

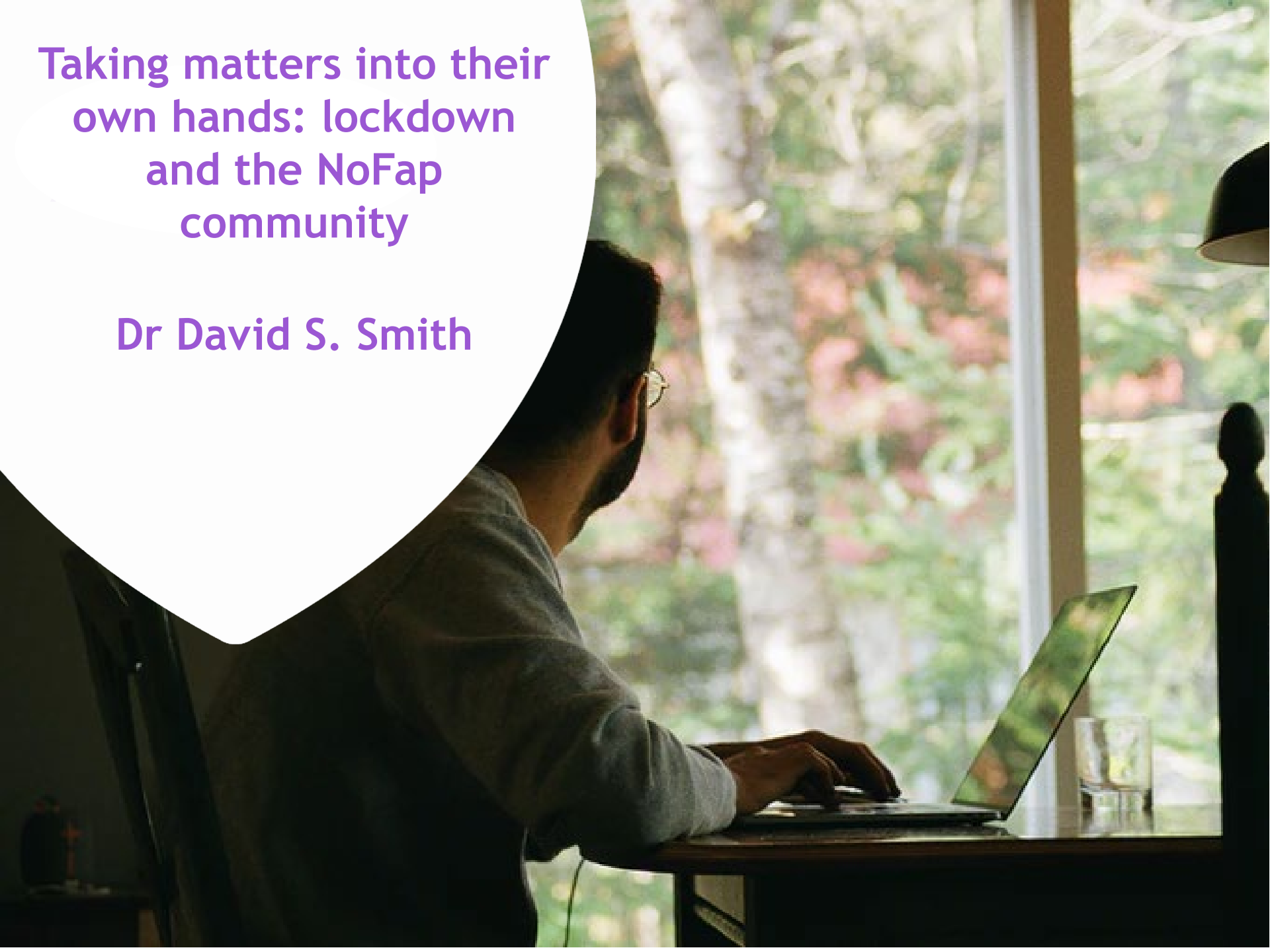
Taking matters into their own hands: lockdown and the NoFap community.

SMITH, D.S.

2021

**Taking matters into their
own hands: lockdown
and the NoFap
community**

Dr David S. Smith



NoFap



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A brief history of NoFap

Tissot (1760) & Kellogg: negative views

91.5% of men/ 60.2% of women each month (Solano et al., 2020): increase

Alexander Rhodes: worried about sexual performance - testosterone link?

4X daily to never (Wilson, 2016): Reddit - 822k+ members/ Fapstronauts

Site/ community help individuals overcome addiction/ problematic use

Pornography addiction - not DSM V, in ICD-11 (Reid & Kafka, 2020)

Addiction and pornography

Pornography and addiction

- Stimulates dopamine paths in reward system (Gola et al., 2017)
- Wired to respond to sexual stimulation to reinforce behaviour?
- Reduced with dopamine antagonist (Kraus & Meshberg-Cohen, 2015)
- Correlations with problematic pornography use:
 - Reduced working memory (Calvo et al., 2021)
 - Marriage dissatisfaction - men only (Perry, 2017)
 - Reduced commitment to partner (Lambert et al., 2012)
 - Sexual dissatisfaction - not ED (Dwulit & Rzymiski, 2019)



Why it may not be addictive

- Perceived addiction/ religiosity - cultural vs clinical (Ley et al., 2014)
- Often do not measure personality: sensation seeking? (Brown & Engle, 2014)
- Compulsion vs addiction? i.e. reduce anxiety vs reward (Egan & Parmar, 2013)



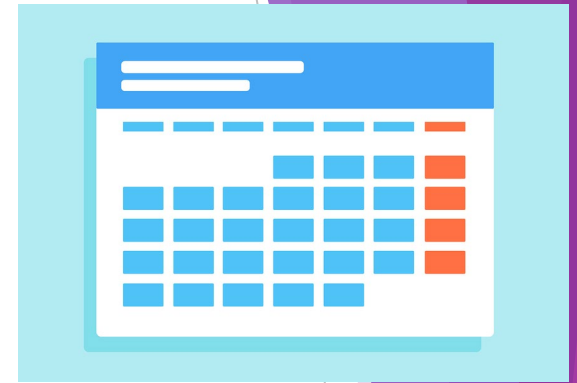
NoFap for self improvement

'Semen retention' gives 'superpowers': motivation/ cognition
e.g. strength, deep voice, willpower, mental clarity, focus, mood regulation

The NoFap challenge

Getting these powers

- 90 day abstinence from feedback loop of Pornography, Masturbation, Orgasm (PMO)
- Meant to result in cognitive reboot

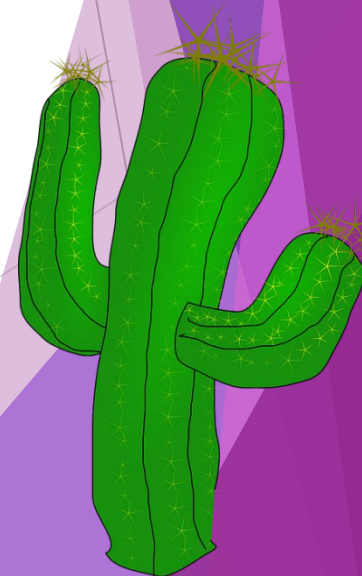


Difficulty levels

- Easy mode: Masturbation and sex, but no pornography
- Normal mode: Sex, but no masturbation or pornography
- Hard mode: No masturbation, pornography or having sex
- Monk mode: Hard + no artificial stimulation e.g. web

Who are the Fapstronauts?

- 95% men (Bishop, 2019)
- White students - atheist/ agnostic (Rhodes, 2018)
- Why?: motivation, relationships, intimacy (Osadchiy, 2020)
- Largely Anglo Northern-American (Taylor and Jackson, 2018)
- Part of the Manosphere?

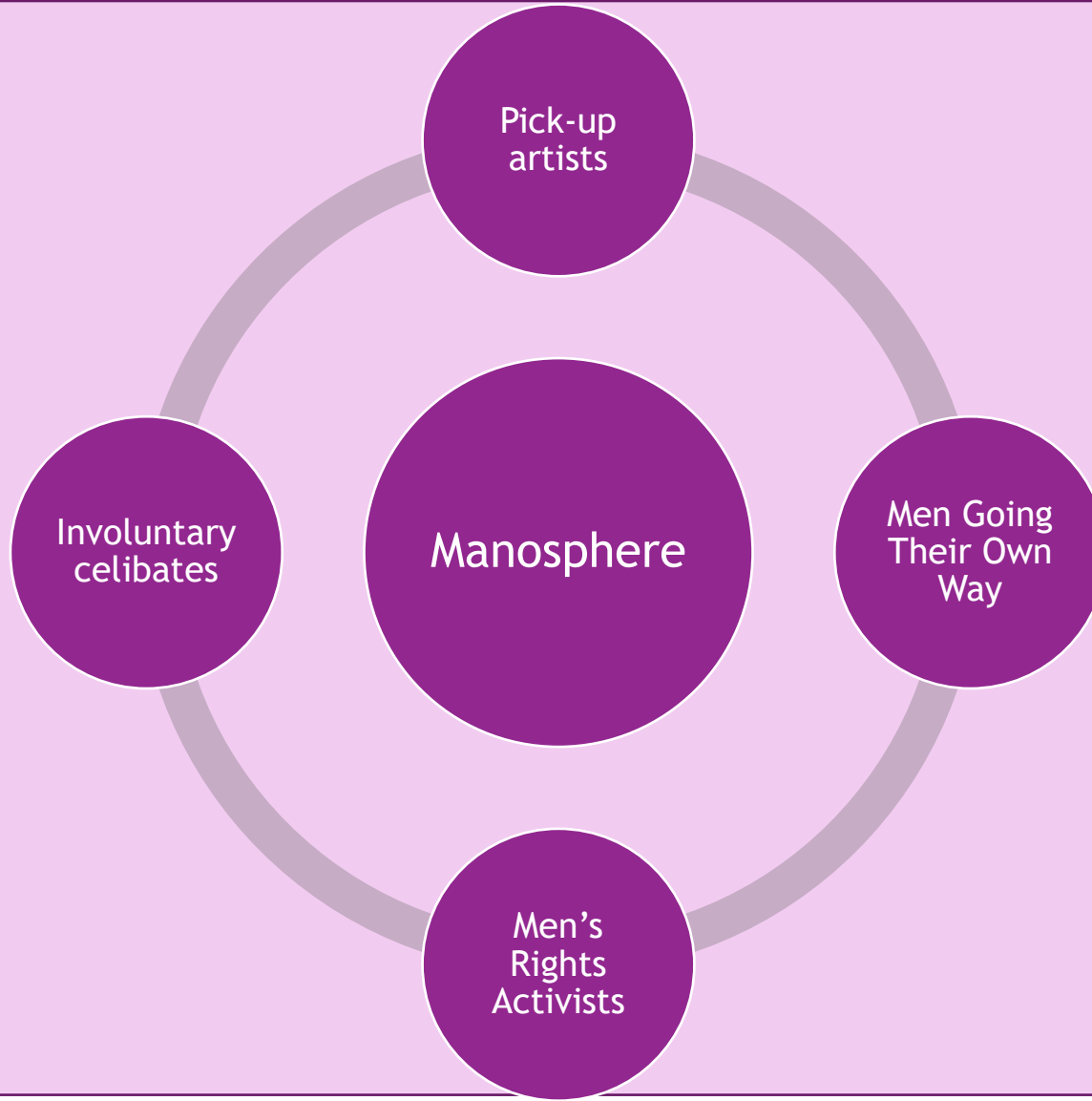


The Manosphere: arguably a part (Hartmann, 2020)

Users: socially inhibited young men across manosphere (Bates, 2020)

Informal coalition of anti-feminist/ male hegemony groups (Ging, 2019)

“Natural” masculinity under attack from feminism (Marwick & Caplan, 2018)



The values of NoFap

The NoFap philosophy (Taylor & Jackson, 2018)

- 663 posts/10 threads: “masculinity”
- Shared meanings of masculinity?

Three key discourses:

- 1. Realness and realisation - seeking genuine intimacy**
 - Masturbation/non-penetrative sex - not seen as masculine
 - Contrast: real/ virtual women - ultimate goal vs inhibiting habit
- 2. Masculinity is innate - a stone age brain in the modern world**
 - Uneven power between genders: reflect differences in physicality
 - Men = pleasure seekers/ women = pleasure givers: porn steals men’s agency
- 3. Masculinity is a performance - act naturally**
 - Society vilifies masculinity: reclaim suppressed identity
 - ‘Embrace your masculinity’: who members are and aspire to be



Quotations

The NoFap philosophy (Taylor & Jackson, 2018)

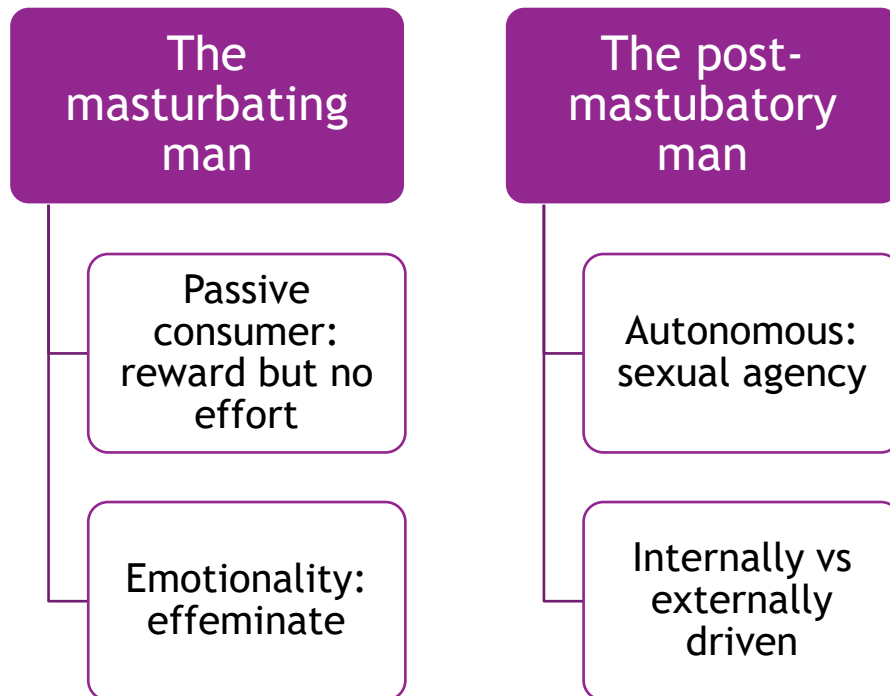
- . . . what in the world is masculine about jerking off to porn in front of a screen? ... There's nothing shameful about fucking a hot young girl, you feel like the king of the jungle afterwards that's what we are meant to do! ... Not jerk off like lonely losers to pixels on a screen. He makes some good points in the book, doesn't mean I became a feminist and grew a vagina after reading it. If anything it made me want to fap less and fuck more. Is that not masculine for you?
- No Fap is not only about overcoming our addiction over porn and masturbation, it is also about reconnecting with our inner masculinity. So lets come out of our fantasies and begin to connect with real women. Lets love them and have meaningful sex with them and show Philip Zimbardo that it is the beginning of the end of the Demise of guys!!! Can we do it??? Yes we can!!!!
- Think about what feminine means to you. Are you doing those things? Are you seeking approval, laughing nervously, and being indecisive? You shouldn't be. . . And by the way, you can laugh, but laugh only if you want to. Laughing because you are nervous is feminine. Let the girls do that around you...
- Who are you to say what Nofap is - really - about? As you should know, most fapstronauts partake for several different reasons. My reason for being a fapstronaut is to increase my masculinity, become stronger as a man, and learn who i really am. If a woman is uncomfortable with masculinity (aka sexist) that is THEIR problem, not mine.

NoFap and neoliberalism

Hartmann (2020) sexual Thatcherism

- NoFap videos on YouTube: sexuality and self-governance
- Historical discourse: unmanly vice (Stolberg, 2000) - true men yield control
- Transgressive: subverts natural economy of sexual exchange (Garlick, 2012)

The journey



Orgasm = natural reward for effort
Relapsing: betrayal of masculine sovereignty

Covid-19

Social distancing and mental health

- Negative mental health outcomes anticipated across all locations/ age groups (Banks & Xu, 2020; Holmes et al., 2020; Kumar & Nayar, 2020; Rajkumar, 2020)

Psychological responses

- Stress (Horesh et al., 2020)
- Loneliness (Brodeur et al., 2020)
- Depression (Rehman et al., 2021)
- Boredom (Droit-Volet et al., 2020)
- Social isolation (Gupta & Dhamija, 2020)

Increases in...

- Baking (Selwood, 2020)
- Gardening (Marsh, 2021)
- Eating (Cherikh et al., 2020)
- Drinking (Pollard et al., 2020)
- Reading (Boucher et al., 2020)
- Smoking (Cransac-Miet et al., 2020)
- Playing video games (Sweeney, 2021)
- Internet use (Droit-Volet et al., 2020)



Lockdown and sexual behaviour

Low-risk sexual outlets (Doring, 2020)

- Constructive way to ward off mental health issues? Few opportunities
- Endorsed: governments in Ireland (Brent, 2020) New York (Valenti, 2020)

Sexual behaviour: increased...

- Sex toy sales (Lee, 2020)
- Sexting partners (Lehmiller et al., 2020)
- Phone sex services (Callander et al., 2020)
- Solo masturbation (Casalheira et al., 2021)
- Sexual relationships between habiting couples (Addi et al., 2020)



Pornography and the pandemic

- Correlation: loneliness (Butler et al., 2018)
- Correlation: low affective states (Boethe et al., 2020)
- Problematic use in local lockdown (Marchi et al., 2021)
- Pornhub searches up: free premium access (Grubbs, 2020)
- General increase in lockdown (Rodrigues & Martins, 2020; Mestre-bach, Blycker & Potenza, 2020; Sharma & Subramanyam, 2020; Zattoni, 2020)

Smith et al., (in submission)

Self-love in the time of Covid

Research questions:

1. How have NoFappers adapted to lockdown?
2. Is lockdown associated with relapses or reboots?
3. How has the online community supports members?



Method

- Python: related search term
- Team analysed subset of posts: inter coder reliability
- Posts split: 3 team members analysed, fourth reviewed coding
- Total: 524 posts/ 164 threads March-November 2020 (final, 513/159)
- Coded: valence, key themes, gender implications, metaphor, alternatives

Posts removed if...

- Threads were irrelevant
- Posters stated they were under 18

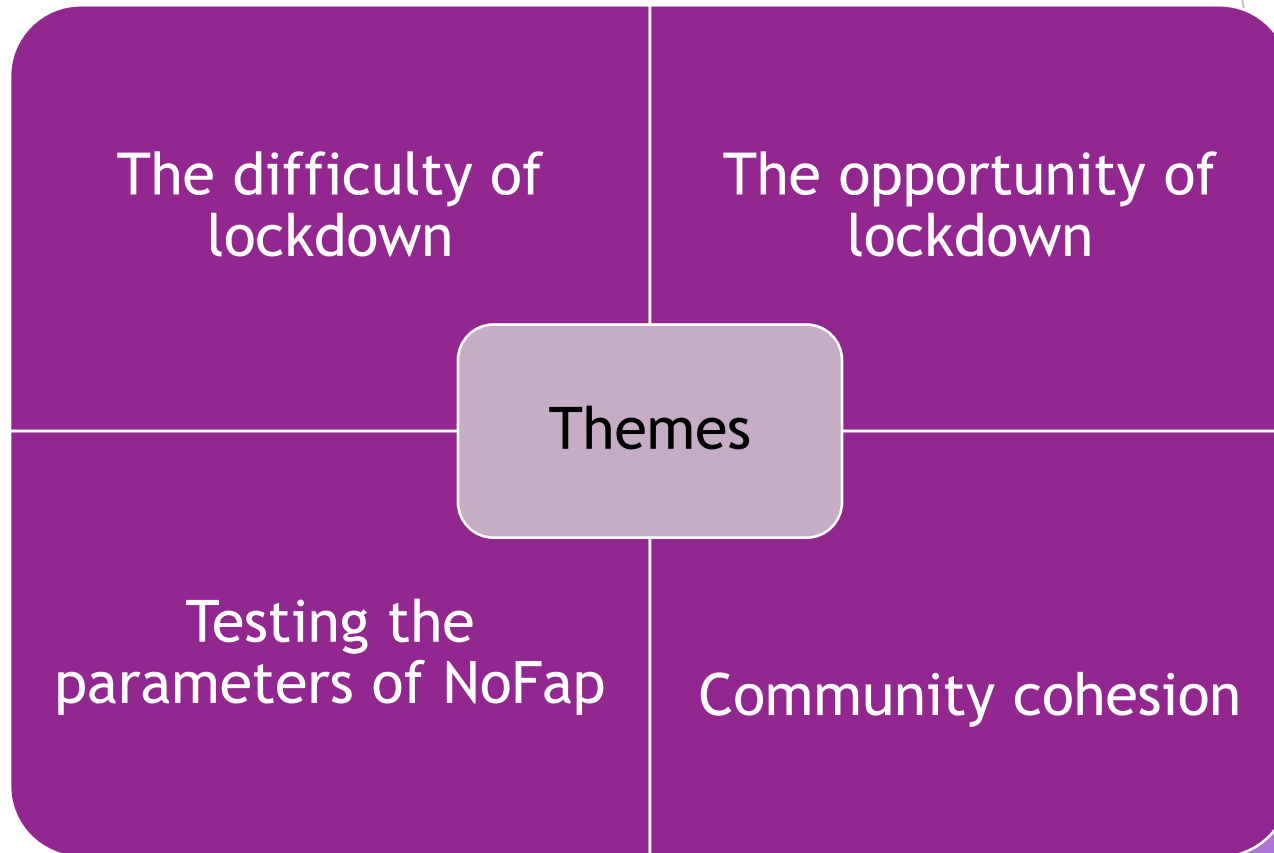


Note all quotations cited are paraphrased to protect anonymity

Smith et al., (in submission)

Analysis

- Discourse analysis: 4 key themes identified, with sub themes



Not mutually exclusive

e.g. difficulty of lockdown makes it a positive catalyst for change

1. The difficulty of lockdown

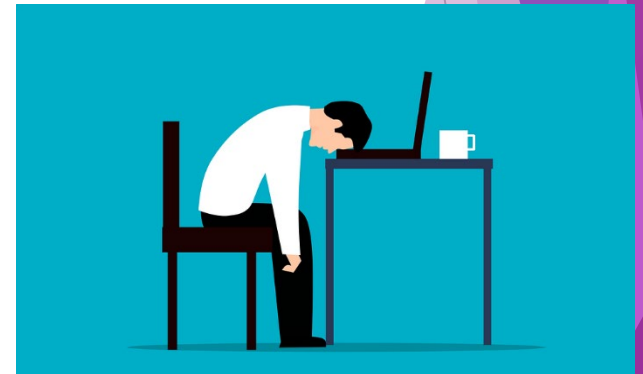
Lockdown as a challenge

- Most posts: social distancing measures have been difficult for users
- Metaphors: armed conflict/ war, lockdown as blackhole, finishing “alive”

Subthemes

1. *Boredom*

- Easy thrills of online pornography - single men
 - Time alone in room: laptop/ mobile - increase urge
 - Highest: members with active social lives prior to lockdown
 - PMO: time goes faster - “only” way of reward without effort
- Lockdown is crucial, but I’m in a bad place. I’m streaming all day, eating too much and staring at the ceiling. I feel shit. I’m alone with zero stimulation. Sports has saved my life, but there are only so many sit ups I can do in my room.
- The last few months I am my old PMO self again - the pandemic has made this worse. Being at home all day means I relapse almost daily...





Alternatives to “fapping”

Performative masculinity: strength/ discipline (Taylor and Jackson, 2018)
Endurance/resistance training increase testosterone (Grandys et al., 2009)

1. The difficulty of lockdown

Lockdown as a challenge

2. Loneliness

- Escaping, negative states - “sole companion”
 - Regress: unproductive/ unmotivated/ “pitiful”
 - Fantasies: self-harm/ breaking things
- “Lately the toll of social isolation has been hard. I feel down, bored and aimless most of the time, which takes the form of very strong urges.”



3. Technology = temptation

- Pornography easy to access - Pornhub: free access
 - Smart phones, laptops/ TV: paths to sexual thought
 - Social media e.g. Instagram/ Facebook - Monk mode?
- “Everything is on computer: work, studies. It’s just a click away. How do you stop?”



Struggles/ habits = reflect general population

2. The opportunity of lockdown

Lockdown as a good thing

- Approx 25% of posts
- Collective identity: strength vs incels
- Measures = opportunity to test their grit
- “Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors”

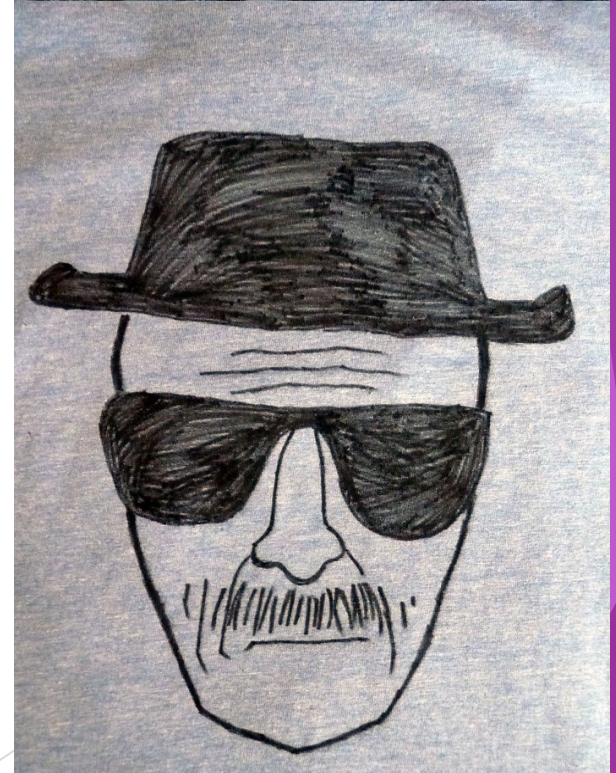
Subthemes

1. *Personal growth*

- Extra time to pursue their goals
- Gift: focus without daily pressures
- Breaking Bad transformation: to Heisenberg
- “To create Heaven, one needs to live in Hell”
- Only ‘easy mode’ after

2. *Separating the men from the boys*

- Exposes casually dedicated members
- Chiasm: NoFap and general pop. ‘zombies’
- Elite 1% vs 99% who cannot yield self control
- Fapstronauts’ kids will tell stories about lockdown powers: mythical



3. Testing the parameters of NoFap

Desperate times/ desperate measures

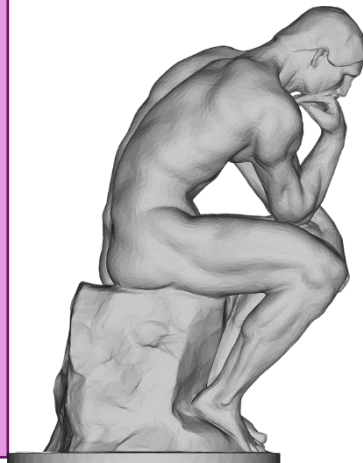
Lockdown measures reflected exceptional circumstance: the same rules?
Why continue with NoFap when they cannot get sexual partners?

1. *Existential questions*

Why NoFap now?
What qualifies as cheating?
Could they masturbate less?

But
Complete lifestyle change
“Real sex” not only goal

Subthemes



2. *Digital intimacy*

Absent partners
Is phone sex acceptable?
Masturbation without porn?

But
Undermines meritocracy
Phone with no touching ok

3. *No free pass*

Near-unanimous: lockdown counts
NoFap = pledge: regardless of circumstances

4. Community cohesion

Importance of digital community

- Share vulnerability: NoFap = journey vs destination
- Antithetical to masculine scripts (Hartmann, 2020; Taylor and Jackson, 2018)

Subthemes

1. *Bromance*

- Emotionally intimate/ expressive
- Safe space: disclose personal info without judgement/ rejection
- Relapses: encouragement/ upvotes/ advice/ support
- Motifs: 'Bro' terminology and military units



2. *Solidarity*

- Commitment to each other and solo achievement
- Reinforcement/ mentorship: members show streak in flares
- Neoliberal but equality of opportunity: share tips/ strategies
- 'You have a 300-day streak, I so admire you. I want you to teach me!'



Conclusions

Themes

1. Difficulty of lockdown
2. Opportunity of lockdown
3. Testing the parameters of NoFap
4. Community cohesion

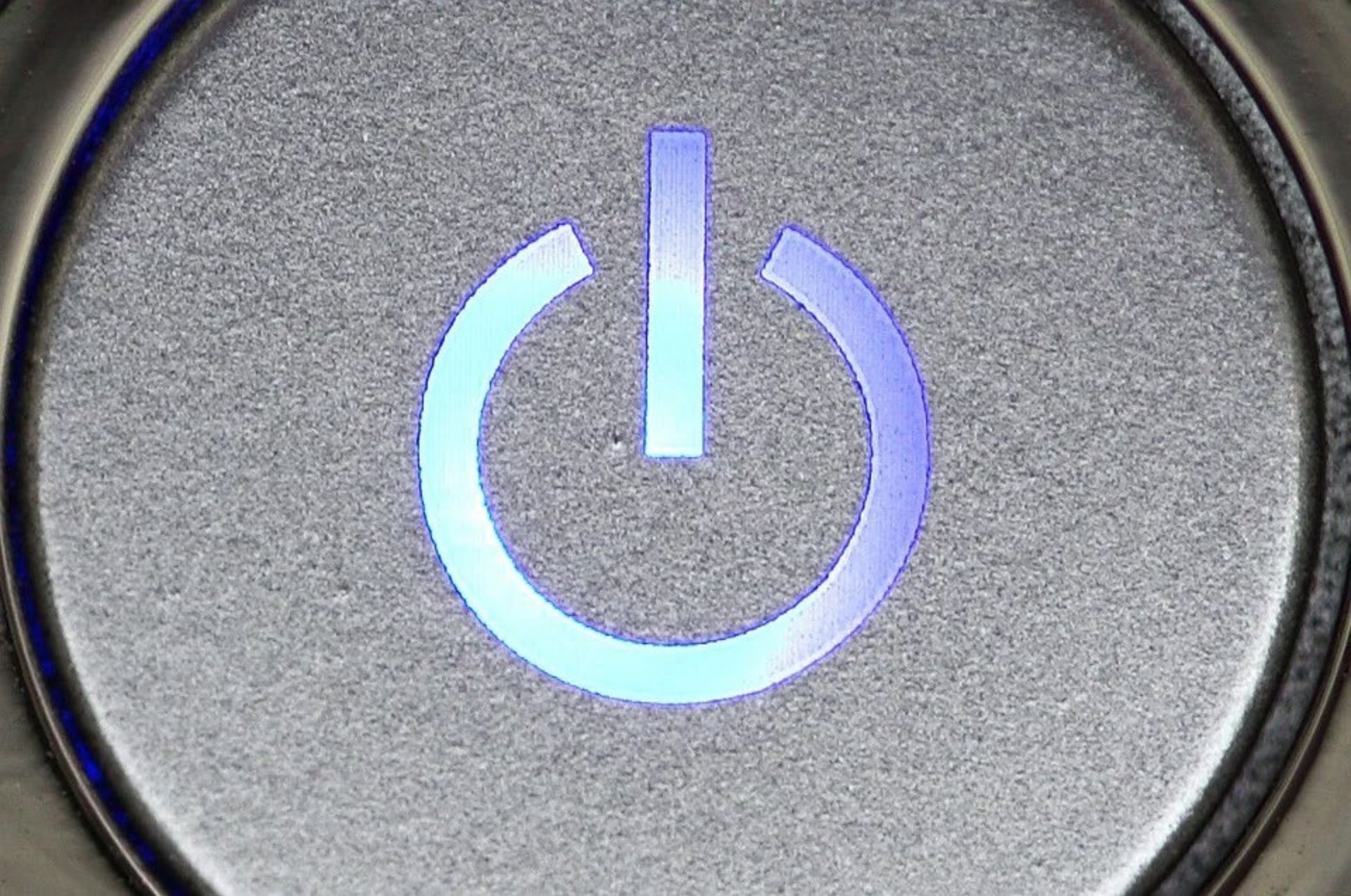


Key points

- Challenge: overwhelming or empowering?
- Fluid: some changed their mind throughout
- Broad patterns in the data: November vs March?
- Gender implications of movement - women as members?
- Control for location, rates and longitudinal changes?

Acknowledgements:

Dr. Alice Butler-Warke, Ms. Emma-Lee Davidson, Dr. Gemma Stevens,
Miss Caroline Hood, Mr. Connor Keegan



Any questions?