

Join the Brotherhood!: How “Alpha Male” Podcasts are Targeting Men

Emma Marsales
University of British Columbia

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Abstract

A recent upsurge of all-male hosted podcasts in North America has brought to the foreground an extreme type of content that focuses mainly on spreading misogynistic rhetoric based on contrived constructions of the gender binary. This paper explores the language used in the trending genre of podcasting, dubbed “alpha male” podcasts, to demonstrate how a “hegemonic masculinity” is constructed in (heterosexual) adolescent boys and young men, taking explicit advantage of a lack of positive male culture. Two trending “alpha male” podcasts— *Good Bro Bad Bro* and *Fresh and Fit Podcast*— reveal a campaign of sexist and bigoted content aimed towards teenage boys who are struggling to contextualize the world and their role in it. In utilizing “hegemonic masculinity,” these podcasts emphasize a practice that legitimizes men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the “common” male population and women. In revealing these hegemonic practices, this paper aims to emphasize the alarming ferocity with which this content is targeted at young men with low confidence, and highlight the need for more online resources for men.

Introduction

In the continued rise of social media content, there has been an upsurge in all-male hosted podcasts in North America, whose content focuses mainly on spreading misogynistic rhetoric based on contrived constructions of the gender binary. Dozens of male-dominated lifestyle and self-help podcasts have emerged in the past few years, parroting toxic and misogynistic beliefs. This rhetoric includes positing men as the dominant gender, as well as passing derogatory remarks about women's appearances, actions, and relationships. These men have carved out a misogynistic niche for themselves within podcasting and are currently being referred to on social media as “alpha male podcast hosts” (Brennan). For the most part, they attract backlash from the larger audience and only receive listeners from the “alpha male” subculture. However, the audience they are targeting is primarily made up of adolescent boys and young men— age groups that are in the process of forming their social identities. Podcast producers target younger age ranges so that they may guide them to the path of achieving true “alpha-male status” by teaching them to be the “natural leaders of the world” (Avetisyan). In this paper, I will explore the language used in this trending genre of the “alpha male” podcast to demonstrate how a “hegemonic masculinity” is constructed in (heterosexual) adolescent boys and young men. I will

argue that “alpha male” hosts are taking explicit advantage of a lack of positive male culture to create their own definition of what ‘manhood’ is to sell to young men and boys.

Two “alpha male” podcasts will be examined in this paper: *Good Bro Bad Bro* and *Fresh and Fit Podcast*. These podcasts are currently the most popular on the internet, “trending” on multiple social media platforms, with many people jumping in to criticize or defend the hosts’ ideologies. Within these podcasts, I will focus on how the hosts talk about men and critique certain forms of masculinity. This will involve examining the language used by the hosts and how they purposefully exclude certain men from the status of “alpha male,” inflicting hate and shame in order to influence them to change their behaviour to mirror that of the “alphas”. In the second part of the paper I will discuss these podcasts alongside academic publications on misogynist rhetoric in online spaces to further exemplify the negative space created by these podcast hosts, and the effects they have on young men. This paper concludes with suggestions of creating a defense against the derogatory “alpha male” mindset, and a positive outlook on the future.

Notes on Jargon and Definitions

The hosts of the chosen podcasts refer to gender as a strict binary of men and women. The scope of my research focuses primarily on the way the hosts speak to and about men, however, I am keen for future research to be undertaken on the numerous other problematic and derogatory views presented in these podcasts.

There is specific jargon used amongst “alpha male” communities that I use in this paper. For clarity, this jargon will be briefly defined here:

“*Alpha*” and “*Beta*” are pseudoscientific terms for men derived from the designation for alpha and beta animals in ethology—alpha being top of the hierarchy, with beta falling below. Another commonly used phrase, “*high/low-value male/female*” refers to a mindset that asserts that men and women can have high or low societal worth. Finally, “*simp*” is slang for a person (typically a man) who is called out for being desperate for the attention and affection of someone else (typically a woman).

The individual episodes of each podcast were chosen because they were the most outstanding examples of malicious language towards men.

Good Bro Bad Bro Podcast - Hosted by Jack Denmo

The following short paragraph is pasted in the description box of every single episode of *Good Bro Bad Bro*:

A podcast about dating and self improvement for men. We help young men improve their dating/game, business and social life. Improving your confidence. Improving your lifestyle. Building status and creating social circles. Getting higher quality girls. Getting multiple girls. Becoming high value. Starting a business. A no-BS approach to being a man in your 20s. Are you a good bro or a bad bro? Welcome to the brotherhood.

(Denmo)

Immediately we know the target audience: men in their 20s. With the guarantee of “no bullshit,” this podcast promises self-improvement in every facet of a man's life. For young men and boys with low confidence and low self-esteem, the promise of becoming a “high value man” becomes irresistible. The question, “[a]re you a good bro or a bad bro?” directly implies that not following the logic laid out by this podcast makes one a “bad bro,” a bad friend, or just overall a bad, weak, and unaccomplished man — a direct insult to the listener’s masculinity. Furthermore, “[w]elcome to the brotherhood” brings together the idea that men can feel like part of a group here— they can find comradery, solidarity, and support.

These phrases and buzzwords are used to draw an audience in, as they are specific to online forums primarily used by men. Using language that is common in all misogynist platforms connects men together in a digital world of manhood, a so-called “manosphere”, allowing young men to find even more of this content when they use these buzzwords. If someone is curious as to what a “high value man” is, a Google search yields forums and articles listing off “21 Traits of a High Value Man”, or “How to Become a High Value Man in 2022”. It also pulls up recommended YouTube videos linking to YouTubers and Podcasters who follow the “alpha male” mindset.

The Rise of Lonely Single Men - Good Bro Bad Bro

In an episode titled *The Rise of Lonely Single Men*, Jack Denmo explains why “lonely men” have terrible luck on dating apps and are bad at meeting women. This episode targets men who have trouble speaking to women in social settings by highlighting how *sad* it is that these men have to turn to the internet and dating apps to find social connections. Denmo first states that men who swipe right more on dating apps are “simsps,” trying to get “girls out of their league” and embarrassing themselves (Denmo, 8:40). One can imagine how listeners who actively use dating apps may identify with this description, and thus, feel awful and embarrassed about themselves. Most likely they would want to keep listening to learn how to “fix themselves” and become a “high quality man.”

Denmo speaks down to “lonely” men who find communities online to engage with and to share their passions and interests. He calls this “artificial stimulation,” stating that only low status men with no self-confidence disengage from society and retreat into “computerworld” where they are assumed to just play video games and spend time online (Denmo, 13:00). This is an interesting point, as the community Jack is creating with his podcast is also an online community where men can interact and engage with himself and other men. Furthermore, he refers to men who use the Internet as lazy and as being skill deficient. He says, “Most guys can’t even call a dentist to book an appointment because it’s too much work for them. They become absolute suckers” (Denmo, 15:00).

By the end of the episode, Denmo somberly concludes: “It makes sense why so many men are single and lonely, and it’s really depressing” (Denmo, 17:05). His tone throughout the entire episode has been somber and matter-of-fact, making this topic feel like a very serious issue, and establishing himself as an “authority” on this issue. Leaving his listeners on this sad note, feeling hopeless that they are doomed to be lonely forever, Denmo closes the last few

seconds of the episode by bringing them some hope: “If you would like to learn how to completely transform your social skills make sure you check out more episodes of this podcast. And make sure to share this podcast because the more guys see this means less guys are lonely and single” (Denmo, 17:20). Denmo has given these lonely men a solution! Listening to all his other episodes will fix them, and sharing the podcast with their friends will help even more people. This leaves men feeling supported, so of course they will come back for more.

You Are A 3/10, Stop Lying To Yourself About Your Looks - Good Bro Bad Bro

In this second episode, Denmo focuses on men whose physical looks or attractiveness are thought to be only a 3 out of 10 (Denmo). To begin, the audience is very bluntly told that they are not attractive, and what’s worse, they are not self-aware enough to realize it. What follows is Denmo positioning himself as being the generous soul who is here to open mens eyes, make them aware of their faults, and give them tips on how to “improve themselves as a product or source of value” (Denmo, 02:30). He speaks about how men of certain races will have a harder time on dating apps because they are statistically less attractive than white men (Denmo, 3:50). This brings up racial dynamics that place white men at the top of the hierarchy when it comes to attractiveness, and posits that socially perceived physical attractiveness is unequally distributed across racial and ethnic groups. This point is justified as a statistical fact, therefore presenting Denmo’s opinion as an ultimate truth provided by scientific findings (Denmo, 4:35). Race is an uncontrollable aspect of these men's lives, and encouraging race to be an insecurity for non-white men increases their sense of need for advice from people like Denmo.

This episode constructs the “ideal man” as someone who goes to the gym two hours a day, has a perfectly clean diet, is never on their phone, and is never playing video games (Denmo, 6:35). Denmo mocks men for buying cheaper, more affordable clothing, while also telling them that they cannot get away with expensive clothing because they do not have the aura of being successful or skilled (Denmo, 7:25). The entire episode bluntly berates men for their appearance while also reassuring them that it can be fixed if they listen to Denmo. He breaks them down, and then promises to help build them back up, even better than they were before.

Fresh and Fit Podcast - Hosted by Walter Weekes and Myron Gaines

In comparison to *Good Bro, Bad Bro*, this podcast takes a much more aggressive tone when telling men how to be successful “alphas”. In a short description, Weekes and Gaines describe their podcast as being a resource for providing the “truth” in fitness and dating with an “experienced and evidence-based approach”. They close the description by promising to teach “NO BS tactics that the fitness industry REFUSES to tell you” (Weekes and Gaines). With this tone and choice of words, Weekes and Gaines are presenting themselves as having the true secrets to success; they are making themselves desirable. Most of Weekes and Gaines’ content focuses on dating advice, which primarily involves dominating and disrespecting women, which will be highlighted in the following section.

STOP Giving Girls FREE ATTENTION - Rest In POWER - Fresh and Fit Podcast

In this episode, Gaines and guest Alan Roger Currie speak about how men should not give women “free attention”. They argue that if a man is spending a lot of time with a woman but is not having sex with her, he is wasting his time, money, and resources (Gaines & Currie, 45.23). Gaines and Currie describe this type of man as a “simp”, asking why a proper man would choose to spend time with a girl if they are not going to get something (usually sex) in return. They are teaching men that sex and relationships are transactional, and that sex is always the main goal of any relationship with women. Much of the content of this podcast focuses on putting men down for certain actions, while stating how obvious it is that these men are “betas” or “losers”.

Short Clips - Fresh and Fit Podcast

Fresh and Fit Podcast also has a TikTok account, and in a short clip posted on the app, Weekes and Gaines state that men who let their girlfriends go out to parties or clubs, and use Instagram are “beta” males who have no control in their relationships. In addition to calling men “simps,” Weekes and Gaines also use “beta” to emasculate their listeners, pressuring them to re-evaluate and change their behaviour to be “alphas”. They mock men who do not fit what they say is the golden standard, and continuously call them stupid. Another TikTok clip features Gains telling the audience that they must never let a woman pay for a date. If a man pays for a date it shows that he is dominant, assertive, and decisive; a true leader of men. If a man listens to this podcast and has let his female partner pay for a date, he would then start feeling like he is inadequate as a man (Gains, 00:00-00:29).

Discussion

Online male-dominated communities centered around issues like relationships, physical attractiveness, or status tend to attract men who feel disenfranchised and crave a sense of power. The podcasts analyzed here claim to feature self-help or self-improvement techniques specifically for men, drawing in young men with low confidence who are looking for a role model. “Alpha male podcasts” are utilizing “hegemonic masculinity,” that is, they emphasize a practice that legitimizes men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the “common” male population and women. In the hierarchy of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is at the top (Pascoe, 7). This opposes “subordinated masculinity” which refers to men who do not fit into the construction of hegemonic masculinity and are therefore treated as lower on the gender hierarchy. These would be the “beta” males that the hosts speak about; the man every young boy needs to avoid being.

An adherence to hegemonic masculinity in these podcasts creates an expectation of certain behaviors in men, such as workplace success and sexual dominance. Additionally, perceived threats to a man's hegemonic masculine identity can result in negative responses and behavior, including threats of violence, aggression, sexism and subordination of other identities. As a result of threatening or stressful events, men engage in negative behaviors, such as using degrading language towards women and other men as a way to reaffirm their masculinity (Bennett, 1). Online spaces enable “beta” males to weaponize misogyny in a bid to increase and

maintain their social, cultural, or economic capital (Ging & Siapera, 517). In other words, beta males are encouraged to use this misogynist rhetoric and behaviour to become “alphas.” The violent language and insults used towards women, effeminate men, or other “object identities” such as “beta” males, is often used to construct their hegemonic masculinity; putting down others they see as weak makes them feel more dominant, hegemonic, or “alpha.”

The attitude of men towards other men in these “alpha male” podcasts highlights a lack of positive male culture. Jack Denmo, Walter Weekes, and Myron Gaines each use insulting language when referring to other men, bullying them into altering their ideas of what proper manhood is. These hosts normalize the use of harassing, insulting, and violent language towards women, other men, and themselves. By employing misogynistic and homophobic language and imagery, these “alpha men” create a space that discourages women, as well as “lower” forms of masculinities from being respected, and keeps “beta” men in line in terms of their proscribed actions and attitudes (Moloney & Love, 7).

This violent language and attitude is then advertised as “self-help” or “self-improvement”, presenting it as something healthy for men to participate in. Looking at some reviews for this podcast, we can see how young men are grateful for having this podcast to turn to for advice. One example is:

Content is incredible and life changing from the perspective of a young male. Plus, seeing all these beta males or mindless females coming straight from tiktok having never actually listened to a full episode, leaving 1-star reviews, compelled me even more to give this show a 5-star rating. Good stuff lads keep it up (Anonymous Reviewer).

The felt disenfranchisement of this anonymous viewer led them to view women and “betas” as enemies, and increased his appreciation of the podcast. While young men express gratitude for these podcasts, many women (partners, friends, siblings) seem to worry about their male loved ones who listen to these podcasts. For instance, a BuzzFeed News post highlights a story of loved ones embracing deeply hateful and misogynistic worldviews since listening to “alpha male” influencers. A woman's young brother became infatuated with “alpha male” podcasts, making insinuations about needing to change the way he was because he was a “beta”. He became unhappy with himself after hearing how the hosts of these types of podcasts describe what the “ideal high-value male” looks like (Onibada). Similarly, on dating apps, interviewed women report a notable increase of men regurgitating messaging from these “alpha-male” content creators. Women noted that these men include phrasings in profiles such as: “seeking a feminine woman,” and “I am a high-value man” (Onibada).

Conclusion

“Alpha male” podcasts suggest that heterosexual men can learn the skills to appear or perform hegemonic masculinity. These podcasts teach men values like assertiveness, dominance and self-confidence with the promise that if they follow the advice, they can convince women to sleep with them (Johanssen, 60). With this intense focus on attracting and controlling women, these podcasts also assume, naturalize, and promote heterosexuality as the only acceptable and

valued form of sexuality, which is also a central feature of hegemonic masculinity: they need to be heterosexual before anything else.

Young, impressionable men have access to very little positive male influence, especially online. These outlets are filled with ideas about what the “perfect man” looks like, highlighting ideals that are not only unachievable but also harmful both to the listeners and everyone around them. What these “alpha male” podcast hosts are offering young men is the opportunity to become the perfect, high value man that allegedly every woman wants and that every man is jealous of. They are offering the perfect guide to being the most dominant, logical, masculine pack leader. Follow the steps they lay out and you’ll have swarms of virtuous, young women, untainted by the stains of feminism, ready to follow your every command and fall at your feet, as well the utmost respect from every other crypto-obsessed gym-bro (Avetisyan). These podcasts are a troubling response to the current political climate, which tends to grant a platform to alt-right voices that campaign for bigotry under the defense of free speech. In addition, teenage boys who are struggling to contextualize the world and their role in it, are more receptive to this type of sexist content. They might not even immediately realize that what they’re consuming is harmful. All they see are men that look like them, or what they want to look like, in this “brotherhood,” promising to give them advice on how to succeed in life. To create a defense against this derogatory mindset, perhaps an increase in positive male culture is a place to start, especially for young boys.

Thankfully, a large part of the online world is not receptive to this “alpha male” content, and many podcasts and video series have been created in response to this content. These creators aim to show their audiences of all ages that these “alpha male” ideals are toxic and harmful, and currently, these creators have been garnering thousands of viewers and listeners. The future looks hopeful.

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