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# Just imagine Elon Musk... you really think he does that? Neoliberal subjecthood and the sexual marketplace in pornography abstinence/reboot communities.

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# “Just imagine Elon Musk... You really think he does that?” Neoliberal subjecthood and the sexual marketplace in pornography abstinence/reboot communities



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## Masters of their domain: why men “reboot”

- NoFap: generic name for men abstaining from Pornography, Masturbation, Orgasm (PMO) cycle to “reboot” brains + gain “superpowers”
  - r/NoFap, via NoFap LLC, 1.1 million users; r/PornFree, 350k, Reboot Nation approx. 24k – numerous content creators/products
  - Abstain from pornography (soft mode), pornography and masturbation (medium), or orgasms entirely (hard) for 90 days: a test of self-discipline
- Masturbation historically linked to adverse outcomes via institutions/public figures, e.g., degradation and mental/physical health (Hartmann, 2021)
  - Reboot communities: less explicitly condemnatory - utilise aspirational language of self-help (Johannsen, 2021; Smith et al., 2022)
  - Sex drive = masculine; failure to yield control/self-governance = feminine lack of regulation (Taylor & Jackson, 2018)
- Argue pornography exploits adaptive masculine sex drive calibrated for novelty: dopamine systems cannot distinguish between stimulation achieved via “real” intercourse versus artificial “reel” alternative. Demotivating: cuts link between sexual labour/effort and reward (Hartman, 2021; Taylor & Jackson, 2018)
  - Masturbating man: disengaged, passive; Post-masturbatory man: supposed benefits of self-ownership, e.g., testosterone, motivation, control, etc.
- 75% of members see misogynistic content + bullying (48%), anti-LGBT+ content (42%), antisemitism (32%), and threats (23%) (Prause & Binnie, 2023)
  - r/NoFap shares members/themes with manosphere spaces, e.g., Pick Up Artists sites + r/MRA, r/MGTOW, and r/Incel
  - Sometimes included in manosphere literature reviews (Han & Yin, 2022; Johannsen, 2021; Prause & Ley, 2024)
- Abstinence linked to “natural” economy of masculine subjecthood and sexual success via three key manosphere discourses below:

## Members in good standing? Crossover with the manosphere



### A war against masculinity

*Taking control of your sexuality and regaining masculinity is something I can talk about as a man. There's no point pretending this is an androgynous shared experience (r/NoFap user, Taylor & Jackson, 2018)*

*I want that power back. Real women, real life, real respect. It's out there for us (r/NoFap user, Taylor & Jackson, 2018)*

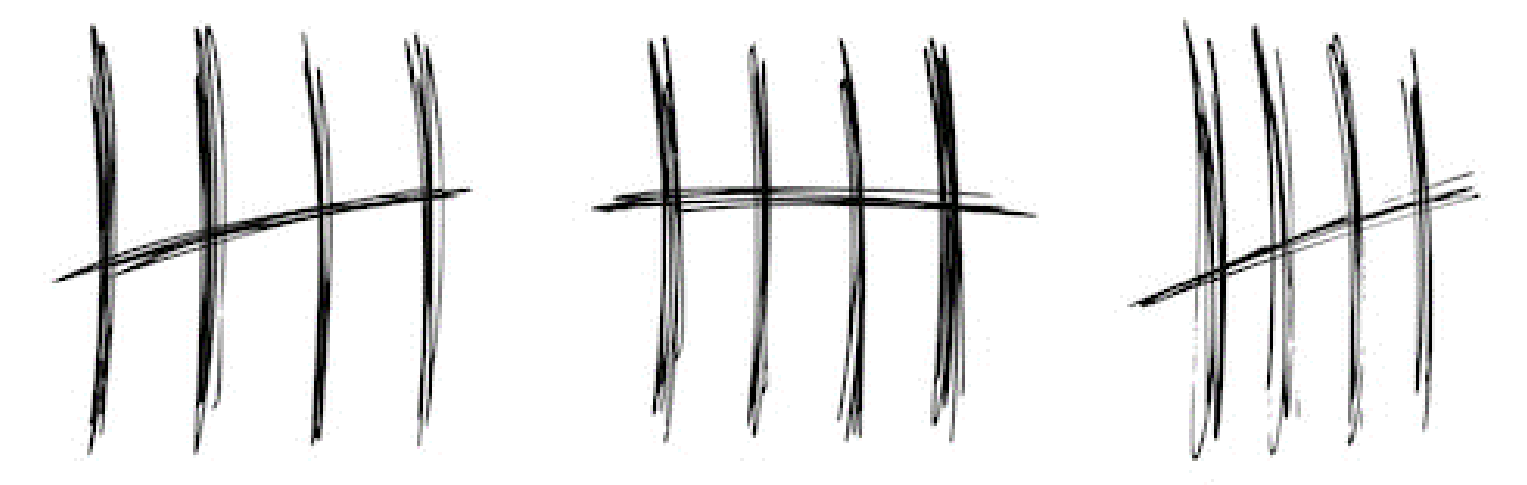
- Pornography = tool to subvert natural patriarchal order: abstinence as defiance against nefarious forces, e.g., feminists, socialists, liberals etc. (Burnett, 2021; Johannsen, 2021)
- Sissyhypno conspiracy: subtypes feminise men by subverting trad scripts (Johannsen, 2021)
- Men must reconnect with the vilified, natural masculinity that has been shamed/robbed by feminist modernity (Taylor & Jackson, 2018)
- Men have to look out for own interests if society will not: manosphere creates danger and extracts social/financial resources to aide members - protection racket (Bujalka et al., 2022)
- Fascism idealises bodily control as an alternative to degeneracy: e.g., Proud Boys' #NoWanks: pathway to extremism (Johannsen, 2021)

### A hierarchy of men

*If you're the kind of man you're supposed to be, you would have no time for that, and you wouldn't need it. (Andrew Tate on PMO cycle)*

*You need to make the decision today that you're gonna stop being a little bitch. (NoFap content creator, Hartmann, 2021)*

- Operationalisation of competitive masculinity. Manosphere taxonomies: tiered natural order of beta to alpha males (Han & Yin, 2022)
- Rebooters = real autonomous and self-regulatory men vs incel emotionality (Hartmann, 2021)
- NoFap masculinity: authentic and aspirational – men must ignore misandrist expectations to be who they really are (Taylor & Jackson, 2018)
- Consumption = microcosm of manliness. Evidenced via stoic endurance, e.g., lockdown separated men from boys (Smith et al., 2022)
- Streak = meritocratic measure of manhood: failure can lead to self-loathing, depression and suicidality (Prause & Binnie, 2023)
- Share emotions over setbacks while striving for masculinities antithetical to vulnerable displays (Smith et al., 2022)

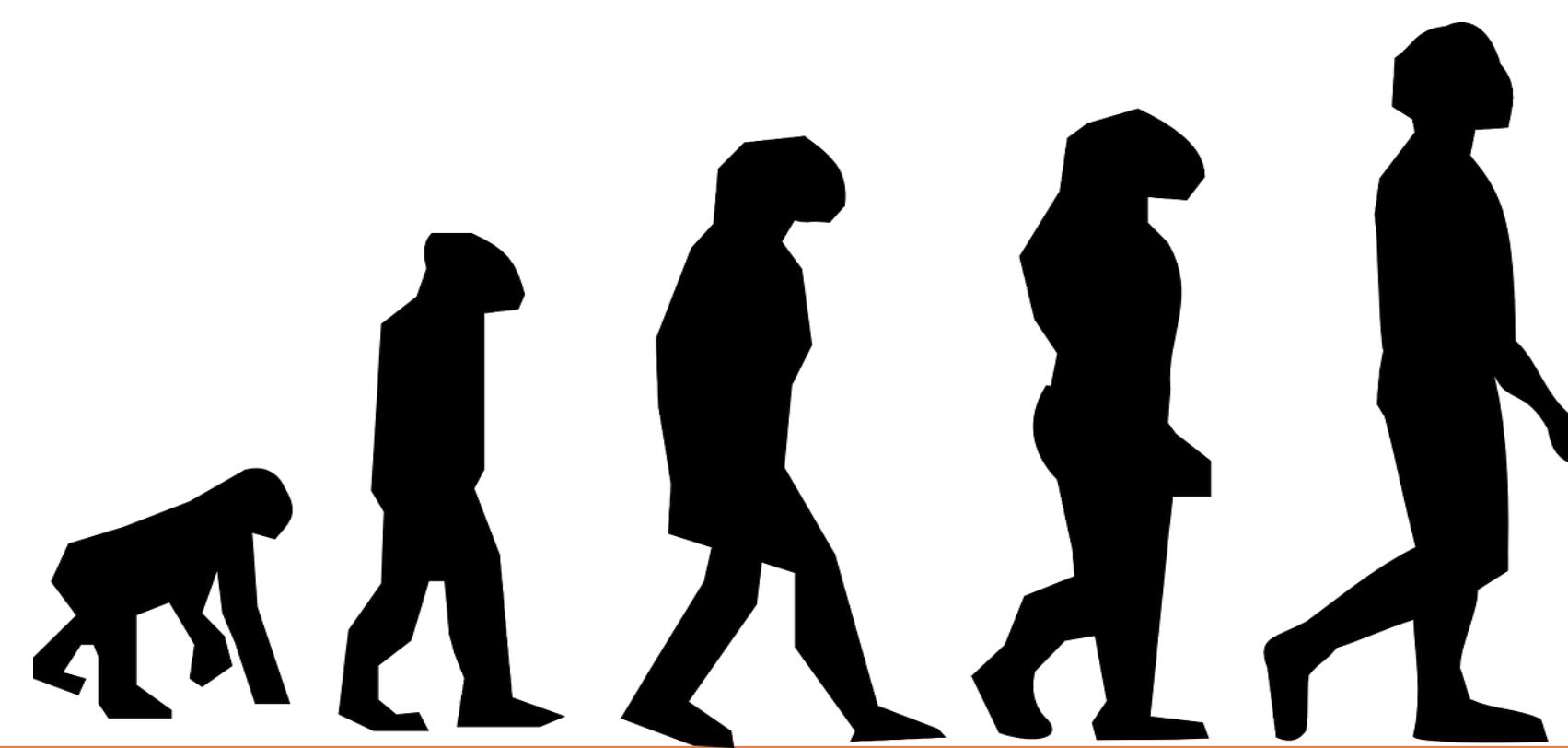


### Neoliberal sexuality

*This is where the “superpowers” come in: confidence, motivation, the burning desire to leave your mark. All of these benefits stem from your brain giving you the highest chance to reproduce (NoFap content creator, Hartmann, 2021)*

*You'll be a different person, and others will notice how much better you've got through NoFap (r/NoFap user, Smith et al., 2022)*

- Instrumentalisation of women: rewards vs decision-makers - meritocratic heterosexuality (Hartmann, 2021): interest = man's erotic capital
- Manosphere/NoFap idealise self-expressing, entrepreneurial, risk-bearing, masculinities to compete for finite resources: women's attention (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019)
- Most men: lazy, demasculinized masturbators vs sovereign/attractive 1% (Smith et al., 2022)
- Totalising meritocracy: increases dominance and mastery elsewhere, e.g., industry (Burnett, 2021)
- Abstinence success = capitalist success: products unlock “Elon Musk” mindset via focus, e.g., Mr Mind Blowing; Self-Conquering sites



### Divergence with the manosphere

- Trademarked organisations/products vs grassroots – variable: r/PornFree < strict/violent than r/NoFap (Chasioti & Binnie, 2021; Prause & Ley, 2024)
- Incentive variance: perception of addiction, relationship issues, fun, challenge, erectile dysfunction myths (Fernandez et al., 2021; Imhoff & Zimmer, 2020)
- Diverse userbase: e.g., Religion (Burnett, 2021): Indian culture: semen as life force, Chinese *Jiese* (abstinence) as tradition/resistance to capitalism
  - Does uncritically aligning NoFap with the manosphere promote/normalise Western-centric sexualities? (Smith et al., 2022)

## General discussion: Masters of their domain?

- Presence/perseverance of misogynistic beliefs at communal level should concern reboot websites/content creators
- Strengthening male hegemony/dehumanising women/reconnecting with innate male power - manosphere tenets on reboot sites
- Despite implications of medicalizing/stigmatizing high pornography use, sociopolitical prescriptions less overt than other manosphere subjectivities
- Pipeline in/out of inceldom: facilitate exit or reaffirm inferiority? Interconnectedness is missed by manosphere vs non-manosphere dichotomy (Burnett, 2021)

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