

Why would anyone join the "nofap" movement.

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The 'nofap' challenge, in which participants don't masturbate or watch porn, has grown into a large online movement. David S. Smith explains the theory behind the challenge, the gender politics of these online groups, and whether they are part of the larger 'manosphere.'

Hey reader, reckon you could go three months without masturbating? This is what the "nofap" challenge is all about. It's a growing online pledge in which participants, aka fapstronauts, try their hands at "[rebooting](#)" their brains from porn and "fapping" in order to improve their mental and physical health. The term "fapping" comes from manga, where it's meant as an onomatopoeic [representation of the sounds](#) someone makes when they're rubbing one out (like a crude version of when Adam West's Batman would "[whack](#)" and "boff" baddies during fight scenes). Thus far, most people I've asked give the same dismissive reaction: "Is that all?" Would they try? "Hell no!"

I'm not a nofapper - a weird thing to share in a publication my mom will read - but I find them fascinating. The [challenge](#) and its [official website](#), owned by [NoFap LLC](#), were [founded in 2011](#) by [Alexander Rhodes](#), a then 20-something tech professional who worried that his pornography habit (up to 14 times a day) had negatively impacted his sexual performance and his life in general. Since then, it has grown into a thriving global community with [1 million members](#), mostly men. NoFap LLC is far from the only site - there are several unaffiliated outlets with less public visibility. Others include [Your Brain on Porn](#), [Reboot Nation](#), and [Mr Mind Blowing](#). Across the platform, reboots are generally discussed in terms of easy, normal, and hard modes. Each site has its own character, and the specifics vary. For example, [Porn Help](#) wants to help people be porn-free but views masturbation positively. However, the aim is largely the same: promoting less reliance on pornography. Or, as NoFap LLC puts it, helping people "get a new grip on life."

Masturbation abstinence is nothing new. Immanuel Kant famously said spanking the monkey debased humans to mere animals, making it a practice [worse than suicide](#). John Harvey Kellogg, the inventor of Corn Flakes cereal, supposedly saw simple, plain, bland foods as a route to [suppress](#) sexual thoughts. [He called masturbation](#) "one of the vilest, the basest, and the most degrading acts that a human being can commit," an act not even fit for a "loathsome reptile, rolling in the slush and slime of its stagnant pool." Then there is the long line of religious arguments against it. For instance, the Catholic Church still considers "celebrating palm Sunday" a [sin](#). And Indian culture, Hindu, Islam, Buddhist, and Christianity [traditions](#) have all been used to promote "semen retention" to avoid [Dhat syndrome](#), a condition marked by physical weakness, tiredness,

anxiety, appetite loss, and guilt. Heck, even the [Seinfeld](#) gang tried to be masters of their domain when they held a contest to see who could hold out the longest from doing "that."

Technology and sexuality have long been interlinked, whether through porn, fetish sites, dating apps, or forums. So, if anything, it ought to be surprising that a viral version only gained momentum recently. What makes this generation of abstinence communities different from past incantations is that they are, in general, less puritanical. For example, NoFap LLC positions itself as [sex-positive](#), seeing porn as healthy in small doses, so it isn't making an ethical argument. Instead, like other parts of the self-help industry, nofap websites want to empower people - in this case by supporting them to overcome porn addiction. Other sites such as Fight The New Drug and Porn Help are similar in saying they want to help users lead their most fulfilling lives, though will sometimes add the extra claim that, by not fapping, men can temporarily [boost their testosterone](#).

There's mixed opinion in the medical and scientific community as to whether pornography is addictive. There's also [little evidence](#) for the proposition that not masturbating has significant effects on testosterone levels - though it is worth mentioning that [stress](#) from prolonged guilt, depression and anxiety can reduce the hormone. In contrast, [several studies](#) point to physical and psychological benefits from masturbation such as stress relief. There's even [speculation](#) that charming the snake works out the pelvic floor muscles and reduces the likelihood of erectile dysfunction and incontinence. But we're not here for too much of that; I'm a social scientist rather than a real one. So I will focus on the mindset that the nofap challenge may inspire or that is already present among those who call themselves nofappers.

First, a note on terminology. NoFap LLC is a [private company](#), though other porn-abstinence sites and coaches use the term generically in [videos](#), [articles](#) and [blogs](#), as do [researchers](#). Hence, when I write "nofappers"/ "rebooters," I'm using it as a blanket term for people posting on "rebooting" sites and forums. However, this does not imply it represents the organization's views. NoFap LLC, in their own words, "is not a movement" but a website, so I only refer to them specifically when using their full name. NoFap LLC claims not to be about improving the world, but enabling users to "improve themselves," with the only belief that unites its diverse membership being that this can be achieved by not fapping. Moreover, to the extent users on a message board internalize its code of conduct, among other things NoFap LLC forbids overtly discriminatory statements, such as hate speech. In my research, I have come across scores of people complaining about being banned or having their posts removed for violating community standards, suggesting that they enforce their rules. However, this is not to imply that forum members do not still share regressive views, a point I return to later when addressing research into some of their [Reddit](#) community [attitudes](#) towards gender.

The expression and understanding of sexuality are inherently political topics, particularly if people wish to restrict these practices or use them as the basis to ascribe personal or moral value to others. While reboot communities typically identify as politically neutral, there are still political implications to the ways in which they tend to characterize porn or masturbation. Regardless of their intentions, I argue that reboot sites may be especially appealing to ideologues who are opposed to pornography in general or have specific interpretations of masculinity and femininity. Research shows that these communities tend to appeal to conservatives and to reinforce conservative values such as individualism and meritocracy. I also discuss whether they ought to be considered part of the manosphere. But first, and of relevance to all of these, we shall look at how reboot communities relate porn use to human nature and gender politics.

The missing kink: this is your brain on porn

To understand the rationale for quitting porn, we need a basic review of the tenets of evolutionary psychology. In this framework, the purpose of the species is to propagate itself. Men increase their viable offspring by doing the deed with as many women as possible. Therefore, from this perspective it makes adaptive sense for them to have i) a high sex drive and ii) a preference for sexual diversity. Naturally, with a wealth of naked men and women literally at their fingertips via laptops, tablets, and smartphones, the average man would, understandably, want to sneak a peek wherever and whenever they could. While a virtual sexual experience could not, of course, result in a pregnancy, the drive to engage would be there. But nofappers think there's danger in having such easy access to sexual material, similar to the theory that the widespread availability of junk foods may be behind an [obesity epidemic](#) in an age when we don't hunt or forage but buy from a store. Porn gives its viewers too much of a good thing. Where once there was scarcity, there's abundance, and people apparently don't know how to handle it.

A core tenet of reboot communities is that our stone-age brain is ill-equipped to handle the modern world. It can't distinguish between a climax achieved through "natural" means and one reached by playing pocket pinball to pixels on a screen. Once we finish the deed, whether alone or with a partner, the brain thinks "job done" and reaches for a metaphysical cigarette. In both cases, our reward system triggers the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine, resulting in a feeling of euphoria that encourages us to repeat the same behavior.

Rebooters say pornography-masturbation is harmful because it severs the link between effort and orgasm, subverting the natural economy of sex. In other circumstances, people can't get their rocks off whenever they want: they need to work for it by wooing, competing and courting. Online, they don't need to do any of that and so reduce themselves to passive consumers. To quote the late [anti-porn activist Gary Wilson](#),

when browsing these sites the brain thinks it has "hit the evolutionary jackpot" without having to do anything more than turn off family settings. Thus, while men could be bettering themselves to attract women, instead they're lazily "fertilizing the screen."

While evolutionary psychology can offer useful insights, the logical conclusion of the nofappers is, ultimately, a reductive application of these ideas. The underlying principle is that people, particularly men, pursue partners solely for sex. While sex is important, an undue focus on sex ignores the extent to which people engage in committed relationships and work hard to support their partners and offspring. There is vast [evolutionary psychology literature](#) looking at long-term relationships and love as adaptations. In other words, humans engage in long-term relationships and love because these activities help them and their offspring to survive. Sexual activity is but one part of the way people relate to one another.

The adaptive benefits of social living seem to indicate that more than sex motivates us to pair up with another person (or people - no judgment here). After all, humans didn't become the dominant species by having the best natural defenses: our teeth are short, and our claws are lacking. Instead, it's because we work darn well together hunting, foraging, and sharing resources. Of course, this isn't to say we're naturally benevolent, acting out the goodness of our hearts. Our genes could calibrate us to survive in groups since these groups help us live and therefore replicate our genes, i.e., the survival of the friendliest. As [David Buss](#), the grandpappy of evolutionary psychology, [observes](#), "other humans are the 'vehicles' on which our survival and genetic legacy critically depend." And some of them are so important to us that we "bestow them with our psychological, emotional, and material investments."

Evolutionary psychology can [seem a bit daft](#), and often gets dismissed as astrology for men. That's understandable - especially when you see its most public figures rave about [lipstick, lobsters and high heels](#). But researchers in this area know memes spread faster than genes, and core to the premise of evolutionary psychology is a complex interaction between biology and the environment. To borrow a metaphor from [Gary Marcus](#), nature and nurture are not in competition. Instead, they work together, sharing the relationship of a writer and editor: nature provides a messy first draft, and it is meticulously revised by experience. A reductionist approach that says that our hardwiring makes us hopelessly preoccupied with orgasm thus misses part of the story.

Addicted to self-love

Let's return to our hypothetical man who has outsourced his sex life with porn and masturbation, effectively cuckolding himself. Complacent, sluggish and unproductive, he could be said to resemble the humans of

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, complacently popping soma all day. Analogies to drugs are common among anti-porn and reboot communities. For example, one popular organization calls itself Fight The New Drug, and one contributor on Your Brain On Porn has [advised](#) people struggling to watch *Requiem For A Dream* so that "every time you have the urge to unblock porn, think of yourself as a drug addict reaching for a drug." Alexander Rhodes prefers the less extreme [comparison](#) to smoking. Regardless of the specific vice referenced, reboot communities tend to discuss a recurring motif, which is that porn is harmful to consumers because once they start, they can't stop. The urge preoccupies them, stopping them from doing other, more productive things.

It is worth mentioning that neither the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the bible of psychiatry, nor The International Classification of Disorders see porn as addictive, though the latter views high use as a less serious impulse control disorder. While this may seem a distinction without a difference, the key point is that addiction implies long-term physical changes in how the brain functions such that the addict is unable to feel pleasure without their substance (i.e. [reward deficiency syndrome](#)). High porn use [does not appear to alter the brain in this way](#), though, and the temporary reward a porn user experiences appears to be less intense than what an addicted person might experience. Granted, the brain's dopamine pathways are [implicated in how addiction works](#), with the hyperstimulation derived from a drug and its cues dulling the reward circuits' sensitivity to pleasure from other sources: everything else seems banal in comparison. Crucially, these pathways are also how preferences and motivated behavior in general work, but porn isn't doing anything unexpected here. You can raise your dopamine levels right now by putting on your favorite music.

So unlike feminist [anti-porn critiques](#) that focus on the working conditions and objectification of women who perform in porn, as well as the well-being of women in general, rebooters typically believe that men only engage in a system of exploitation to the extent they're victims of porn sites and the addictive cycle of Porn, Masturbation, Orgasm (aka PMO - see sidebox). They argue that porn [plays on men's weakness](#) and robs them of their sexual energy, leaving them a lifeless shell of their former self - an idea most pronounced by the subsection of anti-porn campaigners promoting the absurd alchemist idea of [sexual transmutation](#), which is the idea that, by not ejaculating, men can redirect sexual energies into other areas, such as intelligence or creativity. Like other parts of the self-help industry, porn abstinence community members hope that by rebooting their brains, they will gain new skills and capacities that porn otherwise leaves dormant. There is a long and diverse list of these so-called "[superpowers](#)." Currently, the website [Porn Addiction Test](#) includes heightened attractiveness, more confidence and - pushing the testosterone angle - a deeper voice and even faster-growing hair.

Taking matters into their own hands

You may have noticed my focus on men thus far. Indeed, the demographic research to date reveals booters to be mostly a boy's club. Women make up roughly [5 percent](#) of fapstronauts. Beyond demographics, Auckland-based psychologists Kris Taylor and Sue Jackson [argue](#) that the overall culture of booters is one of heterosexual masculinity. Their 2018 analysis of the R/NoFap forum on Reddit found that many of the men felt that not beating their meat reconnected them with authentic masculinity, something they'd apparently been taught to suppress by a mainstream feminist society that devalues them. The authors highlight a paradox at the heart of the forum. Collectively, they claim to celebrate genuine masculinity. However, they mutually argue i) men need to be truer to themselves and ii) this will resemble a specific archetype. Masculinity is who they are but is also something that needs to be reclaimed, embraced, and even performed. A guy is "king of the jungle" if he can have "real" sex; he's a "beta bitch" if he can't discipline himself enough not to have hand shandies. The latter refers to a less masculine, and [therefore apparently inferior](#), man.

Reboot ideas about masturbation and sex reveal some counterintuitive ideas about masculinity and gender. Intuitively, you may think finishing the first draft by hand would be seen as masculine since it would suggest that a guy has a high (and therefore manly) sex drive. However, historically masturbation has been [framed as feminine](#), with men who abstain arguing that the act reflects a lack of regulation. "Real" masculinity, in contrast, means to exert control of one's body. To reboot communities, this usually means demonstrating resolve, self-management, and everything else a burgeoning entrepreneur needs to succeed in the cutthroat world of business and mate selection. Taylor and Jackson noted that this last part led some nofappers to argue that men and women have different roles in human sexuality, though they note that other members contested these posters. While men are pleasure seekers, women are pleasure suppliers and, by extension, gatekeepers to men's masculinity and maturity.

This misogyny is perhaps the most concerning trend among some reboot communities. Since community members often equate manliness with sexual prowess, they see women as codes to be broken rather than active decision-makers in the sexual act. Marlene Hartmann, a sociologist from the picturesque German city of Chemnitz, found this idea [pushed](#) by videos from various content creators. The notches on a man's bedpost are framed as fundamentally meritocratic, with women responding to the guys who can best regulate themselves; nothing turns them on like male agency. This means their inevitable sexual interest signals how manly a man is. So even if booters don't consider masturbation a sin, the community can still reinforce the notion that masturbation represents a fundamental failure to live up to conventional standards of manliness.

As per the evolutionary framework reboot communities adopt, in hunter-gatherer times the most prolific men in the mating department were the best hunters or the most gifted leaders. If the virtual economy of porn rewards anyone with a smartphone, the natural economy of sexual intercourse rewards effort. Thus, reboot communities normalize a neoliberal approach to orgasms: through determination and resolve, men can climb social hierarchies and take their position at the top. The more they put into controlling themselves, the more pleasure they are rewarded with.

The parallels between subjecthood under nofap and capitalism are illustrated by the [Lifeforce Program reboot kit](#), which claims to help people achieve the same mindset as Elon Musk. The life coach Alexander Graves, who cites "[self-conquering](#)" as key to being an alpha male, also evokes the Tesla and (at time of writing) Twitter Titan with an unorthodox [thought experiment](#): "Just imagine Elon Musk rubbing one out at home. Or the late Steve Jobs. You really think they did that? No. They had other things to do." [Masculine Development](#), a lifestyle site, also says men gain "God-like confidence" and an "Alpha male vibe" through rebooting. Its owner, the dating coach Jon Anthony, goes on to link his decision to quit to "starting multiple businesses, sleeping with 100+ women." Likewise, [Order of Man](#), a website about "[what it takes to become more of the man you were meant to be](#)," states that "men who abuse pornography usually struggle in their finances, relationships and careers." A consistent idea emerges: whether it is entrepreneurial success or having access to the most and/or best women, men only go as far as their lack of handiwork will take them. The post-masturbatory man, who has "real" sex with "real" women, instead of watching "reel women," is fully autonomous. Where others fail, he has taken control of his body and self-control portends success.

There has been no better test of nofap self-control than lockdown. In a [recent study](#), some colleagues and I analyzed posts on a Reddit group to see how the community had taken to social distancing. Wherever and whenever measures were implemented, the general population masturbated more. It's not hard to see why: millions of people were sad, bored and stuck at home glued to their electronic devices. In New York and Ireland, officials even recommended auditioning a hand puppet in the name of public health. The NYC Health Department reminded people they were their own safest sexual partner. But, in a refreshingly non-judgemental way, they also [recommended](#) that people "be creative with sexual positions and physical barriers that allow sexual contact while preventing close face-to-face contact." And while many took the time to pick up the books they'd always intended to read, record the podcast they always wanted to start, or make loaf after loaf of banana bread (master baking), idle hands are the devil's workshop. Sensing an opportunity, PornHub, one of the [most popular](#) porn sites, offered free premium membership (the usual services plus perks like zero ads) to quarantined people the world over, leading to a [significant increase](#) in their traffic across some regions. Google Trends also [showed](#) a worldwide increase in people searching out porn in general.

Predictably, most booters we looked at reported lockdown had been tough for them, with many citing feelings of depression and shame. Some said they cried, and in extreme cases engaged in self-harm behaviors such as striking their own genitals. These responses showed just how seriously they took relapsing. Members recommended workarounds: long walks, cold showers, learning to code, and speaking to their families. However, most commonly, people turned their bedrooms into weight-training areas or gyms. This trend stands to reason since men often cite developing muscle mass and upper body definition among the main reasons they exercise - it's another avenue into the masculine ideal.

Yet a subset saw lockdown as an opportunity: "the ultimate test of self-discipline." It was a proving ground. While most men were jerking their gherkins, they demonstrated their resolve. Some framed themselves as an elite 1 percent of humans with the discipline and will power to control themselves. They claimed they would reap the benefits of their sacrifice: afterward, every day would become easy mode. Some fairweather nofappers asked if they could renegotiate the rules a little, such as having phone sex or just masturbating less, and asked existential questions like if they needed to abstain when most couldn't meet a partner anyway. They were invariably told there was no free pass and were reminded that avoidance of orgasm was not the sole purpose of the reboot challenge. The ultimate goal was to attain more comprehensive physical and mental health benefits: high performance, self-mastery, and self-confidence. Hence the pandemic separated "the men from the boys."

It wasn't all testosterone and chivalry. Something unexpectedly touching - pun partially intended - was how effectively the members created a safe space for themselves. Predominantly male outlets tend not to be big on vulnerability and exposure, but their conversations were surprisingly open, including difficult topics like anxiety, self-loathing, and sadness. Perhaps it is the idea that excessive porn use constitutes a kind of medical condition that makes vulnerability so readily accepted in reboot forums: users tend to see each other and themselves as the victims of something external. Likewise for the popular narratives surrounding exploitation. This brings us to whether these nofappers are a part of the manosphere.

Members in good standing?

Some of the beliefs and attitudes associated with reboot communities, particularly their gender politics, may remind you of the manosphere. For the unfamiliar, I'll save you a dark digital rabbit hole. [The manosphere](#) is a loosely defined ecosystem where (mostly) men share and affirm patriarchal and/or antifeminist ideas. The following groups are generally considered canon:

- Pick Up Artists (PUAs): teach "game" techniques to help men attract women.

- Incels (involuntary celibates): define themselves by an inability to attract women they also feel sexually entitled to.
- Men's Rights Activists (MRAs): argue that institutions and legal structures systematically discriminate against men.
- Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW): a separatist group of straight men who reject relationships with women because women are "not worth it."

There's no official list of outlets since it's not a formal alliance, and member groups don't always see each other as allies. For example, Pick Up Artists mock incels, and incels mutually envy and pity them for being handsome but dim. However, all manosphere narratives essentially have the following foundational belief: that a gynocentric, man-hating, liberal consensus has shamed masculinity out of men (and each group has come up with its own theory about how to respond to such emasculation). Accepting this is called taking the red pill, named after the pill Neo picks in *The Matrix* which allows him to see the world for how it really is.

There are similarities between reboot communities and the manosphere. As Taylor and Jackson pointed out, booters' emphasis on biological essentialism depersonalizes women into markers of male success; there is necessarily a competitive dynamic to the story. Such thinking is reminiscent of PUAs, who qualify their "game" by how many women they can get with and incels their inferiority by how many turn them down. Booters also endorse the idea of a natural hierarchy of men, ranging from "pussy" and "beta" to "alpha" based on how well they manage their urges. Finally, the research cited above suggests that reboot communities and gurus can be prone to misogyny, a resentment of feminism changing men, and a conspiratorial mindset akin to the red pill (we can call this subsection *QOnan*).

Narratives built upon ideas about a hidden agenda or population control, such as the red pill, promote irrational and in some instances extremist thinking. For example, fringe booters promote the [sissy-hypno](#) theory. According to this conspiracy theory, some porn has been specifically designed with the intention of making men more feminine, or turning them gay, through subliminal messaging. It is not clear what the ultimate aim is other than to trick otherwise heterosexual men. More worryingly, an analysis of reboot posts on Twitter by Swedish researcher Scott Burnett [found](#) alt-righters citing the porn industry as part of a "Jewish plot," a conspiracy [recently alluded to](#) by the artist formerly known as Kanye West, who has also reported [abstaining from pornography](#). Hence research by Abeer Khan and Lukasz Golab, from Waterloo, Canada, found [crossover](#) between members of Reddit pages pertaining to booting and The Red Pill, with users tending to post on discussions across similar subreddits. Xiaoting Han and Chenjun Yin, researchers from Beijing, also observed [thematic overlap](#) between reboot communities' masculinist discourses and PUAs,

MGTOW and incels. These include the idea that a gynocentric society has reconditioned weak men to take an inclusive approach to gender relations and caused them to deny who they really are.

Popular names in the manosphere, including some right-wing personalities from the so-called Intellectual Dark Web, also endorse teachings from various reboot communities. For example, Jordan Peterson, often cited on forums, told Dave Rubin that pornography is "[an easy out](#)" representing pleasure without responsibility. Likewise, as a fresh-faced graduate, Ben Shapiro released an anti-porn book and still argues it "[destroys society](#)." His Daily Wire colleague Matt Walsh argues that "[every single person who claims to 'enjoy porn' is lying](#)" and that watching it is "dirty and wrong" (more of a moral argument than reboot sites tend to make). Next, lifestyle guru Tim Ferriss includes saying no to a serving of *beef strokenoff* as part of a [30-day transformation](#). Moving further rightward, Alex Jones' former right-hand man [Paul Joseph Watson](#) says it "disincentivizes you from attracting real women," and counters pro-porn arguments with "ok coomer." Finally, the self-professed "Western chauvinist" Proud Boys have their own version, "[no wanks](#)," prohibiting "heterosexual brothers of the Fraternity" from masturbating more than once a month.

Despite these connections, rebooting communities probably aren't part of the manosphere. Rather, I think it's more accurate to say that there exists a spectrum of individuals and subgroups varying in how manospheric they are. The boundaries between reboot communities and the manosphere might be fluid, too, with forums and vloggers acting as a kind of pipeline that leads those looking to abstain into manosphere beliefs. For instance, those who interpret quitting porn as a step toward a masculine ideal may, if they repeatedly relapse, start to see self-improvement as futile and become vulnerable to incelism. Likewise for those who last three months but fail to see dramatic lifestyle changes (while their sexually active friends enjoy the occasional frig): if only they had an easy way to handle their frustration.

Unlike MGTOW, incels, PUAs and MRAs, reboot websites are not always built around concrete aims beyond not jacking it. Some, particularly coaches, openly position abstinence as a step toward achieving alpha masculinity. But others, such as NoFap LLC or [Brain Buddy App](#), present themselves more neutrally. Research into the phenomena is still young, but at the moment, we don't know how many reboot users actually share the manosphere views; studies have tended to look at individual figures or employ specific search terms that influence the conversations included. We also don't know how many in these communities support or celebrate violence and trolling behaviors such as doxing, brigading, and harassment. And while there's evidence that some rebooters share a worldview with parts of the manosphere, it isn't clear whether their particular reboot outlet actively promotes this worldview or if these websites—by appealing to traditionally masculine ideals, stoicism, and personal sovereignty—appeal to fellow travelers already in the manosphere. Having people with manosphere attitudes in reboot communities is a problem and needs addressing, but it may not always be by design.

There are also numerous ways into the challenge and, by extension, reboot communities, many of which are not manospheric. Roland Imhoff and Felix Zimmer, psychologists based in Germany, [surveyed 1,000 men](#) from an unrelated forum about if and why they'd consider not fapping. They were most likely to do so if they were worried that wanking would ruin aspects of their social lives, like their connection with their partner. Others who said they'd do it tended to identify as more religious.

This second point lines up with the diversity of reboot communities. NoFap LLC, the biggest outlet, is a [secular site](#). However, anyone can use it, including religious people. A browse of their message boards and affiliated YouTube videos with "nofap" in their title shows participants spanning the globe, citing their faith as an inspiration. For instance, [Taoist "semen retention"](#) is more spiritual than plain old abstinence since it links ejaculating to losing "life force" rather than motivation. Despite their focus on self-control alongside booters, semen retainers often [won't even have sex](#) unless they can train themselves in the art of reaching orgasm [without cumming](#). However, they still share online spaces with those only trying to remove porn from their life. Scott Burnett also [found](#) numerous believers responding to the hashtag #NoFap. And while pious viewpoints can be compatible with the gender politics commonplace in reboot communities, they are not the same flavor of conservatism as the manosphere. Unequivocally equating them arguably promotes a Western-centric perspective of sexuality.

Other booters could have gotten involved because they are, if you can believe it, the kind of people who give up pleasuring themselves for fun: not masturbating is the new masturbating! The internet meme of [No Nut November](#) has also raised the public profile of rebooting. As with other self-help initiatives, such as [Sober October](#), [Movember](#) (grow facial hair for men's health) or [Veganuary](#), nofap's cultural significance transcends the individual company that created it. Moreover, the internet is almost overflowing with weird places people can confer over whatever niche topic they want (google Cute Dead Guys at your peril). However, there isn't a plethora of spaces to talk about not doing the five-finger shuffle. Thus, maybe for people with this aim, no matter the reason, reboot communities represent the only game in town. It seems less plausible to me that men become MRAs without supporting their political ambitions or join MGTOW without rejecting women since these causes are front and center of their message boards.

Likewise, many men abstain because they are worried about erectile dysfunction, which isn't necessarily indicative of any belief in male supremacy, antifeminism, or the red pill. NoFap LLC does not state that porn causes erectile dysfunction, but [other reboot sites do](#), so people may approach the challenge with this in mind. A potential problem is that if men worry fapping will leave them in Lake Flaccid, it may result in a self-fulfilling prophecy; those who watch it may work themselves into a state of panic. This can then have a knock-on effect if not rising to the occasion makes them even more nervous next time, and so on until the fear of impotency has left them impotent. Recent research by the American neuroscientist Nicole Prause [supports](#)

[this feedback loop](#). One idea is that anxiety, rather than the frequency of porn viewing, predicts the likelihood of erectile dysfunction.

There is also the question of porn addiction itself. Regardless of its legitimacy as a medical condition, this is the context in which most people seem to join reboot forums and is how NoFap LLC frames itself. These efforts may be useful if they help make the small number of people who'd otherwise sack the quarterback all day, every day less likely to do so. However, it's potentially problematic to see porn as addictive if the label leads to individuals feeling helpless, distressed, or guilty because they think their behavior is [abnormal](#). The controversial diagnosis of sex addiction pathologized the [socially taboo but common desire](#) to have sex with multiple partners. Similarly, seeing porn as an addiction risks stigmatizing healthy behaviors and plays to the hands of Christian conservatism. Moreover, an all-or-nothing approach could lead people to spend a lot of money on treatments they do not really need. Like other types of self-help, rebooting communities thrive because people want to change something about themselves. NoFap LLC appears to run entirely from donations and makes its resources available free of charge - same with Reboot Nation. However, other sites also sell some of their "[secrets](#)." With a wealth of [books](#), [coaches](#), [courses](#) and [apps](#) available, a man's wallet can take a pounding to make sure his penis doesn't.

Still, guys worried about having sex on the brain 24/7 can be agnostic to the reasons behind it. Rightly or wrongly, they are there because they want help, and these feelings are valid. However, perhaps part of why they feel this way is the awkward, often embarrassed way we as a society discuss pornography - and sex in general. If people think it is inherently bad, or something to be ashamed of, then this can make porn habits seem problematic. Joshua B. Grubbs and colleagues [suggest](#) it isn't the amount of time spent using porn that predicts people's [perceptions](#) of whether or not they are addicted. Instead, it's the significance viewers give it, as measured by their moral disapproval. Rather than honoring their urges, they are ashamed of them.

To be clear, there are problems with porn. It can create [unrealistic expectations](#) of sexual behavior among young people, and researchers Alessia Tranchese and Lisa Sugiura of the University of Portsmouth note that some porn videos [normalize](#) misogyny. The [poor pay and conditions](#) workers face need to be addressed, too—not that reboot sites focus on these issues much. But if the industry is taboo to the point of talking about it openly, no matter how many people watch it behind closed doors, reforms like this become hard to imagine.

Porn also has some [good points](#): it potentially offers people a safe, judgment-free arena in which they can explore their sexuality and learn what they like (as per the legendary [Internet Rule 34](#), if something exists then there's porn of it). The cornucopia of barely imaginable videos can be dark or unpleasant, but it can also empower viewers to explore their every fantasy and kink, making them more comfortable with their

sexual identity. By being more willing to talk about pornography - and even educate people about it - we can have more informed conversations about what healthy consumption looks like. In that respect, I don't think it ought to be thought of as something to be avoided, but something to be addressed. Perhaps we even need to become more ProFap.

Sidebox 1: The "keep your hands off your dictionary"

Like most digital communities, outlets for quitting masturbation and/or porn have their own lexicon. Here are a few key terms:

- Chaser effect: A period of intense urges to look at porn following a failed attempt.
- Coomer: A loser who masturbates excessively.
- Cumbrain: Like a coomer but worse. Cumbrains have a zombie-like addiction to porn and are unable to function without watching it.
- Death Grip: A tight-fisted grip that men give their penis when masturbating. Is thought to be overstimulating and to make sex with a partner less arousing.
- Death Schlick: Women's version of the death grip. Is thought to happen after stimulating the clitoris more vigorously than would happen during sex.
- Flatline: Temporary periods of reduced sexual interest and mood during reboot.
- PIED: Porn Induced Erectile Dysfunction
- PMO: Porn, Masturbation, Orgasm. The feedback loop people are abstaining from.
- Rebooting: Successfully abstaining from PMO for a fixed period.
- Surge: A temporary boost in physical energy that a rebooter gets after beginning the reboot challenge.
- YMMV: Your Mileage May Vary. Every reboot is different.

Sidebox 2: 4 ways to (not) play

There are a few widely recognized ways to do the reboot challenge. Note that none of them have fixed intervals. Some do them for a week while others go for the rest of their lives:

- **Easy Mode:** Masturbating is still allowed, but you are not allowed to watch porn when you're doing it. Often people start here and then move on to...
- **Normal Mode:** Abstaining from the cycle of porn, masturbation, and orgasms. However, people can still have sexual intercourse.
- **Hard Mode:** Complete abstinence from all sexual activities. Masturbation, porn, sex - the lot!
- **Monk Mode:** Another variant that's not officially canonized but gets mentioned on reboot forums. This is hard mode minus any artificial stimulation: no games, no TV, no YouTube, no social media, no reading Current Affairs online. Those who commit to it aren't even allowed to go on the message boards to share their progress! (If a tree falls in the woods....)