
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

What is the manosphere?



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Phil

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Phil.

Georgie

And I'm Georgie.

Phil

We hear a lot about the difficulties young men face growing up in the modern world, and how many of them are looking online for answers. This has created a situation which has been given the name 'the manosphere'. What exactly is the manosphere? Here's Anita Rani, presenter of BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, with one definition:

Anita Rani

The manosphere consists of online communities and influencers that promote the idea that emotional control, material wealth, physical appearance and dominance, especially over women, are markers of male worth.

Phil

The manosphere describes attitudes expressed online that men are superior. You won't find any website named www.manosphere.com, but in social media posts, TikTok videos and other online content, ideas about how to be a man are finding a young male audience, sometimes with damaging results.

Georgie

In this episode we'll hear from Will Adolphy, a young British man who followed the manosphere until, in his mid-twenties, he suffered a breakdown. And as usual, we'll learn some useful new words and phrases. And remember – you'll find all the vocabulary from this episode on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Phil

But first, I have a question for you, Georgie. According to men's self-help group the Movember Foundation, a majority of British young men regularly engage with masculinity influencers online, but how many exactly? Is it:

- a) two thirds,
- b) three quarters, or
- c) eight tenths?

Georgie

I'm going to guess a) two thirds.

Phil

OK. Well, we'll find out the answer later in the programme. The manosphere includes the idea that the world is biased against men. According to the social media influencers who promote these views, being a man means being strong, rich and controlling others, especially women.

Georgie

As a young boy, Will Adolphy was unlike other boys at school, and as he grew into a teenager, he started engaging with some of these ideas. Here, he tells BBC Radio 4 programme Woman's Hour how it all started:

Will Adolphy

I didn't quite fit in the box – you know, I was doing ballet, I wanted to be an actor, I wrote poetry – and I was an **easy target**. By the time I got to 14 years old, if you look at pictures of me, you can see **bravado**, you can see a mask – I see it. I unknowingly did my best to adhere to what we call the 'man box', which is a kind of rigid set of ideals and rules that I may feel pressure as a boy to follow, in order to be a **quote unquote** 'real man'.

Georgie

The teenage years can be difficult for someone who's different. Will enjoyed poetry and ballet, and he says this made him an **easy target** – someone who's vulnerable and easily taken advantage of.

Phil

Will responded with **bravado** – a show of bravery to impress other people but which often hides someone's true feelings. He felt pressure to present himself as a **quote unquote** 'real man'. The phrase **quote unquote** can be used to show you're repeating someone else's words, especially if you don't agree with them.

Georgie

But behind the bravado, Will struggled to get a girlfriend or hold down a job. Offline, his life seemed to reflect messages he saw in the videos he was watching online: that his problems were caused by women. Here's Will again, sharing more with BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour:

Will Adolphy

When I went online to search for answers, I had an influencer telling me, "The world hates men," which really felt true. And it, kind of, **distorted** my worldview, where it got **painted over – this whole brush...** where I started to feel that was really true: that everyone hates men, so it was an **us versus them**.

Phil

Will's view of the world became **distorted** – twisted out of shape and unrealistic. He started seeing everyone as an enemy. Will says he **painted everyone with the same brush** – an idiom meaning to unfairly think everyone has the same bad qualities as a certain person.

Georgie

Will saw the world as **us versus them** – a phrase which is used to show hostility between two opposing groups: in this case, the men in the manosphere and everyone else, especially women, progressives and the mainstream media, who he believed wanted to limit their power.

Phil

Luckily for Will, his experiences in the online world of the manosphere ended, but not before his mental health had declined to the point of a breakdown. Now, he visits schools around the UK telling his story to young people, reminding them always to question what they see and hear online.

Georgie

OK. Phil, I think it's time to reveal the answer to your question.

Phil

Yes, I asked you how many British young men regularly engage with masculinity influencers online?

Georgie

And I said a) two thirds.

Phil

...which was the correct answer. Well done!

Georgie

Thank you. OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with an **easy target** – a vulnerable person who is easily taken advantage of.

Phil

Bravado is a show of bravery or confidence to impress people.

Georgie

The phrase **quote unquote** can be used to show you are repeating someone else's words, especially if you do not agree.

Phil

Something which is **distorted** has become misshapen so that it looks strange or unnatural.

Georgie

The phrase **us versus them** is used to show hostility between two opposing groups.

Phil

And finally, if you **paint everyone with the same brush**, you unfairly think everyone has the same bad qualities of one person. Once again, our six minutes are up, but if you enjoyed this episode, why not check out the worksheet and quiz, both available now at bbclearningenglish.com! Goodbye for now!

Georgie

Goodbye.

VOCABULARY

easy target

someone who is vulnerable or easily taken advantage of

bravado

show of bravery or confidence to impress other people

quote unquote

used to show you are repeating someone else's words, especially if you do not agree

distorted

changed and misshapen so that it looks strange or unnatural

us versus them

phrase used to show hostility between two opposing groups

paint everyone with the same brush

(idiom) unfairly think that everyone has the same bad qualities as another person