The Crisis of Self-Help on YouTube:

Recommendations of Misogyny and Hegemonic Masculinity

Abstract

Through a rhetorical content analysis of 79 videos, this research aims to explain the function of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messner & Messerschmidt, 2018) on YouTube. It looks to understand how YouTube videos in the "self-help for men" community perpetuate and legitimize hegemonic masculinity. This study suggests hegemonic performances inevitably cause crises that result from gender role conflicts and identity formation cycles (O'Neil, 2008; Parks et al., 2022; Pérez-Torres et al., 2018). Self-help creators attempt to "alleviate" gender conflicts by emphasizing dominance over counter-hegemonic and non-dominant masculinities and viewing women as evolutionarily inferior to justify the uses of misogyny; these performances perpetuate gender role conflicts and harm men more than they help.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, self-help content, gender role conflict, YouTube, creators, complicity, contentious

The Crisis of Self-Help on YouTube:

Recommendations of Misogyny and Hegemonic Masculinity

As nontraditional forms of media continue to become mainstream, younger generations will turn to these platforms more often during times of personal crisis and conflict. With sites such as YouTube becoming mainstream content-consuming platforms, more niche communities have emerged to replace old media and compensate for the loss of real-world spaces. Creators on YouTube occupy a unique space in relation to old media and have a higher potential to influence their audiences.

This work is in conversation with Connell's and Messerschmidt's (2005) "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" and Messner's and Messerschmidt's (2018) "Hegemonic, Nonhegemonic, and 'New' Masculinities" to show what drives and empowers masculinity's toxic aspects, providing a powerful and cogent look at online discursive practices regarding gender studies. With the rise of self-help content on YouTube and creators like Andrew Tate reaching mainstream headlines, these communities can no longer be cast aside in research; boys and men are socialized under heteronormative patriarchy, allowing creators to prey on internalized misogyny and toxic masculinity for content engagement further normalizing these behaviors. If research conducted online continues focusing on extreme groups such as incels and overlooking less outwardly harmful communities—the places most young men and boys turn to first—there will be a continued gap in understanding creators and the impact they have on the audience's gender performances.

In this paper, I conduct a thematic content analysis to show how self-help spaces on YouTube perform hegemonic masculinity and illustrate its relationship with gender role conflict and identity construction for adolescent viewers. This research intends to show how the

consumption of content that performs hegemonic masculinity results in frequent reformulations of masculinity driven by gender conflict. Because hegemonic masculinity preys on boys and young men's constant drives to fit in, what is defined as hegemonic masculinity is constantly being modified lending to high viewership and little conflict alleviation. For viewers, this manipulates how they construct identity, making self-help feel like an active development done by the self, not a process influenced by YouTube creators. The self-help space on YouTube for boys and young men does more harm than good; it gives creators income streams and privilege in society, extending power and privilege to viewers who perform hegemonic masculinity in their unique circumstances.

Literature Review

YouTube and Identity Construction

With YouTube's emergence as the dominant platform for media consumption for adolescents and young adults, more viewers will use creators as platforms to construct their identities as creators have catered to particular niches which has attracted large communities and allowed them to build relationships with their viewers (Pérez-Torres et al., 2018, pp. 65-67. These relationships are developed as individuals watch and interact with creators, forming a parasocial level of trust for the viewer to the creator. This trust can cause individuals to gravitate toward specific creators, seeing them as equals and sometimes friends, and identifying with their actions, practices, and behaviors (Parks et al., 2022, p. 2; Pérez-Torres et al., 2018, pp. 62–63). As more young men and boys utilize YouTube to experiment with identity, many will face backlash or praise from their peer groups, families, or educators due to their identity

construction. These exchanges impact relationships, hierarchies, and/or self-esteem, affecting a person's identity and subsequent gender performance.

Gender Role Conflict

Interactions and reformulations around masculine identities further how young men and boys construct their identities, impacting what Jim O'Neil (2008) describes as "gender role conflict" (GRC). This article breaks down GRC into psychological domains of conflict, situational contexts for GRC to occur, and operational experiences resulting from GRC.

GRC has four psychological domains that affect how we cognitively, affectively, behaviorally, and unconsciously perceive gender. Together these domains influence how we think, feel, interact with, and respond to gender (O'Neil, 2008, p. 362). If GRC is affecting one of these domains there are four situational contexts for GRC to occur in. First, there are gender role transitions, defined as "entering school, puberty, getting married, becoming a father, or losing one" (O'Neil, 2008, pp. 362-363). Second is intrapersonally, the internal experience of negative thoughts and emotions resulting from devaluations, restrictions, and violations (O'Neil, 2008, pp. 362-363). The third is interpersonal, where men utilize practices of devaluing, restricting, and violating others due to their personal GRCs (O'Neil, 2008, pp. 362-363). Last, is GRC experienced by others, "when someone devalues, restricts, or violates another person who deviates from or conforms to masculinity ideology and norms" (O'Neil, 2008, pp. 362-363). Devaluations, restrictions, and violations—more broadly defined as operational experiences—serve as reflexive barriers to exclude and marginalize individuals who do not adhere to hegemonic performances of masculinity (masculine ideology) (O'Neil, 2008, p. 363). When one conforms to, deviates from, or violates the stereotypical gender role norms of masculine ideology, one is subject to devaluations—negative criticisms of oneself or others,

negatively impacting their identity and public reputation. Gender role restrictions occur by limiting oneself or others to hegemonic performances of masculine ideology. This results "in controlling people's behavior, limiting one's personal potential, and decreasing human freedom" (O'Neil, 2008, p. 363). Violations arise when an individual harms themselves, harm others, or suffers harm from others while deviating from or conforming to hegemonic standards of masculine ideology. Violations are about victimization and abuse; enduring psychological and physical pain (O'Neil, 2008, p. 363).

There is a clear relationship between GRC and YouTube identity construction when it comes to why boys and young men turn to YouTube (Parks et al., 2022, p. 13). If one experiences GRC, YouTube creators performing masculinity provide spaces for boys and young men to mold their identities. These performances of masculinity often result in more GRC due to YouTube creators' masculinities not aligning with what's defined as hegemonic in a viewer's everyday context. Conflict arises because masculinity is precarious, differing in geographic and social contexts. While GRC and YouTube identity construction can explain why this content is popular and the relationship it has with viewers, it cannot illustrate what YouTube content is like, or the intentions of creators in their gendered performances. I use these theories as context for why boys and young men turn to YouTube. I focus on the concept of hegemonic masculinity to analyze YouTube content performing masculinity and the effect it can have on viewer's identity formation.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity (HM) is defined as practices and behaviors that legitimate men's dominant positions in society and justify the maintenance of social roles, allowing subordination over women and marginalized men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832, p. 835; Messner &

Messerschmidt, 2018, pp. 36–37, pp. 39–40). HM focuses on understanding what drives and legitimates masculinity, while GRC focuses on how conforming to or deviating from masculinity in interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions produces role conflict. HM is achieved by a few and attempted by many, is affected by local, regional, and global embodiments of masculinity, and can constantly change based on time, society, culture, and the individual (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832, p. 838). At a local level, HM is influenced by peer-to-peer interactions seen in families, organizations, and groups, allowing local masculinities to deviate from regional and global performances due to the immediacy and intimacy of gender in these contexts. Local masculinities can allow for less rigid and sometimes counterhegemonic performances because of power differentials in relation to regional and global masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 849). At a regional level, HM is constructed by culture and the state, influenced by discursive practices politically and demographically, involving communities and organizations not immediately accessible to an individual. At a global level, HM is guided by world politics, business, and media consumption (Messner & Messerschmidt, 2018, pp. 43–44). YouTube creators fulfill regional constructions of masculinity, as viewers turn to them to reconstruct their local masculinities—and because of their inability to have the reach, or the fame, of mainstream celebrities, politicians, or business leaders performing global masculinities, YouTube masculinities uphold aspects of global masculinities, but fail to perform what qualifies as hegemonic in that context. Regional constructions are subordinate to global masculinities until certain performances become globally celebrated and recognized as masculine.

HM requires the subordination of women and marginalized men to justify itself, creating hierarchies of masculinity and giving authority to men who legitimate HM the most (Connell &

Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832, p. 846, p. 849; Messner & Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 37, p. 41). These hierarchies consist of multiple masculinities, some upholding, and some challenging HM. Messerschmidt has distinguished differences between masculinities and identified "nonhegemonic" and "hybrid masculinities". Often, these masculinities attempt to push against HM but often fall into the same cycles of domination and subordination, still representing aspects of the most celebrated forms of masculinity. To maintain and obscure what is defined as HM, "dominant" and "hybrid masculinities" attempt to command and dominate other individuals or social settings and may incorporate subordinated styles and behaviors within HM. Importantly, most masculinities serve the goals of HM and gain many of the privileges even if they look to distance themselves from hegemonic performances.

Methodology and Data

With the self-help community's emergence amongst boys and young men, there is a growing knowledge of this community's toxicity and its potential to challenge modern constructions of masculinity, but seemingly, this toxic content continues to remain popular and thrive on social media. The guiding question for this research is: How is masculinity performed by YouTube creators in the "self-help for men" community and does it perpetuate and legitimize hegemonic performances of masculinity?

Crisis of Masculinity

Self-help content on YouTube has seen a rise among boys and young men due to a perceived crisis of masculinity. This "crisis" has become a repeated talking point in the self-help community, with many creators choosing to create videos to provide boys and young men with different performances of masculinity. It might seem like providing boys and young men with

different models of masculinity is a noble choice by YouTube creators, but this community has been labeled misogynistic, homophobic, and violent due to content from more prominent creators such as Andrew Tate, FreshandFit, and Jordan Peterson. These creators and others in the community have spoken out, stating they are none of the labels the mainstream media has given them and that they are only looking to provide a space for men to better themselves. Despite their objections to this "cancel culture," most creators in this space have not changed their content, seen their audiences grow, and reinforced viewer's alienation from valid criticism of masculinity and patriarchy.

With these creators garnering tens of millions of views, this content is reaching large audiences of young men and boys, affecting how they perceive and perform masculinity. Many of these boys and young men lack sufficient life experience or social support to understand how some masculine performances negatively affect them and those around them, with many gravitating toward dominant masculinities to combat vulnerability during gender role conflict and transition in adolescence. Because we are socialized in a patriarchal society upheld by sexism and misogyny, most men—especially in their youth—are susceptible to this content. Continuing to have this content unchallenged and remaining on platforms such as YouTube will only worsen this "crisis of masculinity" due to the inherent contentiousness of masculinity. If what is defined as hegemonic masculinity is constantly changing, how will boys ever learn to be comfortable and accept their masculinity despite the operational experiences resulting from deviation in masculine gender performance?

Analytical procedure

The key phrase “self-help for men” was chosen due to its easily identifiable position in the YouTube algorithm. This phrase brought the two communities of focus together, providing thousands of videos recommended by YouTube.

To understand the possible viewing habits of the audiences, videos were chosen by varied selection methods accounting for short, casual, and long-session viewing. This consisted of selecting the most viewed video from the first ten recommended and repeating this selection however many times, depending on the viewing style. For short viewing styles, one video would be selected, five more from the original video, and then repeated until completed five times total. For causal viewing styles, one video would be selected with ten more from the original video, and then repeated until completed three times total. For long-session viewing styles, one video would be selected in addition to fifteen more from the original video. Videos over 30 minutes were not selected as they were podcasts, a different type of content. If a video had already been selected, it would be discarded with the next unwatched recommended video added to the selection list. If a video was reuploaded by a different creator or the same video was a separate upload, it would be incorporated into the selection list. These selection methods have been effective in this research, as they provided a whole spectrum of creators ranging in their gendered performances and reached a point of saturation at the end of the video selection process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 61).

With Connell, Messerschmidt, and O’Neil all providing differing, but similar definitions of masculinity, this research chose Levant’s traits of toxic masculinity as cited by Bell Hooks in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* for deductive-coding as the defining characteristics brought together the ideas of hegemonic masculinity and masculine ideology. These traits are listed as follows: “avoiding femininity, restrictive emotionality, seeking

achievement and status, self-reliance, aggression, homophobia, dominance, and non-relational attitudes toward sexuality" (Levant, quoted in Hooks, 2004, p. 118). Each video received three close-watches during deductive coding with the above traits. Once coded, the data corpus revealed that all the videos were complicit or engaging in the above traits. As a result, it was found that videos fell into three themes based on the role of masculinity in the content of a video. These themes emerged as explicitly male-gendered self-help, non-gendered self-help, and hegemony functioning. The traits of toxic masculinity still informed this paper's analysis but have been used to convey the role of these traits regarding masculine performances within their themes. The traits illustrate how topics about one's social perception, sexual achievements, subordination of others, and portrayals of confidence legitimize hegemonic masculinity. In this thematic content analysis, hegemonic masculinity is used as a framework to examine YouTube content and GRC to provide context on why boys and young men might turn to these communities.

Discussion

Explicitly Male-Gendered Self-Help

This section examines the content of self-help creators that are explicitly intended to be viewed by male audiences. In analyzing this content, I found that content in this theme upheld hegemonic masculinity through performances of masculinity exhibiting Levant's traits of dominance, seeking achievement and status, and avoiding femininity. This theme is then categorized into three subthemes—bettering one's perception, men's failure, and subordination of women—to detail how masculinity is presented and performed differently depending on the creator.

In bettering one's perception, this analysis revealed that creators are focused on using strategies to improve one's ability to talk to women in a manner that resembles a game with specific strategies to win. When creators gamify talking to women, they no longer see women as people but as objects to obtain; they are unconcerned with presenting their authentic selves or the women they talk to. What matters is success. These creators see talking to women, getting their numbers, and having sex as achievements, helping push their social status in their peer groups and communities. In FarFromAverage's video, "How To Attract Girls Without Saying ANYTHING," they rely on evolutionary psychology to generalize what women are attracted to: "Both guys and girls are programmed to look for traits within a mate that will ensure their survival...which mean neither I, you, or anyone else can accurately tell you exactly we're attracted to." FarFromAverage further goes on to say that attraction is uncontrollable, stating that men are attracted to looks while women are attracted to behavior (2023, 00:49–01:40). This is the gamification of attracting women, it plays into cisheteronormative dating practices and objectifies women. By framing their video in this way, FarFromAverage objectifies these women by labeling them as "mates" and implying that their attraction can be predicted and influenced with FarFromAverage stating viewers need to embody dominance, optimism, and courageousness to appear confident. While optimism and courageousness are reasonable traits to embody for confidence, dominance is not required to be confident; in this performance, dominance is used to exert power over others, with FarFromAverage admitting that "oftentimes it is the loudest and most obnoxious person who wins and not the person who has the skills to back up what they're saying" (2023, 03:04–03:11). Instead of pushing to tell men to express themselves in ways that are authentic to themselves to attract women, he attempts to sell a nearly unobtainable performance of masculinity that does not guarantee success often causing viewers

to question or further internalize this content. FarFromAverage states that these uncertainties (anxieties relating to dating in this context) are a trait of feminity and explicitly tells viewers to avoid this to continue to appear confident. It's a self-fulfilling cycle that guarantees continued viewership; if you question this content, you're a sissy who isn't doing it right. For men, this is more harmful than helpful; it restricts one's emotionality (Hooks, 2004, p. 118). If one is uncertain of their relationships, this is a concern that should be discussed between partners, friends, and family to alleviate the conflict. By following FarFromAverage's advice, men will continue to be uncertain, as their confidence is only a facade.

When videos talk about men's failure, they are not talking about individual failure but about how men have been failed by society. Videos in this category rely on ideas of seeking achievement and status and avoiding femininity, implying men have become feminine and are not the celebrated patriarchs of past generations (Hooks, 2004, p. 118). In Hamza Ahmed's video "6 Bad Habits Keeping Men Weak," he begins the video by naming the consequences of being a "weak man," calling people experiencing this "a wimp, a coward, a pussy" (2022, 00:09–00:12), quickly transitioning to a man who does not experience these things, calling him "Adonis," showing a very muscular man being cheered by a crowd. This framing begins by categorizing men, showing gender hierarchy in action, and propelling hegemonic masculine performances over more emotional, feminine, and less physically attractive masculinities. When Hamza Ahmed details the six habits keeping men weak, he communicates that these habits are stopping men from attracting women and achieving high statuses. When Hamza Ahmed dismisses gaming, he states, "We evolutionarily don't care about prestiging in a fucking video game, we care about climbing up the ranks of men around us, we care about obtaining status and power and having brotherhood in our lives" (2022, 04:23-04:33). By communicating this, he rejects a

lifestyle other than his own, assuring viewers that stopping gaming will help them better themselves. However, he does not provide concrete examples of how or why this is a healthy practice, nor what alternatives are available while emphasizing masculine hierarchy. He does not supply viewers with a way to better themselves, relying on evolutionary psychology to express power and status in our already patriarchal systems; hierarchy inherently creates crisis unless one is at the top, and everyone is competing for that position further making what is defined as hegemonic, contentious. Engaging in hierarchy causes men to become individualistic and dominate those around them, hurting relationships and providing little to show for it outside privilege and power (Hooks, 2004, p. 118). Hamza Ahmed then circles back to his introduction, stating, "You've been convinced that you should be in touch with your emotions, you should be in touch with your feminine side. That makes you weak…fuck off being in touch with your emotions" (2022, 08:08–08:34). He then follows by telling viewers to get into mediation and journaling to observe emotions, drawing parallels with stoicism. Observing but restricting emotionality still causes conflict because it is vital to have avenues to express these emotions in healthy ways (Hooks, 2004, p. 118). Mediation and journaling do allow for expressing emotion but presenting them to only observe still restricts how men express emotions. Again, this creates a facade, masking men's perceptions of their own emotionality and hurting more than it helps.

While viewing explicitly male-gendered self-help content, the subtheme of the subordination of women cemented how creators portrayed women, as objects. This subtheme showed how creators in the space see women's lives as effortless and that men must work harder to gain positions of comfort. How to Beast pushes this narrative in his video, "Women's life starts at 18. A man's starts at 30." by outlining the patriarchy and how it functions, stating "I used to think that this sucked so bad,", but doubles down in support of it, calling it empowering (2023,

01:07–01:10). In How to Beast's performance of masculinity he feels empowered because he gains privilege due to his masculinity being considered hegemonic in his context. If he was a woman, black, or gay his performance of masculinity would be perceived much differently; he may not obtain the privileges that allow him to feel "empowered." He goes on to remark that women begin to lose their social value as they age, but men have "no expiration date." This framing is problematic in two ways. Firstly, his understanding of a woman's social value is intrinsically tied to patriarchy and what he deems valuable: looks. Secondly, it subordinates women, only giving men the ability to ascend the social hierarchy as they age, with women as side-objects to express status. The framing utilizes patriarchal privileges to further cement boys' and young men's socialization and internalization of unobtainable masculine performances, hurting women and themselves. How to Beast goes on to state that "women prefer dating older men because again they value the courage, the confidence, the success" (2023, 07:15-7:21). Again, the statement frames women as objects—while also projecting a facade of confidence as well as subordinating other men. How to Beast's advice depicts women as something to improve one's status over other men, contesting the benefits of achieving a relationship where both parties are mutually fulfilled by simply being together (Hooks, 2004, p. 118). For How to Beast, women and relationships are there to better men. This advice is about bettering oneself to attain a patriarchal impression of confidence and status by neglecting emotional needs and discarding subordinate masculinities. Self-help content aimed directly at male audiences will only cause further GRCs.

Non-Gendered Self-Help

Even with the search term "self-help for men," many videos were non-gendered in their appearance but still upheld HM. Videos under this theme fell into subthemes of non-gendered

patriarchal advice or gender-neutral advice. While the subtheme of gender-neutral advice did not challenge hegemony, it remained complicit in it. Additionally, gender-neutral advice videos came from the recommendations of other gender-neutral videos, showing that this content is the minority in this sub-community and is only recommended once a user becomes involved in it.

In non-gendered patriarchal advice, these videos provide advice about conversation, confidence, and body language. While this advice is not gendered, it plays into ideas of HM by talking about portraying yourself in ways that uphold performances of HM. Charisma on Command's video "How To Effortlessly Defend Yourself In An Argument" does this by framing a debate between Cathy Newman and Jordan Peterson as an argument, falsely labeling their discussion. By changing the framing, he turns arguments into something to win rather than a discussion where issues are communicated to resolve conflict. He dismisses Newman's debate tactics as personal attacks and conversational trappings while praising Peterson for doing the same and projecting confidence for expressing moral superiority. This allows for dominance in conversation and dismissing valid issues for convenience. This video and others in this subtheme are about portraying status—never losing and being confident—to not appear weak (Hooks, 2004, p. 118). These videos show hegemonic performances that do not allow men to be wrong or lesser; they cannot be perceived in any aspect of life as subordinate, even if arguments can be used to better oneself or one's relationships, thus why they are reframed as debate.

Gender-neutral advice often explicitly challenges self-help content but not hegemonic masculinity. Better Idea's video "Why self improvement is ruining your life" does this by talking about the contradictions, destructiveness, and negative consequences of following self-help content on YouTube but does not make any connections to hegemonic or toxic masculinity. Better Ideas talks about the useful aspects of self-improvement and how having goals and seeing

progress is positive, allowing viewers to understand that his video is a critique of self-help content, not self-help itself. Better Ideas states, "[Self-help creators] sell this idea of improving yourself to a point where you don't really have to deal with life's struggles" (2020, 01:51–02:00). He expresses how self-help content only gives viewers ways to improve themselves but never shows them how to deal with failure; it's destructive. Working out, being charismatic, portraying confidence, and having money are aspects that can make a man's performance hegemonic but if they do not fit the racial, sexual, or physical components of hegemonic masculinity they will be unable to obtain some or all the privileges of performing hegemonic masculinity. This "destructiveness" is self-fulfilling due to the contentious nature of masculinity thus showing the complicity of this content. Better Ideas points out the obsessive nature of how this content talks about how to improve oneself but never shows or discusses its application: "The very thing that I was trying to improve was being sabotaged by the fact that I was cerebralizing it, theorizing about it, instead of just getting out there and getting experience" (2020, 04:09–04:18). He encourages viewers to go out and try to apply what they've learned, expressing how it's best to learn from experience, but falls flat because the destructive and toxic aspects of this community stem from patriarchy, not self-help; viewers will confront these issues in their every day regardless of if the videos they watch are explicitly performing masculinity for content. Videos from the creator, Matt D'Avella, show him attempting new habits, routines, and diets, showing his application before, during, and after his attempts, talking about the positives and negatives but never dismissing improvement techniques for others. He shows a healthier performance of masculinity but reaches a much smaller audience due to the content being non-gendered. Still, these videos are complicit in hegemonic masculinity because they do not make the connection between masculinity and failure in self-help. Better Ideas still recommends

similar practices seen in problematic channels falling into a hybrid masculinity (Messner & Messerschmidt, 2018, pp. 48–49). Matt D'Avella only shows his experiences; he does not employ hegemonic masculinity in the videos but is still complicit for not identifying the toxic aspects of self-help channels relating to masculinity. His performance falls into a nonhegemonic, but complicit masculinity (Messner & Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 38). YouTube, under the keyword search "self-help for men," did not recommend videos that explicitly challenged masculinity, only videos that conveyed complicity.

Hegemony Functioning

The self-help community for men has a culture of engaging in practices that uphold the gender order. Through this, it found subthemes of explicit misogyny and motivational videos that displayed global constructions of hegemonic masculinities. Together, these subthemes serve to reinforce hegemony, never challenging or reconceptualizing masculinity, unlike most channels in the self-help community for men.

In cases of explicit misogyny, FreshandFit was the only creator to specifically fall into this subtheme (many others were more passive in their misogyny). Additionally, many videos from the channel FreshandFit were no longer available during the writing portion of this research due to YouTube demonetizing the channel. FreshandFit deleted many of their most explicit videos to regain monetization. This did impact the research process but did not impact the final analysis. Many of the most egregious examples of hegemony functioning on FreshandFit can no longer be found. The videos provided in this section still clearly illustrate the aims of this theme.

FreshandFit's videos are primarily shortened segments from their podcast, where they bring in women from the Miami area and have roundtable discussions with other men. In these videos, FreshandFit will often ask a woman a question and respond with misogyny. In the video

“Why Females Keep FAILING To Understand THIS…” the discussion is about women’s independence from men. When a female guest expresses a desire to be in a relationship where both partners are seen as equal with the same goals, a male guest retorts that all men do not want that in a relationship. He dismisses the point of his guest and continues into an argument based on evolutionary psychology, arguing men have been “conditioned to protect and provide for thousands of years” and further stating, “When a woman is really in love with a man when she really respects him she becomes utterly dependent upon him because she does not want him to leave” (FreshandFit, 2021, 02:12–02:15, 04:02–04:09). By doing this, he does not allow this guest to express her opinion because it goes against his worldview. He argues that a woman who wants to be independent is doing so based on fear, claiming it is unhealthy; she pushes back, saying she does not want to be in a position where she leaves and is left with nothing. If he can force her to concede this, he proves his point; if she rejects this and pushes back, he pivots or dismisses the argument altogether through misogyny. Importantly, both positions give power to the man, strengthening his argument or diminishing her opinion so she seems irrational. She cannot win. Later in the video, the creator brings up divorce rates—dog-whistling incel talking points—stating women divorce men more than men divorce women, neglecting to understand why this is the case. FreshandFit argues that women being in positions where they cannot leave is only a “worst-case scenario,” making it seem like this is uncommon, again dismissing the guest's opinion because it challenges their worldview. FreshandFit believes women should stay in relationships despite hardships, implying the guest's concerns of abuse and mistreatment are not real. They believe in having power over women, isolation, and victim-blaming. They are arguing in favor of a highly patriarchal society where women are left completely powerless. FreshandFit’s audience eats this content up because their content is driven by anger. For viewers

who engage in this toxic worldview the hosts either prove themselves right or the guests prove their irrationality. No matter what the guests say or do, this is the scenario FreshandFit creates and thrives in. It's a feedback loop meant to create a parasocial bond with the audience. Boys and young men are drawn to this content because it is crass and gives answers to the conflicts arising from GRCs. Instead of telling viewers their issues stem from a patriarchal society, they blame women. For boys and young men, many lack the life experience to understand and critically challenge these ideas.

While the self-help community for men often relies on content explaining how to better oneself, there is a portion of this community that attempts to provide motivation. These channels will often use speeches with videos of athletes, actors, and politicians, and use movie clips in the background to provide images of success and status to motivate viewers. Mateusz M's video does this with a voiceover talking about overcoming adversity and using these experiences to motivate oneself. However, when the voice talks about greatness, the background video shows a man being cheered by a large crowd, then Michael Jackson and Steve Jobs, feeding into global performances of masculinity that utilize status and achievement (Hooks, 2004, p. 118). The video shows the most celebrated forms of masculinity to motivate viewers. When the video talks about failure, it shows homeless men and a backpacker, then talks about living your dreams by showing well-dressed men in suits. Again, it shows global constructions of masculinity that are most celebrated in society, reinforcing what success is. Motivational videos rely on masculinities that are safe, even if these performances are almost impossible to achieve.

Conclusion

This study examined self-help content intended for men on YouTube in response to the growing sentiment of a "crisis of masculinity". Thematic content analysis revealed three

themes—explicitly male-gendered self-help, non-gendered self-help, and hegemony functioning—all contributing to HM, with few videos being gender-neutral. These themes show how HM is inherently contentious and that an overwhelming majority of self-help creators are complicit in HM. In these themes, creators relied heavily on avoiding feminity, restrictive emotionality, seeking achievement and status, and dominance to subordinate women and other masculinities. In turn, this made the creators' regional performances of HM about one's social perception, sexual achievements, subordination of others, and portrayals of confidence. Creators heavily relied on global masculinities, misogyny, and evolutionary psychology to justify these performances. Self-help on YouTube currently teaches boys and young men that these performances will guarantee life improvement when the reality is that this advice will only give men differing forms of privilege depending on the geographic context of their performance and characteristics that inform their identities (race, sexuality, and physical appearance). Those who fall outside hegemony will constantly be experiencing GRC and see little to no improvement from the advice given by these channels. For these men and all men generally, issues of privilege and power can only be tackled if the root of these issues is confronted: patriarchy. Self-help channels will never confront these issues because they would lose their privileges, audiences, and income streams.

Going forward, more research should be conducted on these communities, focusing on the relationships between a creator and their content, creators and their viewers, and viewers to content through interviews and psychological analysis. Additionally, HM and GRC should be incorporated together with future research, as they provide context that informs why GRCs stem from HM and how this manifests in attempted performances of masculinity.

References

Better Ideas. (2020, August 28). *Why Self Improvement Is Ruining Your Life*. YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEz7oJy37lI&ab_channel=BetterIdeas.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Charisma on Command. (2018, January 22). *How to Effortlessly Defend Yourself in an Argument*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nS9W-wlJHPA&ab_channel=CharismaonCommand.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, *19*(6), 829–859. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639

D'Avella, M. (n.d.). *Matt D'Avella*. YouTube. Retrieved June 12, 2023, from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ24N4O0bP7LGLBDvye7oCA

FarFromAverage. (2018, June 26). *How To Attract Girls Without Saying ANYTHING*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeRRkUQOZ64&ab_channel=FarFromAverage.

FreshandFit. (2021, April 24). *Why Females Keep FAILING To Understand THIS*.... YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ylgnh3xJ3cQ&ab_channel=FreshandFit.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine Publishing Co.

Hamza Ahmed. (2022, November 23). *6 Bad Habits Keeping Men Weak*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mP78d2JeY1o&ab_channel=HamzaAhmed.

Hooks, Bell. (2004). *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. Washington Square Press.

How to Beast. (2023, April 24). *Women's life starts at 18. A man's starts at 30.* YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Os6fMnK0JY&ab_channel=HowtoBeast.

Kuypers, J. A. (2010). Chapter 12 Framing Analysis from a Rhetorical Perspective. In *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives* (pp. 286–311). Routledge. www.researchgate.net/publication/318925961_Framing_Analysis_from_a_Rhetorical_Perspective

Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, *9*(3). https://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/335/553.

Mateusz M. (2013, July 2). *Dream - Motivational Video*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-jwWYX7Jlo&ab_channel=MateuszM.

Messerschmidt, J. W., & Messner, M. A. (2020). 2. Hegemonic, Nonhegemonic, and "New" Masculinities. *New York University Press EBooks*, 35–56. https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479866342.003.0006

O'Neil, J. M. (2008). Summarizing 25 Years of Research on Men's Gender Role Conflict Using the Gender Role Conflict Scale. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *36*(3), 358–445. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000008317057

Parks, G., Russo, D., & Simon, J. (2022). New Media Masculinities: How YouTube Influencers Incubate Masculine Ideologies and Mentor Males through Gender Role Conflict/Stress. In *Rhetoric of masculinity: male body image, media, and gender role stress/conflict* (pp. 287–305). Lexington Books.

Pérez-Torres, V., Pastor-Ruiz, Y., & Abarrou-Ben-Boubaker, S. (2018). YouTuber videos and the construction of adolescent identity. *Comunicar*, *26*(55), 61–70. https://doi.org/10.3916/c55-2018-06