The Manosphere

The Cause | The Impact | The Fix

Presenters

Bernie Colbert, Pittsburgh Action Against Rape

Nicole Molinaro, President/CEO Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh

Karen Sellers, Program Associate, STANDING FIRM

Learning Objectives:

Attendees will gain an understanding of:

- Toxic Online Spaces
- The Reach & Impact
- The DV/SA Connection
- The Needed Shift

(https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7444121/)

What is the Manosphere?



A collection of interconnected online communities (websites, blogs, forums) with a harmful focus on men’s issues, masculinity, and gender roles.



Makeup of the Manosphere

- Men’s Rights Activism
- Red pill groups/rage
- Involuntary celibate (incel) spaces
- Grievance-based forums
- Other forums that promote:
  - Misogynistic views
  - Harmful gender roles
  - Online harassment
  - Hostile sexism
  - “Influencers” who invoke religion to restrict women’s rights
  - Women jumping onboard: “Tradwives”
- Monetization of legitimate suffering

How to People Enter

- A desire for self-improvement
- Social media algorithms pushing extreme content
- Vulnerability
  - Social isolation
  - Loneliness
  - Low self-esteem

Real World Dangers



Feeling entitled to sex

Framing of women as enemies

Violent revenge openly encouraged

Pipeline to white supremacist idealogy

Beomes a way to repackage patriarchy and misogyny

Belief in a rigged system that leads to those more likely to vote for authoritarian leaders

Not An Isolated Issue

Patriarchy & Misogyny Repackaged

Patriarchy is an entire operating system for organizing human life by assigning value based on narrow set of criteria; an entire framework operating on the assumption that a man's worth is not intrinsic but earned constantly through performance and it can be revoked at any time.

Misogyny involves cultural, social, and individual beliefs or systems that devalue women, enforce patriarchal power, or punish women who challenge traditional gender roles. It is more active and hostile--the enforcement mechanism to maintain male dominance when women step outside expected social roles.

Pipeline to More Extreme Idealogies & Beliefs

Misogyny acts as a gateway drug

Far-right politics needs these men

Manosphere fulfills a functional gap

Based on the hatred of women; thrives on hating men



The Reach

This unfolding shift, which is by no means complete or evenly distributed, is detonating the foundational assumption that the patriarchal model of masculinity is built on: that men are needed because of what they provide.

What They’re Selling

Monetization and entrepreneurialism; pseudoscientific wellness; alignment with extremist ideologies.

Violence is permissible

The manosphere-adjacent content generated by tradwives and stay-at-home girlfriends glamorizes an unrealistically curated life. A woman eschewing feminist ideas, advocating for a return to the domestic sphere--often connects to white supremacy and far-right conservatism.

What They’re Selling: An Example

- Andrew Tate’s online membership platform, which he calls Real World makes an estimated $184 million annually.
  - That’s 155,000 students paying $99 per month. His premium tier, The War Room, costs $1,600 to enter.
- Top tier influencers in this space earn $200,000 or more per speaking appearance. Mid-level creators make between $1 million and $10 million annually across courses, memberships, supplements, and what researchers are now calling conflict content — content specifically designed to generate outrage, which drives engagement, which drives revenue.

The DV/SA Connection

- Normalizing misogyny
- Teaching coercive control and abuse techniques/strategies
  - Manipulating women into sex
  - Degradation
  - Physical abuse
- Packaging toxic ideas inside legitimate-seeming content around self-improvement
- Justifying control
- Collective victimhood; reframing accountability as an attack on men
- Undermining education and prevention

What If The Real Issue Is:

- **Child Exploitation—Preying on the Vulnerable**
  - At every stage, he pays.
  - At every stage the platform profits from his attention.
  - At every stage the content gets more extreme.

How to Spot the Influence of the Manosphere

- Social withdrawal, becoming secretive about online activities
  - Anxiety
  - Self-harm
  - Risky behavior; pressure to be more “manly”
- Using more gendered hate speech; rigid gender beliefs
- Negative changes in behavior/attitude
  - Increased distrust in women
  - Hostility towards women
  - Unhealthy obsessions with manliness (looksmaxxing, pheromone-maxxing)
- Humor that dehumanizes others (women/girls)
- Sexual harassment
- Sexualizing the appearance of girls/women

Why Leaving is Difficult

- The Use of Cult-Like Tactics
  - Goal is to foster intense distrust of the outside world through isolation from family/friends
- Echo Chambers
  - Reinforcement of their own worldviews and treat opposing views as other trying to silence their message/beliefs
- The Algorithms
  - Example From Reddit User: “I personally don’t feel like I got really sucked into the manosphere content but my social media sure as hell was feeding me the content, and it was definitely affecting my mentality. I think I could most clearly see the change within the Instagram algorithm. I entirely stopped engagement with the red pill content. As in scroll away as soon as I see it, so the algorithm started feeding me other dicey content. Stuff like rage bait content that specifically target men. So clearly Instagram recognized I was someone who was “consuming” red pill content, and when I actively stopped - it tried to loop me back into that sphere via another inlet.”

Leaving the Manosphere

- For some, it’s as simple as growing up and recognizing it’s not who they want to be
- Realization that one has strong female role models in life
- Shaming, while tempting, is not an answer
  - Find positive online communities
    - Empathetic, understanding, open-minded
- Help someone see the commerciallization; everything is for sale
  - Courses
  - Supplements
  - Crypto-currency

Call to Action

- Stand up against online harmful masculinity
- Push back on digital abuse
- Promote gender equality
  - Promote rights, safety, empowerment of women
  - Disrupt gender norms that harm men/boys
- Engage with young men
- Help young men have the confidence to stand up to their friends/others when hearing misogynistic comments
  - Stress non-complicity
- Non-judgmental conversations

The Needed Shift-Community

Promoting healthy masculinity in the digital age

- Value empathy and communication
- Build relationships based on trust, not dominance and status
- Normalize emotional expression and vulnerability safety
- Model respect
- Provide strategies for healthy disagreement

The Needed Shift-Community

- Teach media literacy
  - Point out and discuss gender stereotypes in the media
  - Educate young men to ask, “Who made this, why, and what’s missing?”
  - Learn to recognize red flags
    - One-sided generalizations (All women are like that)
    - Emotionally charged language (us vs. them)
    - Misuse of data (oversimplification of biology/psychology)
- Address misogyny head-on
  - Teach young men to take a stand against sexist comments/behaviors

The Needed Shift-Policy

- Strengthening existing policies on violence against women/girls
- Hold the tech industry accountable for the spread of harmful content
- Promote greater transparency across digital platforms (effects of algorithms)
- Build cooperation between state regulators and industry
- Empower survivors of digital abuse
  - Include their input in developing new policies; testing new technologies

The Needed Shift-Policy

- Close data gaps on the manosphere’s influence and the entry points for extremist ideologies
- Invest in digital citizenship--equipping young people with tools to recognize & reject online hate
- Form community partnerships to counter extremist content
- Invest in programs
  - Mental health initiatives for men/boys
  - Promote positive masculinity & evidence-based interventions to prevent radicalization

Questions?

Thank You!

Bernie Colbert

Nicole Molinaro

Karen Sellers