

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: Misogyny: the manosphere and online content, HC 867

Wednesday 11 March 2026

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Members present: Sarah Owen (Chair); Alex Brewer; David Burton-Sampson; Dame Nia Griffith; Christine Jardine; Kim Leadbeater; Kevin McKenna.

Questions 195-227

Witnesses

I: James Blake, BBC Television Presenter; and James Bloodworth, Journalist and Author.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: James Blake and James Bloodworth.

Chair: Good afternoon and welcome to the Women and Equalities Committee. Today we are holding an oral evidence session on misogyny, the manosphere and online content. We have two fantastic expert panellists before us: James Blake, the award-winning BBC television presenter and documentary filmmaker, one of whose works is “Men of the Manosphere”, and journalist and author James Bloodworth, one of whose latest works is “Lost Boys: A Personal Journey Through the Manosphere”. Do either of you have any questions before we start? No? Excellent.

Q195 **Kim Leadbeater:** Thank you both for coming in this afternoon. You have both spent time with people and communities in the manosphere for your work. Could you explain what that experience was like?

James Blake: In my documentary “Men of the Manosphere”, I spent time primarily with three lads from different age brackets. One of them was 16, one of them was 22, and one of them was 27, I believe. All were very articulate, intelligent enough guys. The premise of spending time with them was to understand their understanding of what we call the manosphere, how they fell into that, and how they got into it initially.

One of the things that stood out to me was the very common theme of self-improvement. None of these guys specifically went into this space wanting to consume misogynistic content, nor did they ever believe they would be sharing it or saying it. They went into this space for the purposes of self-development. I truly believe that. As somebody who is a big advocate for self-development, I completely understood why they went there. They also were seeking a form of community, which is human nature. We all want to be part of a community, we all want to feel like we matter, we want to be around people who share the same values, and so on.

On the face of it, the offering they could see looked like it was great. These are a like-minded bunch of guys: they are into fitness, they are into self-improvement, they want to better themselves. That is how they initially went into it. They never went into it with any malice. That was one of the biggest things that stood out to me.

My experience of spending time with those guys was that as their journey progressed in the manosphere space, the algorithm on social media—because a lot of this now is obviously digitally based—was continuously feeding them content. As their journey progressed, the opinions they were forming were not really their own. In my documentary, one of the participants actually says that. He says, “I have these thoughts about a relationship I’m in, but I don’t even know if they’re my own thoughts.” He was being quite reflective on that and becoming quite self-aware of that, but that was also because of the conversations I was having with him. I



hate to think that if maybe he did not have those conversations, would that self-awareness be there? I do not know. But he was forming thoughts that were not necessarily his.

It was the same with the other contributors in the documentary, including a 16-year-old kid who has very little life experience, but again, really wants to better himself and become a successful man, whatever that looks like to him. The manosphere offered that to him. Even he was developing these misogynistic viewpoints and what could be seen as misogynistic viewpoints. I just feel that these guys generally were in this for the betterment of themselves, but somewhere along the line that became different, maybe even unknowingly to them until it was too late. That was generally my experience of what I saw.

Q196 **Kim Leadbeater:** That is really helpful; thank you. James, is it a similar story for you? Is it your view that young men enter this world with good intent and it is about self-development, or is there anything more sinister going on from the outset?

James Bloodworth: I spent almost five years investigating the manosphere, having dabbled in the manosphere myself 20 years ago. Back in 2006 I attended a pick-up artist boot camp in London, for my sins. This was before the algorithmic internet; this was internet 1.0. I discovered this forum of guru figures who purported to have all the answers when it came to dating. It was a mixture of people, including those such as myself, seeking just conversation starters or some basic advice on how to ask somebody out.

I would say the thing we had in common was that we were willing to overlook the misogyny of the community, so there was this blind spot. I would not say I was any more sexist at the time than mainstream society, but I certainly had blind spots in that area; otherwise, I would have simply walked away from that material. I walked away from that material quite soon. After several months I realised how silly a lot of this stuff was and how it was driven by profit seeking. They were not simply figures on the internet who were trying to give advice; they were entrepreneurs. They were masculinity entrepreneurs and businessmen.

When I revisited the manosphere in 2018 onwards, to investigate this subculture as a journalist, again, I met all kinds of people who had been drawn into that world. Some were people who were simply looking for advice and pointers when it came to how to meet someone or how to be more social, socially awkward men who found it very hard to view socialising outside a problem-solving context, neurodivergent men, men with autism. There is that side of it.

There were also men who sought out the manosphere to reaffirm misogynistic ideas they held and found these voices—very charismatic voices a lot of the time—who would then parrot back to them these theories that they may already have been dancing around about women. They also gave them something external to blame for the fact that their



HOUSE OF COMMONS

lives had not turned out as they hoped they might. These masculinity influencers would give them the message, "You're not happy because women and minorities are hoarding all the treasure," or, "The sexual revolution is where it's all gone wrong for men. Feminism is where it's all started to go wrong for men."

After a while I came to see the manosphere really as a sales funnel. It is somewhere where you have these masculinity entrepreneurs, businessmen who will diminish men, diminish their audience, make them feel small and feed them these conspiracy theories, like the 80:20 rule—the idea that women are interested in only a small percentage of men. These masculinity entrepreneurs will then present themselves as saviours and guides, and if you just buy their course, you will be able to escape the surplus men and the incels and whatever fate awaits your male friends, and so on.

I came to see it as really a sales funnel. It is big business. Women are the primary victims of that in the sense that they are the ones who are on the receiving end of these misogynistic views when they seep into relationships or when they bleed into a dating context. But there are also male victims, who may be vulnerable and then get drawn into this world and radicalised. As James said, they may not even know they are being radicalised.

Q197 Kim Leadbeater: That is really interesting; thank you so much. It feels as though what you are saying is that there are different routes into the manosphere. It feels as though there is the self-development, fitness, want-to-look-after-myself route; there is the dating and relationships route; and then there are perhaps the people who are unhappy and want someone to reaffirm some prejudices or insecurities. There are different ways into it, which is really interesting. Staying with you, James Bloodworth, you go back to 2006; how has the manosphere changed since that time? We are now in 2026, 20 years later.

James Bloodworth: It has got worse. It has grown more political. Individuals like the pick-up artists were misogynistic and manipulative. That became a big business after Neil Strauss's 2005 book "The Game" came out. It saw the emergence of all these guru figures who sought to profit from male loneliness, but there was no algorithm that then drew people in deeper.

Back then, men would log on to these forums and read about these tips on how to meet women. There would then be these guru figures who would emerge and try to sell them courses, but once they shut down the forum they did not then pick up their phones and get bombarded. Their timelines were not monopolised by all these men saying, "The reason you're not happy is because of feminism, and because of the left, and because of minorities, LGBT people," and so on. That has changed.

It has also become much more political. In October/November 2022, I attended a red pill summit in Orlando, Florida. It was called the 21



Summit, and it was the biggest gathering of followers of the red pill. I expected it to be the usual garden-variety misogyny you tend to see in these communities, alongside some boilerplate self-help stuff about weightlifting, how to hustle, how to be a millionaire and start your own six-figure company, and so on. I met someone there who had been involved in January 6th in the United States, who subsequently went to prison for that. He is now out because Trump pardoned him. There was also someone who was trying to recruit for an armed militia to start a civil war against Joe Biden's Government. There were antisemitic conspiracy theories as well; that came up a few times.

Basically, the red pill community believes that men are oppressed by women and women control the world, but it also believes that women are simultaneously hysterical and stupid. How do you square that? If they are as you say, how are they controlling everything? Sometimes that would involve these darker conspiracies about how women were being controlled by Jews, and feminism was actually a Jewish conspiracy, as was the sexual revolution, and so on.

This stuff had seeped much more into the movement than when I first encountered it in 2006. Back then I heard a lot of sexist ideas but there was not really much overt anti-feminism. It was not political. They were not saying, "The reason you can't get a date is because of feminism." It was typically much more based around self-help: "You need to improve yourself. That's why you don't have a partner."

Q198 Chair: Before you come back on that, could I ask something? You have talked about and explained how the manosphere intersects with the alt-right movement. We hear the term brocialist; was there a left-wing version of this as well, or was it just very much in that alt-right space?

James Bloodworth: I encountered people who had been radicalised. When I was in the United States researching, I met people who had been Bernie Sanders supporters and then eventually supported Donald Trump. Back in 2016 they would have voted for or supported Bernie Sanders, and then when I met them again, when I went back after covid, they were now very much open Donald Trump supporters. They had been radicalised. Correlation is not causation and the two things are not necessarily linked—maybe they just were never willing to vote for or support a woman—but they had been radicalised in the process. They were much more red pill, so to speak, whereas initially they tended to be more into the pick-up stuff and, "I want to get a girlfriend and I'm going to listen to these guys because I think they're going to help me."

Q199 Kim Leadbeater: You talked about antisemitism at that event, and other things like that. Is there any intersection with religion, in terms of the taking over of religious beliefs from that environment? Does that make sense? In terms of Christianity, we are seeing worrying things happening in this country, and in other countries. Also, you mentioned loneliness; do you think we need a bit more leadership in terms of community building, providing opportunities for connection, and addressing loneliness so that



people are not pushed towards some of these behaviours and thoughts?

James Bloodworth: Christian nationalism was something I observed when I started to visit the States again after covid, beginning in 2022. The red pill conference I attended was much more inflected with these Christian nationalist beliefs. There is an example of an influencer on YouTube, Elliott Hulse, who was a strength and self-improvement influencer and was advocating Christian nationalism when I met him in person in 2022.

It seems that on the one hand you have these misogynistic influencers who draw on evolutionary psychology or a very—if I can use the phrase—bastardised version of evolutionary psychology to justify their beliefs. They try to give it this scientific penumbra and say that men and women are different because science says so, Darwinism says so, and so on. There are also these other men who draw on religion to try to make those justifications, giving these theological justifications for why women should be subordinate to men, should not vote, should not be in the workplace and so on. That definitely had crept into it more in later years when I visited the manosphere.

Q200 Kim Leadbeater: I have superseded something David is going to ask about shortly, so we will come back to that if we can, but we would like to know more about that. James, in your documentary you discussed sharing content by Andrew Tate on your social media account. What prompted you to do that, and what did you learn from that experience?

James Blake: Can I just add something to the last question? You were asking about the lack of communities outside the manosphere and things like that. To make it more real for everybody in this room, I went to Portugal with young Sam from my documentary, who is 16 years old. He flew to Portugal to spend a week with other 16, 17 and 18-year-olds in a little flat, to basically work together, improve each other, keep each other motivated and so on.

I sat with those guys and asked them, “What do you do outside the internet to build community? Do you go to youth clubs?” There were six or seven of these guys and not a single one of them knew what a youth club was. They asked, “What’s a youth club?” You are thinking about real-life scenarios outside the internet. They do not even know where to go. That was one of the things that was keeping them online in those communities. I just wanted to add that because that really took me back when I heard that.

Q201 Kim Leadbeater: That is really helpful. The other thing that strikes me with that is that presumably they were not into sport. If we think about young male identity, that is often where young men find their home, their people and their identity. Are we talking about people who are generally not members of a football team or a rugby club?

James Blake: Yes, they were not really members of football clubs or anything like that. They were interested in sports, but they did not seem



to participate in team sports or anything like that. That speaks to the whole hedonistic approach of wanting to better yourself: it is all about yourself. They were not really into team sports or anything like that.

But when I explained to them what youth clubs were, they said, "Wow, that sounds cool. I would love that." That really just took me back. I spent a lot of my childhood going to youth clubs. It kept me out of trouble; it kept me from doing a lot of silly things. That just really surprised me.

Q202 Kim Leadbeater: My question was about sharing the content from Andrew Tate and what that was like.

James Blake: To take it right back and explain my situation when I shared that content, I come from a working-class background. I grew up in a council house, my father was a taxi driver and my mum was a retired politician who started doing charity stuff. For me, one of my biggest drivers and motivations was to be what you could say is financially free. I used to see all this stuff, even in a different format. I am 32 now but when I was 16 I was reading self-development books. I actually read some of the books that James just mentioned. I was massively into self-development and improving myself, because as a working-class guy I had seen that as a way out. I grew up in a house with no stability. I had an older learning-disabled brother who I helped to care for. That brought with it a lot of friction and different things that I had to deal with as a young lad. I always wanted to be successful, because that was my way out of that in my mind.

Luckily, I worked really hard and I did well. I reached the point where I could buy a Lamborghini and I could do all this cool stuff that I always dreamed about doing when I was a kid. With that came a lot of attention on social media. I started to build up my own following. I personally have a lot of young lads who message me asking for advice. They want to know what direction they should go in. They maybe grew up in a similar background to me and feel lost or maybe not educated to a high level, and are thinking, "How can I achieve this and that?"

I was in this little world at that time where I was doing well. I was doing all this cool stuff and living out my dream, I had all these kids coming to me, and then Andrew Tate popped up. When I initially saw Andrew Tate, I completely resonated with the things he was saying. I will just be honest: I did. He said things like, "If you come from poverty or from a less-advantageous background, you need to work harder than everybody else." I thought, "Hell yes," because I had to do that, of course. Things like going to the gym, looking after yourself, driving the cool cars, and doing all the cool stuff sounded great to me. Of course I started to think, "Wow, this guy is super cool," and started to follow him.

But as time goes on the algorithm starts to show you more and more of that content. I have been in the position that the young lads in my documentary are also in. I have seen this content coming at me. Did I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

agree with it all? No. But at one point in time I had a six-year relationship break down and became single. I thought I was going to marry this girl. She was a big deal to me. I was very, very upset.

Most men, when we are upset, tend to go in on ourselves. We typically do not have the same support mechanisms as women. Maybe that is a generalisation, but for me personally I did not have a friendship group that checked in on me. I did not have anybody ringing me to say, "Are you okay mate?" Nothing like that. I spent a lot of time on my phone just looking at content and things. That moment of loneliness made me seek security and confirmation of my own bias from people outside me, and I did not have anyone around me. It was social media; it was Andrew Tate; it was individuals popping up. Yes, I shared some things.

When I looked back at it I thought, "Oh my God, I can't even remember sharing that to begin with," and "Wow, I would never share that now." It just goes to show that your mind can go to that place even if it is in a small way. I remember sitting with the director when we filmed that scene and he threw it on me as a surprise; I was not expecting it. We were sitting in my living room and he said, "Right, we have some old videos you shared on social media," and I said, "Right, okay," and he showed me them. I thought, "Oh, my God, I honestly can't remember even sharing that," but I watched it back.

Interestingly, I did not actually notice the misogyny in some clips that he showed me; I think this is in the documentary. When I watched them, I said, "Hmm, I'm not really too sure what is wrong with that clip." Then he said, "Let's watch it again." I watched it again and I looked at it through a different lens and then I could see it. I thought, "You know what? I'm watching that back now having gone through a whole process of maturing, growing up." This is years later and having a completely different mind frame, and still when I first watched it I did not see the misogyny in it, but the second time around when questioned about it, I could see it. That was quite a startling thing to me, because I did not foresee that happening. It also made me wonder how much stuff I was consuming at that time without realising it. That reflects the experience of a lot of young lads.

From what I can see through my experience, and through the experience of the guys I spent time with, this impacts the most when you are at a low point, not when you are at a high point. It seems to be that the nature of self-development is that most people seek it when they are at a low point. Nobody is already making millions and saying, "I need to get better." It is the people who are coming from backgrounds like mine, from working-class backgrounds, who maybe do not have a father or a mother so they do not have the motivation from that individual to say, "Oh, I want to be just like my dad," or, "I want to be like my mum," so they look to external places. Sometimes it is movie stars or fictional characters. Then suddenly there is somebody like Andrew Tate who for



the most part is a fictional character but appears very real to a lot of these young lads.

I think I was in my mid-20s when my father had just passed away, my six-year relationship had ended, and I was at a very low point. I found some sort of solace in what these people were saying. Thankfully, I pulled myself back from it very fast, but not everybody is that aware to do that, which is very worrying.

Kim Leadbeater: That is really, really interesting. Thank you so much.

Q203 **Christine Jardine:** Something you said resonated with me, because in a media interview recently, I was asked about one political party's plans to do away with the Equality Act 2010 because it does down working-class boys and men. We are seeing that increasingly in the political arena. I would not disagree with what you said about it originally: "If you're working-class, you have to work harder." Do you see a connection between what you were seeing in the manosphere then and what we are beginning to see being used to attract people in the political sphere now?

James Blake: Maybe this is one for James, because he's seen the political side of it more so than I have.

James Bloodworth: One thing I noticed in the manosphere was that one way these entrepreneurs made their money was by discrediting the mainstream—institutions, dating advice, their family, and their friends. There was very much a cult-like mentality of, "If your friends and family tell you different from what we're telling you, that's because they don't want you to succeed because they're comfortable with you as you are." They would discredit things to then present their own product.

You see this in the wellness industry, for example, where entrepreneurs will discredit mainstream medicine, vaccinations, antidepressants or whatever it is. There is no clear distinction online between intellectuals and entrepreneurs. They are advertising products and presenting themselves as people who are knowledgeable and have advice on these topics, but really they are trying to discredit the mainstream to then sell their own alternative product.

It can be seen with a certain type of populist political entrepreneur now who will present themselves as having all the answers and the secret sauce, if you like. They will discredit the mainstream and try to discredit the mainstream media. It is not simply because they have the answers. It is because they seek to capitalise by presenting an alternative and then profiting from that. That was quite similar to the techniques used in the manosphere: discredit the mainstream then present yourself as the saviour, the guide, and the alternative.

On the one hand, there are people who are already vulnerable who may be looking for someone to believe, follow and blame. But sometimes it is not just people who are already vulnerable. In terms of the manosphere,



these ecosystems can create the vulnerability. Someone can find the manosphere content as a confident, well-rounded person, just like someone can find some other forms of advertising and may be fine, but the advertising convinces them that they are not enough as they are. That is something women have had to deal with for a long time in terms of the cosmetic industry or the beauty industry. It makes them feel like they are not enough and then it presents this product they need. The manosphere is the same in many ways.

You could say that with some types of populism, those politicians operate on a similar wavelength. Social media has really allowed them to amplify their message. In the past, these individuals would be in the back pages of a men's magazine or something with their little advertisements selling their get-rich-quick schemes, their magic beans or whatever. You would not encounter it.

Nowadays, they are on this six-inch screen that we are all glued to all the time. They are often incredibly charismatic individuals. They are presenting this stuff against the backdrop of this lifestyle that can be very appealing to, say, a teenage boy, of these fast cars, mansions, luxurious travel, private jets, and the most important status symbol in that world is the women. There are parallels with politics.

Sorry, that was a bit long-winded but I hope you can see some parallels. There are masculinity entrepreneurs and political entrepreneurs.

Q204 **Kevin McKenna:** Thank you both; this is really good stuff so far. It has helped me to understand a lot more about what is going on and what is pulling people into the manosphere. There is a real feeling that it is becoming more and more popular and it is a little amorphous to people who may not be engaged with it. Mr Blake, when you were filming your documentary, what were the common characteristics you found with the men and boys you were speaking to?

James Blake: Honestly, without talking out of turn, there is a common sense of desperation among all the contributors. I have felt that myself in my own life. That desperation stems from confusion around wanting to be successful but not coming from a privileged enough background to have access to certain things that you see other people have access to.

There is an element of extreme ambition while potentially lacking the education or skillset to utilise that properly. There is an element of thinking, "The world is against us." That is created and nurtured throughout the manosphere. The sense of the world being against us keeps people in. It becomes an echo chamber and a subculture of, "It's us against them." That is a really effective way to control people when you have people in this little group.

All the guys were similar in that sense. They were all intelligent, and on the face of it they were all very friendly, nice guys. You would meet them and say, "Oh, I'd have a drink with that guy," although maybe not in the



16-year-old's case. Little Sam, for example, at 16, was extremely articulate and very intelligent. I just wanted to be a big brother to him and say, "You have so much potential," but obviously it was not my place to do so.

Sam has all the makings of someone who could be very successful, but I just fear that the content he was consuming up to a certain point was quite dangerous, because it brought in the red pill stuff. It brought in the misogynistic side of things, which at that age you should not be exposed to. I certainly was not at that age; it is crazy to think they are. They all have access to this stuff, want to better themselves and have that idealised life, which is fast cars, lots of money and beautiful women by their side. That is how they rate success and measure being a man, which is important to touch on. Their viewpoint of what a man is is skewed and quite different.

For example, Sam was consuming content by a creator who was saying, "If your father works a nine-to-five job, he's a loser," which obviously is crazy. He had some sort of nickname for them and all this kind of thing. That is just insane to think that somebody who is going out to work, providing for their family—I guess you could say being a man—is being seen as less-than because he has a structured life. Those kinds of things were quite worrying. They all shared that viewpoint because they were all seeing this content that was saying it.

James Bloodworth: One thing I quickly noticed with the manosphere was that everything was seen through the prism of the market. They talked about the sexual marketplace, the dating economy, and their own sexual market value. They embark on these self-improvement programmes to improve their sexual market value.

On the one hand, you had this old-fashioned misogyny and old-fashioned patriarchal viewpoint; on the other hand, women were just another commodity. Women became another status object in that world. As James said, social media created this sense of not being enough and a sense of pauperisation, wherein everyone else was having more sex than them and a much more enjoyable lifestyle than them, and being an ordinary man in a nine-to-five job was not enough. From there it was not that hard to see how women were treated as just objects in that world, rather than full human beings. They were just status objects in that world. It was not so difficult to see how some misogyny flowed from that.

Q205 **Chair:** Can I come in on that point? There is a missing part of this, which is that we do not know how or why it is that they were able to get these women. Was there any view given about why women were going to go out with people such as Andrew Tate? There are obviously legal issues on that front, but how was it that they were able to capture beautiful women and commodify this as something that people want? Were women active participants in this—beefing up the manosphere and that performance of masculinity for online content—or did you see something darker going



on?

James Bloodworth: One difference between the early manosphere I encountered and the one later was that the earlier manosphere in 2006 was comprehensible in the sense that these men wanted to turn themselves into the objects of female desire. They wanted to make themselves very attractive to women. When I went back to the manosphere, these men were performing for other men. It was for the male gaze. It was their idea of what success is but it was a male idea of success.

They would sometimes hire models for their social media content. I went out to the desert in Nevada with one of these groups. They had hired a Lamborghini and would do photo shoots in front of it to make it look like this was the lifestyle they were living. There were others who were hiring out cabins that were kitted out like a private jet inside. They were then sitting with a laptop, adding captions like, "Office for the day," before uploading it to Instagram. It was tragic.

They would also film themselves at a nightclub where they had bottle service tables because they knew the nightclub host. They had a free table, and when Calvin Harris was playing they were making out they had a DJ set. Some women will join that because they have invited them to join and there's free alcohol and stuff. They will then film it and make out that that's their lifestyle, because social media does not show the whole picture. Some kid watching that is thinking this is what they are doing 24/7. They do not know that the women have been hired, that this is just a scam, and it is not really their lifestyle.

James Blake: It is complete perception. I experienced some online courses that are out there at the minute that these young lads are consuming. To be honest, there is very little involvement in those from women whatsoever. Interestingly, a lot of it is performative for other men.

For example, in the community groups that these guys are in, they are putting in topless photographs of themselves and asking other men to rate them. They are putting in stories. For example, one of the stories I saw was from a guy who had started a job. He was working somewhere and was quite attracted to a co-worker. Someone wrote, "If you want to date her, you're gay," which of course makes no sense, but that is the kind of language that is used. That is the structure of it. It's very childlike.

As James said, it is all about male gaze. There is very little involvement from women whatsoever, aside from the perception that by doing this stuff you will attract more women. But it is yet to be proven.

James Bloodworth: The irony of it is that the deeper in the manosphere you go, the more time you spend with other men rather than women.



Q206 David Burton-Sampson: Kevin was in the same room as me when we met a young gay man who had been pulled into the manosphere when he was younger. He knew he was gay at the time, yet he was pulled into the manosphere at that point. As two gay men ourselves, we found that quite surprising. It was something we never expected. I am wondering whether that is something you often see. If you do, what is the reason gay men get pulled into this?

James Blake: I have to be honest, from my experience, the guys I spent time with and the elements of their lives they showed me, I have seen very little involvement, if any, from the LGBT community at all.

James Bloodworth: It's the same for me. Funnily enough, they did not have a problem with lesbians, but gay men were seen as failing at masculinity, because to perform masculinity successfully, you have to have not just a girlfriend but a harem of women competing over you. That was one of the tenets of a successful performance of masculinity. I did not encounter gay men in the manosphere. In saying that, I did not encounter openly gay men in the manosphere. There was one guy at the red pill conference who had been thrown out of the military in America decades ago for being gay, but now he was presenting himself as a Christian nationalist and said he had got over all that and it was behind him. I saw examples of that sometimes.

Q207 Kevin McKenna: I have often raised a bit of a wry gay smile at a lot of this, because some of it is actually very familiar. To follow on from what David said, there has always been a bit of a trend of guys who are not comfortable with their sexuality overcompensating publicly, and that was what we picked up on in that interaction. From the stuff you have been saying, these grifters are producing this material and are promoting a grifter mindset, a philosophy, which is not really masculinity. It is actually something slightly different.

On that, you have both talked a lot about how social media is a strong driver of this and is driving people towards the manosphere. Mr Bloodworth, how is it doing it? From your investigations, what are the mechanisms that social media companies are using?

James Bloodworth: Social media companies facilitate these smaller-scale entrepreneurs to put out content. For a long time pick-up artist content was given a free rein on YouTube. It was only around 2017 that YouTube really started to crack down on men filming themselves approaching women on, say, Oxford Street. There was a BBC investigation in 2019 that led to much more of that content being taken off the internet.

On social media, there is not really a clear separation or signposting between what is advertising and what is not. If I put on the TV—the BBC, or ITV or something—and someone is selling a product to me, or if I am reading a newspaper or a magazine and seeing an advert, there tends to be this separation. It is clearly signposted that this is advertising,



whereas a lot of these masculinity entrepreneurs start off giving the impression that they are just giving advice.

I interviewed a boy who was 13 at the time of his discovering the manosphere. Touching on the previous point, he had had a very domineering stepfather who would make him feel small and that he was not enough. He was not confident in his masculinity so he wanted to do kickboxing. He thought, "If I do a combat sport, that may make me more masculine."

He discovered Andrew Tate and he said that this guy was very charismatic and seemed very knowledgeable about kickboxing. Maybe kickboxing is the one topic that Andrew Tate is actually somewhat knowledgeable about, because he is quite good at that. He started watching these videos and very soon it started to segue into advice on dating and life, and then he came in with these courses he was selling: how to be more of a man, how to be a millionaire, how to attract women. He was falling down the sales funnel without really realising it. That is a big part of the problem.

These entrepreneurs can now present this ostentatious lifestyle as the backdrop. They are very charismatic; they have this very telegenic charisma. The regulatory world, if you like, has not really caught up with that. There is talk of banning social media for children. I do not know whether that is the answer or not, but what is happening at the moment is that these people are advertising courses that rely on them making people feel insignificant, insecure and small. They are circumventing socialisation from parents, teachers and good role models and beaming the content straight to a kid's bedroom on the phone. That is why you have these men who feel like having a normal life is no longer enough, as you said. You have to have this superstar lifestyle; otherwise you are a loser, basically.

Social media allows these entrepreneurs to circumvent the more positive forms of socialisation and really dial in on the insecurities of the individual.

Q208 Kevin McKenna: The demonetisation and deplatforming that you talked about has clearly had some impacts. Could we do more of this stuff long term? Is that really the route to tackling a lot of this?

James Bloodworth: It worked to an extent. People say, "Oh, this stuff doesn't really work," but the biggest pick-up artist company in the world for most of the 2000s and the 2010s was a company called Real Social Dynamics. It pivoted to just boilerplate self-help advice after the YouTube demonetisation, because it could not make money from its videos on YouTube any more, which it made a huge amount from in the past.

A lot of these other figures emerged instead. They started putting out content on other channels like Rumble, which they see as bastions of free speech with no censorship and whatnot. But it has definitely had an



impact to some degree. Some influencers who emerged in the 2010s were then kicked off platforms such as Twitter—Milo Yiannopoulos is someone who comes to mind as an alt-right influencer—and really lost a lot of their foothold in their segment of the public, and mass appeal, when they were demonetised.

I would not say it is the full answer, especially now when social media platforms can just be taken over by figures like Elon Musk who can turn it into a free-for-all again. But it definitely has an impact on people's revenue streams when it is done in a smart way.

Q209 Kevin McKenna: That is really useful to hear. You talked about the social media ban, Mr Blake, and you were meeting particularly younger users—I do not know what we call them; perhaps people in the manosphere. What is your take on a social media ban at 16? Do you think that could be an effective tool?

James Blake: Yes, it could be effective, but it is not going to solve the problem completely. To touch on one of the things James said about demonetisation and so on, that is all well and good, but a lot of the monetisation happens off platform. It is all well and good that the creators do not get paid for their content, but a lot of their revenue comes from off-site stuff. It comes from their websites and things. Andrew Tate is an example: his website was taken down at the height of his thing and now it is back up. I do not know the exact figure off the top of my head, but he is making millions of pounds from subscriptions on that website.

Alongside that, the social media power cycle now is so much greater. I do not know if anybody in here is aware of social media clippers. Social media clippers will essentially go to platforms such as Rumble and Kick—the platforms James mentioned—and they will cut content from those channels. The social media clippers do not work directly for the influencers. They are just doing this off their own bat, but some are using monetisation on platforms like TikTok to make a substantial amount of money.

In fact, one of them actually approached an influencer on a livestream and told him that he had made his first million pounds clipping his content. The pieces of content that often get clipped are of course the most polarising pieces. They are the most misogynistic pieces of content, because they are shared more, get more engagement, drive more views, and therefore get more revenue for the clipper. That is a whole other side to this social media thing that is really expansive, and it is growing very fast.

Q210 Kevin McKenna: Are they automated? Are they robots crawling?

James Blake: They are literally kids in their bedrooms. With technology evolving with AI, they can make hundreds of clips in a very short period of time, whereas a couple of years ago they would have had to manually



sit, record and clip it. As AI is moving at such a great pace, there is software that can just clip content like that, which makes a huge amount of content flooding the social media channels.

Put yourself in the position of a young man on social media. I did a test on social platforms in my documentary, where I acquired a brand-new mobile phone, downloaded the social media apps and browsed through the phone. I did not engage with anything, I simply browsed, but I had to think like a young lad. I was stopping at videos of cars, for example, or videos of the gym—very innocent, mundane and normal stuff. By day three, I was starting to get served misogynistic content. By day five, I saw a video of Conor McGregor training an MMA fighter. He was punching somebody in the stomach and the caption was, “When you find out she’s pregnant,” or something like that.

You have to keep in mind that that account had not engaged with any content, but because I was registered as a male and I had browsed through cars and things, it found its way to me within five days. There is a bombardment of really explosive content that comes quickly.

Q211 Kevin McKenna: What is the economic engine for this? Where is the money flowing through to these clippers?

James Blake: To be honest, I am unsure whether those creators are monetising or not. Some may be, but it is in the platform’s interest to have as much content getting as much engagement as possible at all times. It means it makes more money on its bottom line from advertisers. There is always money getting made somewhere, whether it is the creators themselves or the platform itself.

Q212 Kevin McKenna: We talked about the ban for under-16s. Is this an under-16s problem, or even a men-in-their-20s problem? It wasn’t when I was 18 and everyone said I was an adult that I felt like I was a man; it was in my late 20s. What age groups are we really talking about here? That really impacts on whether an under-16 ban is going to affect this.

James Blake: In my documentary I spent time with a 16-year-old, but I also spent time with a 27-year-old. They were consuming the same content. I am 32 and I see the content myself. An under-16 ban is not going to completely eradicate this problem whatsoever. It may be a plaster of some sort but it is not the solution.

James Bloodworth: There were mixed ages. Most people I met who had signed up to these alpha male courses and this kind of stuff were in their 20s, 30s and 40s, and there were one or two in their 50s. I do not know whether a ban is the right approach. The danger with a ban is that you can be banned from social media until you are 16 or whatever, but then you go on and it seems like this free-for-all and you have no idea how to navigate it.

People who seem to be the most confused by the AI stuff now are members of my family who are the baby boomer generation. Not in my



family, but I have seen people interacting with someone they think is Brad Pitt, and then they send money, but it is an AI. Conspiracy theories are also a huge problem. Media literacy is important as long as we define what that is.

It is also important to create aisles of sanity, if you like. For example, in school, where kids are not on their phones, you can have a counter-narrative around more progressive ideas, or around equality, so it is not just entirely circumvented by these charismatic snake oil salesmen online.

Q213 **Chair:** I want to explore this generational issue in the manosphere. Refuge has just come out with research on gen Z's take on marriage, according to which one in three gen Zs believe that a wife should obey her husband. That is twice as many as the boomer generation. Do you think the manosphere has played a huge role in that shift in thought? James Blake, I am going to ask you first as I think Mr Bloodworth and I are probably of the same generation. We are geriatric millennials—sorry.

James Bloodworth: I thought you were going to say gen X.

Chair: No. *[Laughter.]*

James Blake: The most information I received around that side of things was when I was in Portugal with a group of young lads who had all travelled to be there. These were guys from all around the world. There were people from Estonia, America and the UK. I sat with them all and we talked about that. I asked them about their opinions on women, relationships and marriage. Interestingly, every guy in the room wanted to have this idealistic life where they have a wife and kids. Actually, deep down that is all they wanted. However, they were also saying things like, "I believe it's in a woman's nature to be submissive to a man," and similar things around that tonality, saying, "As a man it's your responsibility to be a provider and you're supposed to be dominant over the woman. That's just how it is."

I do not really think they think that; they just repeat things they have heard. I am not sure if that is what they genuinely think, because when we dived a bit deeper, for example, one of the guys was only there because he had had his heart broken in a break-up. Suddenly he was there and he was listening to these guys saying, "Women are this, women are that, women should be like this," and he was thinking, "Maybe you're right."

As I said earlier, it is in those low moments that this stuff infiltrates your mind and becomes your thought process. Generally they were saying things that adhered to that. Do they truly believe it? I do not think so. However, that could just be the group that I was with, because as I said they were generally quite nice people. I think they were just quite confused and lost and they were trying to find their way, especially the



younger guys. Obviously it does not excuse coming out with things like that.

Somebody should check that, but it does not seem that anyone is. They are in this echo chamber where everything is just repeated back to them and there is no one to challenge it. If you say a woman belongs in the kitchen, nobody is going to say different because it stays within that community. The online community could have hundreds to thousands of people within it and they all echo that exact sentiment back to you. At no point is anybody challenging that, which is a big problem in itself. It is a problem for anything but obviously more so for something that is dangerous like this.

Q214 **Chair:** In terms of different characteristics, we have explored age and generational issues, but was there any ethnicity crossover or cultural issues?

James Blake: Honestly, the guys were all so varied. They were all from different backgrounds and cultures. The only thing that really brought them together was that desperation for success—the desperation to be a man. That was the thing that brought them all together. I do not think any of them really knew what that looked like, but they were basing it on what they had seen on social media and through these courses.

James Bloodworth: It is definitely someone else's idea of what being a man is. That touches on the previous point about creating those isles of sanity, and those counter-narratives. The series "Adolescence" begins with this apocalyptic murder; I do not want to give too many spoilers in case anyone has still not seen it.

Chair: Jack Thorne gave evidence as part of this inquiry so we have all seen it.

Christine Jardine: There are no spoilers left.

James Bloodworth: There is this apocalyptic murder in the series, and some might say there was a sudden public conversation, almost a moral panic, about whether our children are going to commit murder because they have watched an Andrew Tate video or something. I would say the influence of the manosphere is much more subtle, but still insidious. It is about how it creeps into the domestic setting, relationships and friendship groups.

A 2025 Ipsos poll found, I think, that 53% of gen Z men essentially believe that women are only interested in high-status men. They believed the 80:20 conspiracy theory was a real thing. There was another poll from, I think, the year before, which found that a very slim majority of gen Z men thought that feminism had gone too far and that men were the ones who were oppressed rather than women. These are classic manosphere narratives, and you can find other statistics on how likely a man is to be falsely accused of rape, for example. The fact is that a man



HOUSE OF COMMONS

is more likely to be raped by another man in Britain than be falsely accused of rape. It is vanishingly rare, but in certain sections of society you have this prevalent belief that it is actually quite common.

This is an example of ideas from the manosphere, essentially conspiracy theories, becoming more mainstream and then potentially creeping into the domestic setting and people's personal relationships. It is partly down to the algorithm, but in many ways it is also partly down to the material circumstances that gen Z and other generations face. There is a housing crisis and many people now live with their parents well into their 20s, 30s and even '40s, and it is harder for them to form a sexual relationship. Influencers tell them that it is because of feminism when it is really because we have a housing crisis.

If you are at the bottom end of the labour market, there is not necessarily as much status attached to a working-class job as there may have been in the past. I have relatives who had working-class jobs and there was a great pride in the work they did. There was a certain element of status attached to it, and they were very proud of that. That is not necessarily the case if you work in an Amazon warehouse or something. They are then more susceptible to the messages they see online that James talked about, where it feels like you are not enough and you have to become rich or present this ostentatious lifestyle.

Chair: I guess planning reform is not really what social media loves to see, is it?

Q215 **Christine Jardine:** You have talked about how influencers are actually entrepreneurs. How are they selling? How do they make their money? What are they physically selling that they get money from? How do they do it?

James Bloodworth: They do it through courses, mentoring and mentorship programmes. They present the lifestyle. They create this internet persona and then say, "Buy my course and you can be a real man. You can be an alpha male—a high-status male like me." I spent time embedded in a course in Nevada in America called the Men of Action. The guru figure—the instructor—recruited from social media through this larger-than-life internet profile where he is always surrounded by glamorous-looking women. He said, "You're not going to be one of the surplus men because you've joined my course." He also said, "This is Noah's Ark and I'm saving you from being one of the surplus men and being part of the 80%."

Interestingly, during one induction session he said, "For many of you, this will be the first true locker-room experience you've ever had." It was about spending time with other men; they never felt they had those public spaces where they could maybe spend time with other men. When they were growing up maybe they did not spend time at the youth club with other men, or perhaps they did not have a father figure—I did not



have a present father or grandfather growing up—and they went in search of that because they felt there was something missing.

- Q216 **Christine Jardine:** Mr Blake said that he thinks some young men who were in the manosphere were repeating things they did not genuinely believe. Does that apply to the entrepreneurs as well? Do they genuinely believe what they are saying, or is it just a way to make money?

James Bloodworth: Eventually, it is a distinction without a difference. Even if they did not start off believing it and it was just a way to make money, the mask comes to fit the face, as it were. They may be playing a character but they essentially become the character. It does not really matter if they are espousing certain views to build an audience or whether it is audience capture: there is that symbiotic relationship between the audience wanting more extreme content so they lean into that. It does not matter because the ecosystem trend is more extreme.

James Blake: I agree with that. Leaning into the more polarising content will always work better. It will always get you more engagement. It will always get you more followers, more clicks, and eventually more revenue. Unfortunately, in a lot of these situations the more polarising, the better. The polarising figure they create might not necessarily be who they are, but it makes them money and that is how they continue. The problem with that is you have young lads who watch it and think that is who they really are and that is who they need to become, not knowing that it is actually a complete creation of the beast itself—the algorithm—and it is just a vicious cycle.

- Q217 **Alex Brewer:** This is fascinating and depressing in equal measure, but I am so glad you are both here to answer our questions, so thank you. I would like to ask you a little about the online/offline link and how the manosphere then translates into real life and relationships, which you have touched on a little. Based on your conversations with men and boys in the manosphere, how would you describe their attitudes towards women?

James Blake: As I said earlier, I do not think their attitudes are completely their own opinions. They are not based on their own opinions; they are based on things they have heard or consumed. I can give a real-life example of that. I met a guy during filming who was one of the contributors. When we started filming, he had just met a girl and he really liked her. She ticked all the boxes, and she liked the same things as him. We were having a conversation about it in a boxing gym where he was training. He was a really nice guy and the conversation was going well. I said to him, "Look, you're in a relationship. What do you think about that?" He said, "Well, I really like her and stuff, but Hamza"—the guy he follows—"says you really should have like five women on the go, not just one." I said, "Right, okay. So how does that impact you then in terms of this thing?" He said, "I need to see how it goes and whatever."



I left the conversation wondering what direction that was going to go. Is he going to stick to his own devices and say, "Actually, I really like this girl; I'm just going to stay with her," or is he going to say, "Oh, well, the influencer says this." I met him again and much to my surprise he said, "Oh, I'm still with her. It's just me and her. We're getting on really well; this is really good." He then admitted to me that a lot of the time his thoughts are not his own. I thought, "Wow, this guy's very aware of this; this is great."

A little later I met him for the third time and he said, "Nah, nah, I'm done with that. I have so much value that I've worked for. I don't want to just be with one woman because I've built this value and, because I've built that value, I deserve to have multiple women." That is what his leader had told him. Interestingly, when I challenged him on that he said that women have an inherent value. They are told that if a woman is born pretty or good-looking they have an inherent value, whereas men do not have that. He thought he had to do a certain amount of work to ever have any kind of value as a man. But women automatically had that value—whatever it was—which meant he was entitled to be promiscuous but a woman was not, because she did not earn that value.

When I challenged him on that and said, "Well, I'm not promiscuous and I would like to say I'm high value to your consideration of what high value is. What do you think about that?" He said, "Oh, well, that's your choice, but for me I've worked really hard; I have built up my value so I should be promiscuous." That is how they feel about it. They feel women have this sense of inherent value but need to be with one man. Women are not allowed to be promiscuous or seek anything outside one relationship, which obviously speaks to the domineering and submissive thing that they all talk about. It was quite shocking to hear that.

James Bloodworth: There is a classic double standard there. They would implant that in people and give it this scientific veneer by drawing on this very simplified version of the most clickbaity, just-so, evolutionary psychology, so that would be part of it. That then manifested in the men: they felt they always needed to perform. They felt like they always needed to be performing this cartoonish version of masculinity, so they would walk around wearing a costume basically.

In one instance of a character in one of the darker sections of my book, it ended in violence, because they would put on this performance and then expect other people to respect that performance and go along with it. They would expect women to be subservient and other men to treat them as a high-status alpha male. When that did not happen they would often lash out, because it messed with their sense of reality because they had invested really heavily in these online characters, or cults as I call them. It shook their reality so they would lash out. I do not think that is new, but it is something you see re-emerge with the manosphere, and it is amplified by the way they are siloed into these cult-like communities, as



HOUSE OF COMMONS

James talked about, where they isolate you from other members of society who may be better role models.

Q218 **Alex Brewer:** That's interesting; thank you. You have talked a little about how that manifested in violence potentially towards women, but also how, when they are drawn into the manosphere, men are spending more time with other men. Did you see an increase in violence between the men in any of that?

James Bloodworth: There is an example of someone in my book called Lyndon McLeod, who at the end of 2021 committed a mass shooting in Denver, Colorado. He had been scheduled to speak at the 21 Convention a couple of years before I went there. He had appeared on lots of manosphere podcasts and was very much within that circle.

The manosphere retrospectively disowned him and said, "Oh, it was just someone who was mentally ill," and there is probably an element of truth to that. I do not think he was a particularly stable human being, but he also swam in these fascistic ideological currents, which reaffirmed to him that he was a dominant alpha male and women and minorities had usurped the natural order. He thought people like Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden and the Democrats, and modern society, had overturned the natural order and we needed to go back to this more traditionalist way of being. That message resonated in the manosphere; it was why he was on all these podcasts. He ended up going on this shooting spree and taking revenge on people who he felt had not given him the respect he deserved as a natural-born alpha male.

That is an extreme example but there are other, more subtle and insidious examples where, in a domestic setting, it can end in violence and coercive and controlling behaviour, because they have imbibed these ideas about the natural order and men and women's places within that. There is a pseudo-scientific veneer of, "I need to be performing. Women should not be out in the workplace. Women should not have male friends," and men trying to vet what women wear before they go out and things like that. I lost track of the original question, but that is one way it can manifest in men's treatment of women and other men.

Q219 **Alex Brewer:** It also seems there is a kind of cycle here. Picking up on some things you have already said, there are myths coming out from the manosphere—for example, the fear of false accusations of rape. Is that potentially making young men so fearful to approach women that they are attracted to that it becomes a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy? They feel unsuccessful in dating and therefore go back to the manosphere for help, so it sort of creates its own problem.

James Blake: Interestingly, some of the guys that I spend time with have said exactly that. In today's world there is so much pressure on men when it comes to dating women that they are worried and think women are dangerous, can get them into trouble and can accuse them of things. They use that as the reasoning. They tend not to date; they tend



to stay away from women, which as you say, is counterproductive to the whole thing, because ultimately the whole thing is about women. It is all about raising your status as a man to become high value in order to get women.

But somewhere along the line they are saying, "Oh, women are the worst thing ever. They're dangerous; don't go near them." They seem to have that viewpoint. They mentioned to me multiple times that they are nearly fearful of women, and that is because of the content they are consuming. They are told this stuff by the creators: women are this, women accuse people of rape, women are dangerous. I saw a piece of content that was saying that women will get pregnant on purpose to trap men because they want them for their money. A lot of these men do not actually have any money but they are doing it anyway.

These men are told a lot of pretty extreme things and they take it verbatim, because you have to remember they are inside this community. If you differ your opinion or have a different viewpoint, chances are you are going to be chastised for that. People are not going to like it in that community. Everybody wants to drive forward as a collective, as one. If you see something that is actually pretty silly and sounds ridiculous, to challenge that would be really bad. I heard examples where somebody within the group challenged something and then he was ousted from the group or, prior to that, made to look foolish in front of everybody. Suddenly you have—I think at the time he was 12—hundreds of older lads sending abusive messages in these communities because the leader of that group decided that he challenged him and that is not on. It is a very nuanced thing.

Q220 Alex Brewer: It seems there is a lot of cognitive dissonance here with insecurity, alpha males, and loving and hating women all at the same time. Holding these two things in mind is not only difficult but, as we have talked about, potentially violent. Is one of the solutions to teach boys better communication skills?

James Bloodworth: Partly. It is obviously something that is hard to teach. When I went online 20 years ago, essentially to seek dating advice—I was going to say typed into Google, but I think it was Ask Jeeves or whatever—I was living with my grandmother in Somerset. I had dropped out of education. It was a bit like during covid: my social muscles had atrophied and I was not going out much. I just needed to put myself out there again, build that social muscle again and get used to interacting with people.

In some ways that is harder now because we tend to spend more time indoors. It was happening before covid, on phones and staring at screens. There are fewer public spaces now. We have less disposable income to go to places to socialise than we may have done in the past. There is just less face-to-face contact where you can pick up and learn those skills. I find it difficult to learn those things naturally. I felt like I was a late developer in terms of learning social etiquette, if that is the



right term. That can happen; it is true for a lot of people, especially neurodivergent people. There is just less face-to-face interaction now, so creating those public spaces—youth clubs were mentioned earlier—is something that could be done to help this along, for sure.

Being respectful is important in terms of those kinds of interactions with a member of the opposite or the same-sex—with someone you are interested in. You have these male separatists in the manosphere who say they are separating from women because they are afraid of false rape accusations and so on, but that stuff can be a bit of a red herring. Approaching someone to talk to them or starting a conversation, or whatever—speed dating, meeting up after you have met them on an app—is hard. It makes you anxious. It is normal to be nervous about that and it is hard to put yourself out there.

A lot of men go wrong because they do not know how to put themselves out there in a way that if someone is not interested in you, you back off respectfully. Say you go and talk to someone and you realise they are not interested, you then say, “Oh, nice to meet you,” and then you leave. It is simple things like that: this is not going to happen—this is not going to go anywhere—so respectfully leave. We could do with men being taught that a bit more maybe when they are younger.

Q221 Chair: You have talked about neurodivergence a lot. You were late-diagnosed with ADHD. When you had your ADHD diagnosis, did it help you to understand why people who are neurodivergent are more attracted to the manosphere, and why it is that you saw people who were neurodivergent struggle with the kinds of social cues you just talked about?

James Bloodworth: Yes, definitely. From my own perspective it helped with a bunch of things, to retrospectively understand myself a bit better. For example, lifestyle management and structuring my life in a certain way to work with the disorder rather than working against it was a huge thing for me.

I met a disproportionate number of people who were on the autism spectrum right through the manosphere, especially in terms of following pick-up artists on these courses. I hung around some people taking men out on courses, and roughly one in four would be someone who either told us they were on the autism spectrum or it was just pretty clear. They gravitated towards that because they saw social interaction through a problem-solving context. They often did a job like an engineer, where they would not be socialising with a lot of people. It was very much about problem solving, and they transposed that on to their dating life, which had often not gone very well. They thought, “This is the beginning to the end of this interaction, and if I just follow this script, I will be able to be happy and have a partner like everyone else.” Going out to a bar or something and chatting to someone was this huge intimidating thing.



There are some better dating coaches around now, but there are also a lot of snake oil salespeople who they get drawn to because those people are very good marketers. The best people at marketing in those spaces generally tend to be the ones whose hands you would not want to be in, essentially.

Q222 David Burton-Sampson: Thank you for everything so far; it has been really interesting. We said earlier that people with poor mental health or suffering from loneliness can be pulled into the manosphere. You are welcome to elaborate on that a bit more, but I am quite interested to know about the mental health impact once somebody has been pulled into the manosphere.

James Blake: My understanding from the time I spent with the guys—especially in Portugal, because it was more of a group setting where they were sharing things with each other—was just that: they all felt a shared sense of loneliness and they had always felt that. It was not just a random thing; they had always felt that. They did not have peers in the real world.

As an example, one guy had spoken to another member of the group for two years and they had never met in person. He considered him to be his best friend, yet they had never met in person. Experiencing them meeting in person for the first time was quite a nice thing because it was very emotional. That sense of community is so important for them.

These guys in particular had framed this as they were going to the property in Portugal, which they called Adonis House—this was the nickname they had given it. The plan was that they would all work; they would all try to make money together. To be honest, as far as I could see, they actually just wanted to hang out. They were literally going there to hang out and become part of a community and a group where they did not feel lonely any more.

For example, one of the guys told me he had no friends in the real world. He did not like school; he was bullied in school. He left school and his only friends were this group of people. There is a lot of power and hold in that, so once you get a taste of that, then potentially withdrawing from it is a scary thought. When he got back from Portugal, I asked him, "That was a temporary fix to the problem. What's going through your head now?" He was self-aware enough to say, "I am lonely." I said, "Is this not a temporary thing? You're not going to fly to Portugal every day to see these lads. They all live around the world. What do you think about that?" He said, "Oh, no, we've already booked the next trip. One of the guys is actually coming here next month."

That sense of community and belonging is a massive thing for these guys. It is probably the thing that keeps them in that space, because from what the guys I met told me—about the elements of being successful and being this version of a man that is pushed towards them—I do not actually know if that is exactly what they want. At the core of it I



think they just want friends and friendship. They got that from what they were doing and they were not able to find that in the real world. They said they had no access to youth clubs, and they were not part of communities or football teams or anything like that. They found a real belonging in those groups and they were all aware enough to say they were lonely and this was something that was fixing that and plugging the gap.

James Bloodworth: I completely agree; there is nothing for me to add to that. That is the paradox of these communities. In some ways you have men who gravitate towards it and find this community of other men, this locker-room experience. They bond over self-development or talking about women, helping each other or giving each other honest appraisals on what they need to do to be a more successful man or be more respected.

But the more time they spend within the manosphere, the more of a negative influence it exerts on their mental health, because they are swimming in this paranoid world where you have these guru figures always hovering above the manosphere, hovering within those circles, who are always trying to sell them the next product or the next course. They always want to persuade them that they are not enough as they are, that we live in this paranoid world where they are a few dates away from a false rape accusation, one marriage away from paternity fraud, raising someone else's kid unknowingly, and that they need to constantly be on this treadmill of self-development because they are never going to be enough. They need to attend these seminars and workshops, and buy these courses and mentoring programmes.

They see these guru figures who appear very successful to them, but then the great unspoken is that they made all their money from selling courses to these men, not from any kind of business acumen. The longer you are in that world, the harder it is to come out, in many ways, and the more it can damage your mental health, because you have been fed this very skewed view of humanity, the world, and men and women for a handful of people to profit from.

Q223 David Burton-Sampson: Mr Bloodworth, in the past you have spoken about the positive impact that maybe 20% of what is in the manosphere can have on a man or a boy. Can you tell us a little more about that? How can we try to help young men and boys to fill those spaces where they are getting the positives? How can they get those positives elsewhere?

James Bloodworth: James touched on the positives in some way. If you look at any community, if it was all negative for the people, no one would be involved in it in the first place. You have to look at what it is that makes it attractive.

The first thing would be the camaraderie. As James touched on really eloquently, you have people who are isolated, who maybe do not have a



friendship group, and they unite around this one topic that they are all interested in. I still have a couple of friends I met years and years ago when I was interested in the manosphere. They are not involved in that world any more but we first met through that. There is nothing inherently toxic about giving men basic tips on conversation starters or advice such as, "You need to dress better. You need to leave the House. You need to clean your teeth and use mouthwash before you go to a nightclub." The problem is all the baggage that tends to come with it.

There is a vacuum in terms of some of these areas. In some ways I do not think it is as bad nowadays, but when I was young it did not feel like I had anyone I could talk to about that stuff, and the patriarchy makes it worse. Toxic masculinity, if you like, makes it worse, because as men we are not supposed to admit that we do not know what to do in the area of dating or we do not know how to perform successfully in some area of our life. This is not the fault of women; in many ways this is something we have been indoctrinated with. We are supposed to be 100% put together, stoic and invulnerable.

I do not think most men feel like that, certainly not as a boy, a teenager or in their early 20s. I did not have a dad; my granddad died before I was born. Who did I talk to about this stuff? There probably were people, but I was so embarrassed so I looked online. We are moving in a positive direction on that. It is easy to say everything is getting worse but men are less reluctant to, say, get therapy now than they were when I was younger. Certainly among middle-class men, stoicism is less in vogue than it was in the past.

The danger with the mainstream manosphere figures or these manosphere-adjacent figures is that they are telling men they need to go back to this stoic worldview and they need to be tough and strong, otherwise they are not real men. That is where the danger lies at the moment. If there was nothing positive from those communities, no one would be attracted to them. It is about extracting that from them and stopping them being able to own that space. It is improving, but slowly.

Q224 David Burton-Sampson: It is interesting, because when you look at the facts, men's mental health is in a pretty poor place. Three out of every four suicides are men. Again, through the whole masculinity-type thing, men are often unwilling to talk about their feelings. Those barriers are still there. How do you think we can improve the mental health of men and boys? How can we help men and boys who are perhaps feeling lonely?

James Blake: The community aspect is a big part of it for sure. The fact that these young lads are found in online communities run by individuals who just want to monetise is a dangerous thing. The communities should not be run like that. Although we touched on how good these communities are, and how they can give that sense of friendship and things like that, we forget that they isolate them from the rest of the world. That subculture is not enough. It cannot be enough, because even



HOUSE OF COMMONS

within that community there is a whole world outside of that, and actually that is where you learn most things. That is where you develop and learn from people who are different from you, not from people who just echo the exact same things back to you all the time. That is an extremely unhealthy place.

I have been working in television for a few years. I have been to the Philippines, to Thailand, all over south-east Asia and to America, and met people from all different backgrounds. Even at this age, it has developed me so much: I have learned so much from that. Every time I make a new documentary it completely changes how I see the world. I am very privileged to have that, but not seeing other people's viewpoints for a long period of time is very damaging to your brain and how you view the world around you.

On the face of it, albeit the communities are great within what they are doing, there is one positive aspect that needs to be expanded massively: it needs to bring in people from all different backgrounds and cultures. I do not know how you do that. I guess it is not my job to know how to do that, but it is something that we all lack massively as people.

James talked about neurodivergent people. A lot of neurodivergent people do not like nightclubs and bars. Other people do not like them for different reasons, maybe because of religion or whatever it could be. There need to be things that are very community-driven that are inclusive of everybody and allow that space for young men to open up. Especially in Portugal, in that group setting with the young guys I saw, they were all happy to share their feelings with each other. They were all opening up to each other, which you do not typically see men doing, but they felt safe in that little bubble of theirs. If we can expand that and bring other people in, it can only be a good thing.

James Bloodworth: We need places that are not just for-profit spaces and we need to make sure that the material conditions catch up with the rhetoric around mental health. We talk a lot about men needing to open up about their mental health, and there will be an item on the news about, say, Prince Harry talking about his mental health. This is all a progressive development. My grandmother died in 2022. She brought me up; we were very close. It was very difficult to deal with, and I sought grief counselling. There was a six-month waiting time to speak to a counsellor, by which time I had figured it out in other ways. There is this message, "Open up. Men need to talk about their mental health," but when you actually seek help it can be very hard. There is no money there, or there has not been any money there for 14 years. It's difficult.

Q225 **Dame Nia Griffith:** Thank you very much; it has been an absolutely fascinating session. I do not want you to repeat yourselves too much, but because I am a former teacher I am going to give you the most difficult questions. You have talked about all the uncertainty that men feel and how they are going to make their way in the world, the chip on the



shoulder and everybody is against them. We want to look at why that is happening. What are the main drivers of that uncertainty about what masculinity really is? How do you think we get a really healthy model of masculinity? How do we communicate that with young men? In other words, how are we going to get out of this situation?

James Blake: Society and the media in general are very good at promoting healthy examples of femininity and feminism, so there is a lot of empowerment around women entrepreneurs and different things like that. You see it a lot: a lot of magazines lead with that kind of thing. Men are kind of forgotten about, because I guess for so long they dominated those spaces and now it is not like that; it is very open for everybody.

Q226 **Dame Nia Griffith:** Can I stop you there? As a former teacher, I know it was always a thing that if you gave boys and girls an equal amount of attention, the boys thought they had less. It is almost an in-built perception even when you have positive role models. The positive ones can be very masculine; they do not have to be feminised or anything.

James Blake: Absolutely. The perception of the young guys that I spent time with is that positive role models are not spoken about enough. Whether that is true or not I do not know, but that is definitely the perception. However, the negative examples of masculinity are spoken about a lot. For example, Andrew Tate gets a lot of platforming. Whether the conversation is around what he is doing wrong or what he is doing right—probably not a lot—there is a platform there. Ultimately, that gets him into people's phones, on their screens and things like that.

The guys I spoke to all shared the same opinion. For example, I asked them to give me a positive masculine role model and none of them could—they actually couldn't—but when I asked for a negative masculine role model, they were able to fire off names like Donald Trump and Andrew Tate. They were able to name all these people who you see in the media a lot, but they were not able to tell me anyone positive. Whether that is selective on their part or not I am not sure, but maybe there is something in that.

James Bloodworth: Breaking down stereotypes can help with this stuff, by encouraging more men to become teachers or go into caring professions. I had a very good teacher in college who encouraged me to go to university and inspired me with the bug of learning. It was the best teacher I had and it really made me believe in myself and made me think that I could go on to university and progress forward.

It is just about seeing yourself in them in some ways. Growing up, my grandmother was the most influential person in my life. It is not a zero-sum competition between men and women. Sometimes you just need someone to identify with who you can really see yourself in. We recognise that in terms of, say, women's sport. Women's football has exploded and that is fantastic. But it is also true of men, which is why the role model question is so important.



Men are going through this kind of recalibration of where they draw status from, in some ways. You could say that men have lost status relative to women in some fields, and that is a good thing because in the past men had far more status than women in, for example, the world of employment or in the home. There is now this recalibration and men are dealing with that. There is this conversation that in some ways is only just beginning in some quarters about how you deal with that. How do you draw status? You have some parts of the world, like Russia, where the Government do not give anything apart from poverty and war, but in your home you can still feel like a feudal lord. To some extent that was true of this country in the past and we are still coming out of that. There are some men who say, "Where do I draw status from now?" They cannot find it in the workplace. They can no longer find it in the home or the family. What is their identity now? There is a lot of confusion around that.

We are going in the right direction. Huge progress has been made; I do not want to diminish that. It is not to say that men face more problems than women: men and women face different challenges. Women still face far more problems than men in many walks of life, but that does not mean we should not recognise that there is this kind of readjustment that many men are having to go through in terms of where they draw their self-esteem and identity from. There are so many confusing narratives and the manosphere is one place that really capitalises on that confusion and monetises it.

Q227 Dame Nia Griffith: How do we stop the spread of the manosphere? Is there any way that somebody who is drawn into it can be helped to come out of it, perhaps in the way you have seen?

James Blake: It is a difficult one to answer because it is so nuanced, and the manosphere itself has so many components. There are so many different variations and ideologies within it. With my own personal experience of the manosphere, in the space that I have seen and fell into for a little period of time, I guess what took me out of that was essentially just maturity and realising that the stuff that I was watching actually wasn't serving me and did not have a positive purpose. However, I am also aware that not everybody will come to that point, and some people will not have that awareness around it.

Talking helps a lot—for example, talking to family members or having a conversation with somebody you know is absorbing all this stuff. We have spoken a lot today about loneliness, and there could be something at the core of their need for that content that could be solved in another way, whether that is through talking, counselling, therapy or just simply having a mate to pick up the phone and say, "Let's go and get a pint," because actually a lot of this just comes down to that loneliness problem.

James Bloodworth: Yes, definitely. It is important to create that safe space within friendship groups and families where someone can be vulnerable and open up about insecurities and challenges and it does not feel like they are being judged for it. Some male figures step up and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

ventriloquise something or repeat something they have heard online and it is like you are barking up the wrong tree. These people do not have your best interests at heart; they are trying to sell you something. It is about having some kind of a figure you respect and can identify with—it does not have to be a man—who can then tap you on the shoulder and say, “Look, these people haven’t got your interests at heart.” Creating that space is so important.

Chair: It has been a really thought-provoking and enlightening session; I’m sure that is reflective of the whole Committee’s feelings. The loneliness and the performance element of the manosphere sounds exhausting to me, and something a lot of women will identify with. Ironically, that loneliness and monetisation of their sadness and vulnerability is something a lot of women will identify with. We talked about role models; we are looking at two role models right here. Kim said, “I want you to tell them that I think they’re both fucking brilliant.” I have done it; I promised her I would. I just want to say a massive thank you to you both. That brings this session to a close.