse (de Bruijn & de Graaf, 2016), and problem gambling have also been found to increase the likelihood that young men will perpetrate IPV (Dowling et al., 2016; Hing et al., 2020). Both alcohol and illicit substances can impair impulse control and rapidly escalate aggression towards partners (Moore et al., 2011), while gambling-related financial and emotional stress can contribute to relationship conflict (Hing et al., 2020).

4.3. Limitations

Several limitations should be noted when interpreting these findings. First, the TikTok data provided by participants did not specify which videos were watched in full versus skipped, limiting insight into engagement depth. However, given TikTok's algorithm delivers content similar to previously engaged material (De et al., 2025; Herman, 2024), it is reasonable to assume the videos captured reflected content participants were likely to interact with. Future research could address this limitation by employing the social media "scroll back" method, in which participants review their social media histories with researchers to reflect on the content and its meaning (Robards & Lincoln, 2020).

Second, the framework was developed and validated using data from a single platform (TikTok), so its generalisability to other platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube) and other forms of visual media (e.g., long-form video) remains uncertain. Applying similar methods to platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) may yield different patterns, particularly given its recent changes to content

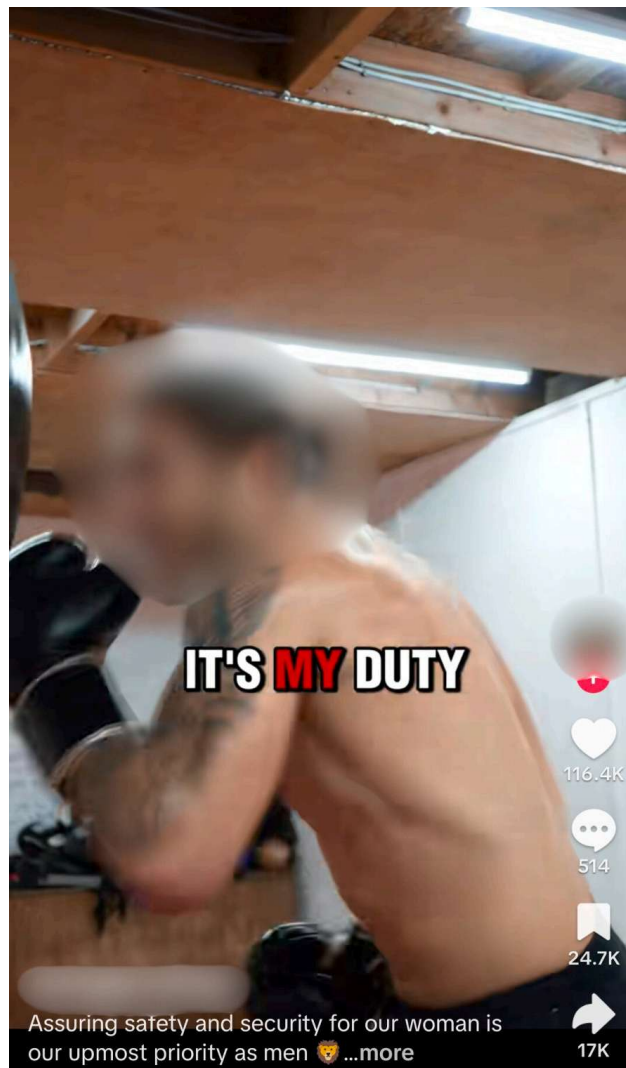


Fig. 15. Male monologue explaining why he would restrict future partners from going to clubs.

moderation policies (Kopps, 2024).

Third, the content used to validate the framework was likely influenced by our sample and TikTok's content moderation practices. Given the skew of Australian and UK-based participants in our sample, the content analysed may reflect region-specific trends. Participation also required data sharing, which may have introduced sample bias and contributed to the high proportion of *cultural touchpoint* videos. While this has implications for interpreting frequency estimates (Table 2), the study's primary aim was to qualitatively test and refine the coding framework, not to quantify content prevalence. In addition, only videos still live on TikTok at the time of coding could be analysed. Content violating TikTok's Community Guidelines (e.g., promoting suicide or substance use; TikTok, 2024) was likely removed, reducing the amount available for coding and potentially excluding harmful material that participants had already viewed.

Finally, although themes identified in *masculine status* and *degrading health* content have been linked to poor outcomes for men, the extent to which young men agree with or act on manosphere content remains unclear. This represents an important caveat when considering potential health impacts. Future research should explore how content engagement behaviours (e.g., active vs. passive consumption) and individual values interact to shape whether exposure to manosphere content translates into negative health outcomes.

4.4. Future directions

Future research must look to understand the concentrated, active and potentially 'radicalised' communities of the manosphere, as well as the more diffuse, and mainstream manosphere narratives circulating in popularised men and masculinity content. Together, these perspectives are essential to understanding how manosphere ideologies evolve and influence young men and society. The Masculinity Content Classification Framework developed in this study provides a foundation for such inquiry and enables us to centre a health and wellbeing lens, a unique viewpoint within a field that has so far primarily focused on radicalisation.

The framework was developed with the intention for its use and iterative adaptation in future studies. The framework as presented

in this paper reflects a platform-specific manifestation of the manosphere at this point in time, providing a rigorous foundation for ongoing testing and development. Extending this method and the framework's themes to other prominent mainstream (e.g., YouTube) and fringe (e.g., 4chan, Odysee, Rumble) social media platforms used by men will strengthen its applicability and reach. The framework's themes (e.g., *Muscularity and physical dominance, protector and provider roles*) were intentionally designed to transcend format and are not limited to TikTok's video medium. Researchers should also seek to capture the full scope of young men's digital lives by examining content across multiple platforms, continually refining how such material is defined and analysed. Crucially, this work must actively involve young men to ensure findings reflect, and resonate with, the realities of their digital landscapes.

Future research could apply this framework to examine how manosphere content shapes men's health and wellbeing over time. While research in this area has already begun (e.g., Fisher et al., 2025b), our comprehensive framework affords the opportunity to validate prior cross-sectional findings that are based on self-reported, rather than objectively recorded video data. For example, researchers could assess whether greater exposure to content promoting rigid masculine values (*masculine status*) predicts poorer health outcomes, matching the known health harms of such norms in other contexts (American Psychological Association, Boys and Men Guidelines Group, 2018). By delineating and differentiating manosphere content across multiple subcategories, the framework enables assessment of relative risks: For example, comparing the impacts of *relentless mental fortitude* and *avoiding weakness or emotion* content versus *wealth attainment* content. Importantly, this approach shifts the focus from individual content creators to the content itself, allowing researchers to track broad *meta*-trends that persist beyond the rise and fall of specific creators.

4.5. Conclusion

Manosphere narratives are now deeply embedded within mainstream, male-oriented lifestyle and cultural content on TikTok. This study is the first to analyse real-world TikTok data from young men, revealing their exposure to a broad spectrum of masculinity-oriented content with significant implications for young men's health, wellbeing, and relationships. We also developed the first operationalised framework for analysing manosphere content, offering a robust foundation for measuring how increasing exposure to men and masculinity-related content online may shape the health and social outcomes of the next generation of men.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Krista Fisher: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Ruben Benakovic:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Kieran O’Gorman:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Simon M. Rice:** Supervision, Writing – review & editing. **Kaitlyn Tierney:** Writing – review & editing. **Cynthia Miller-Idriss:** Writing – review & editing. **Pasha Dashtgard:** Writing – review & editing. **Zac Seidler:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Dr Krista Fisher reports statistical analysis was provided by Unforgettable Me. Dr Krista Fisher reports a relationship with Unforgettable Me that includes: consulting or advisory. The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. If there are other authors, they declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2026.102402>.

Data availability

OSF link provided in Methods contains de-identified participant data. Video Examples are available upon request as outlined in [Supplementary File 2](#)

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