Tate and the boys

Boys' reflections about Andrew Tate, gender equality, and masculinity

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A note about this translated version of the report

The original version of this report was published in Norwegian in April 2025. The initial plan had only been to publish a Norwegian version of the report. However, it became clear that there is a lot of interest, not only in Norway, in how digital platforms are impacting and shaping boys and men's wellbeing.

Our report was published just a few weeks after the release of the Netflix series *Adolescence*. The show's global popularity and the debate it sparked underscored how deeply this topic resonates across different countries. This reinforced the importance of making our report more accessible. Our findings contribute to a knowledge-based discussion on how boys and men are influenced by digital platforms, and how we can better support them in addressing the challenges they face.

This report has been translated with the help of ChatGPT and then followed up with a minor round of editing by Reform staff.

Reform – Resource Centre for Men is a Norwegian NGO working to ensure that men are engaged in gender equality work—and that gender equality work includes men and the challenges they are facing. Reform provides direct support services for men, gathers and disseminates knowledge about the lives of men and boys, and is an important actor in shaping Norwegian gender equality policy.

Reform's goal is to raise awareness of the challenges and needs of men and boys. Some of the main thematic areas we work with include: involved fatherhood, violence prevention, improved physical and mental health, and more equitable norms around masculinity.

Working with gender equality from the perspective of men's position in society is not about promoting men's interests at the expense of women's, contributing to polarized debates, or framing gender equality as a battle between the sexes. On the contrary, Reform is committed to strengthening gender equality by including a broader range of perspectives and lived experiences.

Reform aims to:

- Support men in difficult life situations

- Improve the living conditions and quality of life for men and boys

- Document and disseminate knowledge about the lives of men and boys

- Influence decision-making processes that affect men, boys, and gender equality

- Collaborate with other organizations to increase awareness of men's experiences in the broader field of gender equality work.

Foreword

Social media, digital platforms, and internet culture are playing an increasingly significant role in how boys understand themselves, their relationships, and their place in society. These digital arenas are not only sources of information and entertainment - they are also important arenas for socialization and identity formation, where ideals of masculinity are shaped and contested.

At the time of writing this report, news has emerged that the current U.S. president, Donald Trump, have become involved in pressuring Romania to lift the travel ban imposed on the Tate brothers, Andrew and Tristan. The ban was implemented following charges against the brothers for human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women. The Tate brothers - especially Andrew - have amassed a massive following on social media by promoting a hypermasculine ideal centered around financial dominance, physical strength, and control over women.

At a time when figures like these dominate public discourse and actively shape how boys view gender, relationships, and power, it becomes even more important to understand how such ideas spread—and how they influence values and attitudes. This report explores how masculinity is constructed on digital platforms, which actors dominate popular discourses around masculinity, and how these dynamics shape boys' understanding of themselves and society around them.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this report - through insight, discussions, and support. Special thanks goes to Reform's Chief Advisor, Ole Nordfjell, for his contributions to the project, including the development of the interview guide and conducting interviews. Most importantly, we extend our sincere gratitude to the boys who shared their experiences and perspectives with us. Their voices help us not only better understand the challenges, but also the opportunities for a more nuanced understanding of masculinity in the digital age we find ourselves in.

Finally, a heartfelt thank-you to the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs for funding this project.

Oslo, April 2025
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Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing attention to the gender equality challenges faced by boys, including through the government-appointed "Men's Gender Equality Commission," which examined issues related to gender equality for boys and men in Norway. Some of the issues raised in the commission's work include boys' high dropout rates from school, suicide statistics, and what appears to be a growing skepticism toward gender equality among young men. Some even claim that masculinity itself is in crisis. At the same time, there has been increasing public debate about how boys are influenced by social media, internet trends, and online influencers such as Andrew Tate. However, few studies have directly asked boys themselves about these issues. What are their thoughts on gender equality? How do they experience expectations around masculinity? And what role does the internet and social media play in shaping how they view the world—and themselves?

In an age where algorithm-driven platforms strongly influence access to information, this report seeks to explore how exposure to polarizing messages, traditional gender roles, and extreme viewpoints impacts boys' understanding of themselves and their place in society. The report is driven by a desire to understand boys' perspectives and reflections, rather than relying on assumptions about what they think or how they are influenced by social media.

Through individual interviews and focus groups, we spoke with a selection of boys aged 16 to 19 to gain insight into their views on gender equality, masculinity, and how the digital world shapes their understanding of these topics. By amplifying the voices of boys themselves, we aim to contribute to deeper knowledge and a more holistic understanding of how they relate to gender equality. This insight can hopefully help ensure that efforts to address boys' challenges are grounded in their actual experiences—not just in our assumptions about them.

Intended Audience

The background for this report was Reform's experience in receiving a growing number of inquiries from teachers, counselors, and other professionals who were seeking more knowledge about how digital phenomena—such as Andrew Tate—are influencing young boys' attitudes and self-understanding. The report is therefore primarily aimed at professionals who work directly with boys, such as those employed in schools, youth clubs, health services for young people, and preventative units within the police.

At the same time, the topic is relevant for a wider range of actors with responsibility and influence over youth policy, knowledge development, and prevention work. We have therefore made an effort to present the report's methodological and theoretical framework in a way that is also useful for those involved in policy development, programmatic work, or research in this field. Our ambition is to provide a strong foundation for both practical and strategic work aimed at boys and young men.

Structure of the Report

The report begins with a brief presentation of the project's background and objectives, followed by a description of the methodological approach, ethical considerations, and recruitment process. It then outlines how individual interviews and focus groups were conducted, as well as how the data from these interviews was analyzed.

Next, we provide a literature review that forms the foundation for our analysis of the interviews. This section includes theoretical perspectives and research on masculinity, gender equality, algorithm-driven media, the "manosphere," Andrew Tate, and issues related to boys' mental health and body image.

The report then moves into the core analysis of the interview material, where participants' reflections and experiences take center stage. The analysis is structured around six main themes: gender equality, algorithms, Andrew Tate, masculinity, mental health, and body image.

Finally, the report concludes with a summary of key findings, followed by recommendations based on those findings.

Methodological Framework: Centering boys' own experiences

To better understand what Norwegian boys think about topics such as masculinity, social media, and gender roles, careful consideration was given to the research design, data collection methods, and tools for analysis. In the following, we describe these choices, along with the ethical considerations that guided the project.

Ethical Considerations

Since the project involved young participants and the collection of personal data, research ethics were a top priority. Several measures were taken to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and this was clearly communicated to all potential participants. Before the interviews, each participant received a consent form outlining the project's purpose, the interview process, and how their data would be handled. This information was also repeated verbally at the start of the interviews. All participants signed the consent form.

To protect participants' privacy, the signed consent forms and the audio recorder used to capture the interviews were stored in a locked cabinet at Reform's offices. No audio files were uploaded to cloud-based storage systems. All recordings will be deleted upon the conclusion of the project (March 2025).

All participants were anonymized and assigned fictional names drawn from the list of the most popular boys' names in Norway in 2024. Direct quotes are presented in a way that maintains context while ensuring that no individuals can be identified.

Recruitment of Participants

We partnered with a large upper secondary school located outside a major city. The school was selected because of its diverse student population, which allowed us to engage with boys from varied social and cultural backgrounds. The decision to speak only with boys was based on the fact that they are often underrepresented in conversations about gender equality and gender roles, while being particularly exposed to digital influence in these areas.

We aimed to interview 6–7 boys aged 16–17 and 5–8 boys aged 18–19, including students from both vocational and university preparation programs. Recruitment was carried out in collaboration with the school, and contact teachers helped identify students who met the criteria.

Two focus group interviews were conducted: one with boys from Year 2 of the vocational track, and one with boys from Year 2 of the university preparation track. In addition, we recruited Year 3 students for individual interviews to ensure variation in age and experience. In total, 11 students participated in focus groups and 6 students in individual interviews.

Conducting the interviews

To gain insight into the boys' thoughts and reflections, we used qualitative interviews—a method well-suited for exploring individual experiences and perspectives (Winchester & Rofe, 2016). We chose to combine focus group interviews with individual interviews for several reasons. Focus groups allow researchers to observe how participants discuss, argue, and respond to each other's views (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), while individual interviews offer a safer space for more personal reflections (Dunn, 2016). This approach enabled us to both observe group dynamics and provide space for more open, one-on-one conversations.

We used a semi-structured interview design, which allowed the interviewer to explore a set of predefined topics while leaving room for participants to express diverse thoughts and reflections (Dunn, 2016). The interview guide included questions on digital media, social-media platforms, masculinity, gender equality, Andrew Tate, and other online influencers and trends. The interview guide was developed by staff at Reform.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus groups were conducted in spring 2024 in a classroom at the school and were led by two Reform staff members—one facilitated the discussion and asked questions, while the other observed and took notes. Each focus group lasted between 75 and 90 minutes and was recorded for later analysis.

During the focus groups, we conducted two exercises to encourage open reflection. In the first, participants were given "agree" and "disagree" cards and asked to respond to a series of statements, explaining their reasoning. In the second, they watched two video clips featuring Andrew Tate and discussed them as a group. In the first clip, Tate claimed that no one cares about men and that they had

to act in their own interests because one would help them with their problems. In the second video, he emphasized that man must be in control at home and that a woman is a man's property.

The individual interviews were conducted in fall 2024 by a staff member from Reform and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. As in the focus groups, a semi-structured interview guide was used, and participants viewed three video clips.

The first showed Andrew Tate being interviewed by the journalist Piers Morgan, during which Tate stated that "no one cares about men." The second consisted of two clips in which Tate advocated for traditional gender roles, claiming that men should control women. The third was a popular TikTok trend where people were asked whether they would rather encounter a bear or a man alone in the forest—most responded "bear." These clips were used to spark discussions about social media, masculinity, gender roles, and male role models. Participants were also invited—if they felt comfortable—to show the interviewer their TikTok feeds and describe the content and their reactions to it.

The interviewer took notes during all interviews, and all sessions were recorded to ensure accurate capture of the material when needed.

Thematic Analysis

To structure and make sense of the interview data, we used a thematic analysis. This approach involves identifying, coding, and organizing data into key themes (Clarke & Braun, 2016). We chose this method because it allowed us to detect recurring patterns in the material. The analysis followed a step-by-step process:

1. **Listening and Transcribing** – All interview recordings were reviewed by multiple members of the project team to ensure a thorough understanding. Key findings were transcribed and structured.

2. **Initial Coding Round** – We identified recurring themes and patterns in the boys' statements, including both explicit opinions and underlying attitudes.

3. **Categorization of Themes** – These themes were grouped into categories and entered into a data matrix.

4. **Contextualization with Previous Research** – The identified themes were then examined in relation to theoretical perspectives and existing studies to provide a knowledge-based analysis of the boys' reflections.

These findings form the foundation for the report's conclusions and recommendations.

Literature review: Masculinity in a Digital Age

In a time when digital platforms occupy a significant part of young boys' daily lives, algorithm-driven social media is one of several forces shaping their identities and worldview. Influencers, online trends, and internet phenomena contribute to reinforcing specific ideals of masculinity, while public debates on gender equality and gender roles often feel distant or irrelevant to many boys.

This section aims to shed light on how digitalization affects boys' views on gender equality, masculinity, body image, mental health, and their place in society. To understand how masculinity is constructed, negotiated, and shapes boys' experiences of these topics, it is also necessary to draw on central theories of masculinity.

Masculinity

Masculinity is not a fixed trait but something that is shaped and expressed through social interactions and embodied practices (Messerschmidt, 2016). In gender studies, the concept of "doing gender" is often used to describe how gender is not just something we are, but something we do in everyday life (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This means that masculinity is constructed and embodied through actions, language, clothing styles, and interactions with others. For example, a man may perform masculinity by demonstrating physical strength and avoiding expressions of vulnerability.

Some gender researchers argue that multiple forms of masculinity exist within a hierarchy, where certain ideals dominate while others are marginalized. Central to this argument is the theory of hegemonic masculinity, which shows how specific masculine values and practices become normalized and celebrated, while other forms of masculinity are subordinated (Connell, 1995). This hierarchy is not static but evolves through social and cultural change.

Heteronormativity is central in discussions of masculinity, as it influences which forms of masculinity are seen as legitimate and valued in society. Hegemonic masculinity is often closely tied to heterosexuality, where men are expected to be sexually dominant (Fisher, 2021). This creates a limited understanding of what it means to be a man and can lead to social exclusion or pressure for men who do not fit the ideal to conform. Heteronormativity also contributes to homophobia and the fear of being perceived as "unmanly" (Kimmel, 2012).

Within hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality is portrayed as the norm, while homosexuality and alternative expressions of masculinity are often marginalized or subordinated (Connell, 1995). Kimmel (2012) points out how the fear of being seen as unmanly or gay can lead to certain behaviors where men feel compelled to prove their masculinity through aggression or dominance.

At the same time, recent research on masculinity has highlighted the diversity of masculine expressions. Several studies have introduced concepts such as *hybrid* and *caring masculinities*—forms of masculinity that combine traditional masculine traits with values such as emotional openness and other caring traits (Christensen & Jensen, 2014; Messerschmidt, 2016). This has been particularly significant in a Nordic context, where increased paternal involvement in caregiving has contributed to broadening understandings of what masculinity can entail (Christensen & Jensen, 2014).

These theoretical perspectives help us understand how masculinity is not only a personal identity, but also a socially constructed practice shaped by historical, cultural, and structural factors. Hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, and systems of power create and maintain norms of manhood, even as these norms shift over time. Through social interaction, embodied practices, and ideological systems, ideals of masculinity are negotiated and regulated—showing how gender is both dynamic and context-dependent. Masculinity, therefore, does not exist as a fixed quality, but as a fluid category that is constantly being adapted and challenged—where digitalization plays an increasingly important role.

How Do Young Men Understand Gender Equality Today?

The gender equality challenges faced by boys and men have received increased attention in recent years. This is partly due to their overrepresentation in a number of negative statistics—such as poor academic performance, suicide, substance abuse, criminal behavior, and lower life expectancy (NOU 2024: 8).

At the same time, recent studies show that more young men today appear more skeptical about gender equality. In 2022, CORE—Centre for Research on Gender Equality—conducted a national survey on Norwegians' attitudes toward gender equality. Overall, the majority agreed that gender equality is important and should be advanced. However, some findings drew attention—especially that a large proportion of young men aged 18–25 said that gender equality had either gone far enough (30 percent) or too far (18 percent). In contrast, only 3 percent of women in the same age group felt that gender equality had gone too far, and about 17 percent believed it had gone far enough. The responses from younger men breaks a pattern found in earlier research, which typically has shown that younger

generations—both women and men—were more supportive of gender equality. Although the reasons for this shift are unclear, the researchers behind the CORE study suggest that many young men believe society is already equal, or feel the debate is overly-centered on women and is unconcerned with the issues of boys and men (Teigen et al., 2024).

Algorithms Role in Shaping Opinions

More than half of Norwegian teenagers spend over three hours a day on screens outside of school (Bakken, 2024), and the digital sphere plays an increasingly important role in shaping both how young people spend their time and form opinions (Evans, 2025; Hayes et al., 2024). Algorithms determine much of the content boys are exposed to online, making it essential to examine this to understand their experiences in the digital world.

The content boys encounter in their feeds ranges from influencers promoting stoic masculinity and misogynistic messages to emotion suppression and workout videos (Baker et al., 2024). Research into Norwegian boys' social media feeds found that around 25% of the videos featured violence, substance use, or scantily clad women. In contrast to girls—who are exposed to both male and female influencers—boys mostly see male figures (Retriever, 2023). These dynamics can create gendered algorithmic echo chambers, where boys and girls receive vastly different information and content (Evans, 2025; Haidt, 2024; Mathisen, 2025). This shapes boys' self-understanding, views of others, and how they develop and navigate society.

The Manosphere

For some boys, echo chambers can act as entry points into more extreme digital environments characterized by misogynistic and radical content, often referred to as the **manosphere** (Sugiura, 2021). There is considerable variation among the different movements within the manosphere, ranging from pick-up artists (PUAs) to more extreme groups such as incels. Despite internal differences between these groups, they share a common belief that feminism has led to a structural imbalance that disadvantages men (Perliger et al., 2023; Sugiura, 2021; Whippman, 2024).

The term *manosphere* has become harder to define, as ideas from the movement have increasingly entered mainstream culture (Langeland, 2024). Ideologies that were once considered fringe and extreme have gained greater traction and become more normalized in online discourses (Bates, 2020). One

example is the concept of looksmaxxing—the belief that appearance is the sole determining factor in dating success. Previously, this was primarily a concept found among incels (Hammer & Storbækken, 2022). Today, such ideas have spread more broadly through short-form media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. These concepts appear more moderate and diluted compared to traditional manosphere forums, likely due to stricter content moderation on mainstream platforms. As a result, more extreme ideas from the manosphere are conveyed in subtler ways, contributing to a gradual normalization of phenomena that were previously considered peripheral (Solea & Sugiura, 2023).

Another example of fringe phenomena reaching a wider audience is the trend No Nut November—an internet challenge in which young men are encouraged to abstain from ejaculation throughout November. The trend began in 2010 but only gained broader appeal in 2017. Each year since, the month of November sees a surge of videos related to the challenge on TikTok, some of which garner 2–3 million views, illustrating its scale (Dæhli, 2021; Vollan, 2020).

The motivations and arguments for participating in No Nut November vary among its promoters (Dæhli, 2021). Many videos emphasize the idea that controlling sexual urges is a masculine trait, while others promote the challenge as a way to reduce pornography consumption. Some claim that abstinence gives men more power in relationships by resisting sexual intimacy from partners. Others assert that avoiding masturbation and ejaculation is beneficial for health, prevents mental health issues, and increases testosterone levels. None of these claims are scientifically supported, and in the worst cases, the challenge may negatively affect young people's sexual health by contributing to shame surrounding masturbation and natural bodily exploration (Vollan, 2020).

In the manosphere and similar online communities, sexual experience is often seen as a key marker of masculinity. Discussions frequently revolve around strategies to "become a real man" by achieving sexual success or, conversely, about how men can free themselves from pornography addiction to regain control over their masculinity. This one-sided approach to sex and masculinity can contribute to narrow understandings of male sexuality and limit opportunities for a more nuanced understanding of sexual health and relationships (Hayes et al., 2024).

Andrew Tate

Many have pointed out that certain prominent influencers play a key role in spreading manosphere-related content (Bates et al., 2024; Haslop et al., 2024; Langeland, 2024), and have significant influence

over how young boys understand gender and masculinity. Andrew Tate, a former kickboxer and reality TV personality, is one of the more prominent examples—with a message that both engages and concerns observers.

Tate became one of the most talked-about figures on social media in 2022. Through provocative and controversial content, he quickly gained a large following, primarily among young men. His content, often marked by misogynistic and polarizing statements, received billions of views globally (Bubola & Kwai, 2023). Interest in Tate was also considerable in Norway, where he was one of the most searched-for people in 2022 (Google Analytics).

Tate's most popular videos convey messages such as women being subordinate to men and men being natural leaders due to biology. His videos often frame masculinity as being under siege, suggesting that it's hard to be a man and that men's problems are ignored (Haslop et al., 2024). Such narratives can significantly impact boys and men who feel uncertain about their place in the world, as Tate offers simplified and clear answers to challenges many men face (Haslop et al., 2024).

Some believe it is admirable that he dares to say things others do not. This especially applies to Tate's portrayal of gender equality and feminism as the root cause of men's challenges (Haslop et al., 2024). In practice, however, this can reinforce sexist attitudes among young men. Several studies indicate that such attitudes have become more widespread as Tate's popularity has increased (Wescott et al., 2024). On the other hand, many boys disagree with much of what Andrew Tate says. They feel he often exaggerates to gain attention, and many engage with his content as a form of humorous entertainment (Wescott et al., 2024).

Body Image and Mental Health

Seeking help, showing vulnerability, and relinquishing control often contradict traditional ideas of masculinity (Blom, 2022; Murrell, 2021). For many men, there is a real conflict between societal expectations of masculinity and the act of speaking about one's emotions or asking for help (Blom, 2022; Murrell, 2021). This is reflected in various indicators for mental health and well-being in the Norwegian population. Men fare worse than women on several measures related to mental illness and help-seeking. Three out of four suicides are committed by men (Stene-Larsen et al., 2024), and they are less likely to seek help for mental or physical health issues (Kantar & Reform – Resource Centre for Men, 2021). Moreover, men struggling with poor mental health are more likely than women to adopt alternative

coping strategies such as substance abuse, excessive exercise, binge eating, or social withdrawal through gaming and online forums (Haidt, 2024; Whippman, 2024).

Excessive exercise has recently been highlighted as a frequently used coping strategy among young men. This may be due to increased pressure from social media for body image, where boys are exposed to exaggerated and unrealistic ideals that are difficult to live up to, and to which adolescents are particularly vulnerable (Glass, 2024). A feedback loop often develops, where body ideals and pressure affect both self-esteem and mental health (Bjørnebekk, 2015; Engelsrud, 2006; Eriksen et al., 2017), while exercise becomes a coping mechanism for dealing with mental distress.

Furthermore, the body represents more than appearance for many boys—it symbolizes success, control, and masculinity (Larsson, 2001). On social media, unrealistic and unhealthy ideals are frequently promoted, with some claiming that men must be physically superior to women just to be attractive (Roberts et al., 2025). Many young men feel intense pressure to achieve a specific physique (Hayes et al., 2024; Marks et al., 2020). This can lead to unhealthy workout habits, restrictive diets, and in extreme cases, eating disorders and body image disturbances (Eriksen et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis: the boys' experiences

In the interviews, six main themes emerged: equality, social media, Andrew Tate, masculinity, mental health, and body image. These themes reflect key aspects of the boys' experiences and reflections and provide insight into how they navigate a reality shaped by both traditional and new norms and expectations. They also highlight how social, cultural, and digital factors influence their understanding of themselves and others' place in society. To better understand these experiences, we will examine them in light of the relevant theoretical perspectives discussed earlier in the report.

The boys' thoughts on equality

Several of the boys described equality as important and many believe in, but they had somewhat different definitions of what they believed it entails. Some said that gender equality was mostly about women's rights:

When people talk about equality, they mostly mean that girls should have the same rights as men.
– Noah

Noah primarily associated gender equality with something girls should get more of—equivalent to what men already have. Ludvig also felt that it was mainly women who brought up the topic of equality and that it wasn't something he thought about much in his daily life:

It's important for girls at least, they're the ones who bring it up. I actually respect that, I don't mind it or anything.
– Ludvig

This reflects a view of equality as something primarily driven by and for women. That doesn't necessarily mean one is against gender equality, but rather that it's understood as mainly concerning girls and women's rights. As Ludvig went on to say, this can lead to boys being less engaged:

> *I think it's because boys don't care that much about it, because it rarely applies to them. It's more a women's issue.*
> *– Ludvig*

There were also examples of some boys experiencing equality as a paradox, where the expectation of equality could clash with traditional gender roles. Ludvig gave a specific example, pointing out that even though some women want everything to be equal, it's still expected that men pay on dates:

> *But when they say there should be more equality, then I think that it should also apply to what is often expected for men. Like for example on a date, it's expected that the man pays.*
> *– Ludvig*

This illustrates how some boys were concerned that equality should also challenge traditional expectations of men.

While some of the boys associated equality with strengthening women's position and promoting gender balance, others emphasized equality as the right to equal opportunities regardless of gender, and a fair distribution. This aligns with previous studies showing that younger people—and especially young men—are more likely to focus on the distinction between equal opportunities and equal outcomes when discussing equality (Grødem, 2024). This was also the case for several of the boys we spoke to, as William explained:

> *Equal opportunities to do something. Not necessarily making sure everything is fifty-fifty, but that it's fifty-fifty in the opportunity to do it.*
> *– William*

Or as Jakob put it:

> *I think it's about everyone having the same. That there shouldn't be differences between people, or not big differences. That most people should have equal*

This understanding of equality isn't about creating perfect symmetry between genders but rather about ensuring equal opportunities regardless of gender.

When asked how far we've come in terms of gender equality, some of the boys felt that it had largely been achieved, while others believed there was still work to be done. Although none of the boys in our sample believed that equality had gone too far, Elias had a theory about why some others might feel that way:

I mean, equality can't really go too far, it's supposed to be equal. But those [who think equality has gone too far] are probably influenced or maybe just joking around. Equality isn't too little or too much—it's equal.
– Elias

Elias' theory suggests that those who claim gender equality has gone too far are either influenced by others, such as influencers on social media, or are just being humorous. William offered a different explanation for why some boys might oppose equality:

A lot of people associate equality with lifting women up and putting them above men, which maybe happens in the most extreme cases, but I think it can be a kind of defense mechanism, where men feel like they're losing some control.
– William

This explanation reflects a view of gender equality as a zero-sum game, where progress for one group is seen as a loss for another—in this case, men. Such a view can lead to backlash driven by a sense of lost privileges or opportunities due to equality efforts. Some of the boys believed this could be influenced by social media content portraying men and boys as the losers. As Oliver put it:

> *There are a lot of people on social media saying that men have it worse, but I don't feel discriminated against as a boy.*
> *– Oliver*

Even though he was exposed to content promoting the idea that men and boys are at a disadvantage, he didn't personally relate to the descriptions being presented.

What the boys see: Algorithm-driven content

TikTok, YouTube, and Snapchat dominated many of the boys' digital lives, but it became clear—both through focus groups and individual interviews—that they used these platforms in very different ways. While some spent a lot of time on social media, others had actively chosen to limit their use. One had even deleted almost all of his social media accounts. The content they encountered also varied widely. Their feeds could include everything from comics, humor, fitness, news, and politics, to videos about ideals of masculinity and gender roles.

Algorithm-driven platforms can amplify interests and pre-existing views (Baker et al., 2024), something several of the boys confirmed. Many reported that the content quickly adapted based on their interactions. As Elias explained:

> *I get a lot—like, really a lot—of football. Sometimes I get a bit tired of it, but I guess it's mostly what I like.*
> *– Elias*

Jakob reflected on how he could influence what he saw through active choices:

> *I get a lot of stuff I like. If I get something I don't like, I just press 'not interested'.*
> *– Jakob*

The boys also reflected on the adaptability of the algorithms and how they often felt that the content was "following them" based on conversations and searches. At the same time, several noted that their feed did not only contain content that reflected their interests:

> *It's kind of my personality, but there's a lot there that's not really my personality too.*
> *– Focus Group 2*

One of the boys said he liked watching boxing, but that this interest gradually led to him seeing videos of real street fights. Here, the algorithms likely interpreted his interest in boxing as a general interest in violence:

> *I get a lot about boxing and sports, and that's stuff I'm interested in. But then I also get a lot of street fights, and that's not me.*
> *– Focus Group 2*

The amplification effect of algorithms can gradually expose users to more extreme content based on their interests (Baker et al., 2024; Hayes et al., 2024), as seen in the example above. Additionally, extreme and sensational content tends to gain more attention because algorithm-driven platforms prioritize what sparks strong reactions and engagement (Hayes et al., 2024).

Andrew Tate in the boys' feeds

Algorithms reward engaging content, and provocative statements often spread more widely on social media. A clear example of this is the content produced by Andrew Tate. At the time of the interviews, Tate was receiving significant media attention due to new allegations of various crimes. This media exposure may have made more boys aware of his content, while algorithms may have reinforced the exposure by showing him in their feeds.

Although the boys we spoke with were not necessarily aware of all the details of Tate's legal situation, it may still have influenced their impressions and reflections on his message. On the other hand, Tate had by then been banned from several social media platforms, which may have reduced the amount of exposure. Many of the boys had known about Tate for several years. They mentioned that they first came across him when videos randomly popped up in their feeds, not because they actively searched for him:

> *I got loads of Tate videos in my feed, even though I didn't follow him.*
> *– Focus Group 2*

This exemplifies how algorithm-driven platforms can help extreme views gain a foothold that they might not otherwise have had (Haslop et al., 2024). When asked what they thought about Tate, several boys said he represented ideals of self-discipline, success, and financial independence. For some, Tate was inspirational in how he promoted ideas about taking responsibility for one's own life to achieve success and happiness. For others, this part of his message didn't resonate. In particular, we saw clear disagreement about his claim that "nobody cares about boys." While some disagreed, others were more open to that part of his message. William was one of the boys who had previously followed Tate's content. He explained his success like this:

> *He's good at speaking. And the way he talks reaches boys and men struggling with mental health. [...] He uses the right words to explain it.*
> *– William*

William also explained that when he followed Tate, he was only exposed to a particular type of video. These emphasized specific parts of Tate's message, such as self-respect, independence, and respect for women:

> *He showed how to respect women, how you should work independently and make something of your life—a lot of good stuff. I didn't see the other side of him. [...] I only saw videos that showed the good side of him, and then people who didn't like him probably only got the bad ones.*
> *– William*

As William describes, there was a clear split in what people saw in their feeds—some mostly got positive videos about Tate, while others were exposed to content promoting misogyny and sexism. This type of content is often highlighted as one of the most polarizing aspects of Tate's message and has led many young men to reject his hyper-traditional views on gender roles. This was also the case among the boys, where his most extreme views on women did not resonate with their values or beliefs:

> *He has some good points about becoming a better man, but he says completely horrible stuff about women.*
> *– Ludvig*

This aligns with previous research showing that young men may adopt certain views from an influencer without necessarily embracing the whole ideology (Haslop et al., 2024; Sugiura, 2021). Ludvig also had a theory about why Tate appealed to some boys:

> *He has crazy opinions. He wants to show that men are 'superior'. A lot of people like watching that, I think—a lot like hearing it.*
> *– Ludvig*

Despite widespread societal concern about Tate's influence, the interviews also show that his popularity had decreased significantly since 2022. In one focus group, participants noted that he used to be more visible on social media, but after several controversies and legal issues, he no longer had the same reach:

> *People don't share Tates' videos as much anymore. He was big in 2022, but now it's more humor than serious.*
> *– Focus Group 1*

Even though fewer boys actively follow Tate today, that doesn't necessarily mean that the values he promoted have disappeared. Controversial figures often have short lifespans in digital spaces, but their messages can live on in various forms (Langeland, 2024). Several of the boys mentioned that ideas about financial success, physical strength, and discipline were still inspiring, even if they no longer associated them directly with Tate:

> *I don't see much of him anymore, but I still get videos about how men should be tough and successful.*
> *– Oliver*

Even though Andrew Tate has lost some of his visibility in the public and on social media, his ideas live on through digital networks and other influencers who continue to promote and normalize his message (Bujalka et al., 2022). This also illustrates that Tate is part of a larger digital ecosystem that spreads and normalizes ideas that can be harmful to boys and men.

Masculinity in a Changing Society

The boys we interviewed were asked to describe what kind of ideal of masculinity they saw presented on their social media. As we've seen, several associated masculinity on social media with physical strength, discipline, and financial success. This perspective also became apparent in their descriptions of what makes a man attractive or respected:

You need muscles and be able to take responsibility—that's how you get respect.
— Focus Group 2

Not all the boys agreed about this idea of what a man should be. In the focus groups, some were active and engaged in the discussion, while others remained more passive and participated less. This may indicate that not all of them saw these ideals as relevant or necessary to their own identities. For those who did see muscles and responsibility as important markers of manhood, these ideals were often not shaped by friends or family, but by the content they encountered on digital platforms. Social media played a key role in reinforcing and spreading these ideas, prompting some to actively strive to live up to them:

You kind of end up with higher standards maybe. And you can look up to that and work toward it. But you have to be critical.
— Elias

Jakob was one of the interviewees who confirmed that social media glamorized a mindset in which highly disciplined men—who don't need close relationships—are seen as the formula for success:

> *I get videos about how real men don't need anyone, you should just focus on money and working out.*
> *— Jakob*

This is in line with an existing pattern where digital media reinforces an individualistic and hypermasculine approach to manhood (Haslop et al., 2024). Building on this, we also see digital trends linking the ideal of the independent and disciplined man to specific ideas about sexuality. One such trend is No Nut November, which is based on the idea of an emotionally detached man and a rigid understanding of masculinity. We asked the boys whether they were familiar with the trend, and whether they had participated. Some described the challenge as a humorous gimmick that people joined in on for fun. As Jakob put it:

> *It's mostly just a joke, but most people try it. It could be good if you're addicted to porn.*
> *— Jakob*

Some of the boys emphasized that they didn't take the information around the challenge seriously. Still, it was clear that some of the messages in the videos—especially those that shame boys' sexuality—had some impact:

> *I think it's a good thing [No Nut November]. Masturbation isn't good. That kind of pressure to not do it is positive.*
> *— Focus Group 2*

This statement wasn't met with much resistance from the rest of the group. It may indicate that even if the challenge is mostly seen as humorous, some may internalize harmful beliefs about their sexuality and bodies. These types of phenomena can be contradictory: on one hand, they promote self-discipline and unity, but on the other, they can contribute to shame and unrealistic expectations for men (Haidt, 2024; Whippman, 2024).

When boys encounter these ideals and online trends daily, it can create the impression that there is only one correct way to be a man. While some of the boys felt pressure to conform, their experiences of

masculinity weren't one-dimensional. Some described how they felt caught between different expectations. They felt there were both high expectations to be strong and successful, and also at the same time to be open about their emotions:

It's hard to know what people really expect from us. Are we supposed to be strong or talk about our feelings?
– Focus Group 1

This reflects research showing that young men often feel pulled between conflicting demands of masculinity, which can lead to stress or insecurity (Fisher, 2021; Whippman, 2024). At the same time, some of the boys experienced that social media not only reinforced hypermasculine ideals but also contributed to a polarized portrayal of men in general. Noah reflected on how he encountered extreme messages from both sides:

There's this narrative that all men are evil—you've probably heard 'kill all men' and that kind of thing. It's like Andrew Tate, just on the opposite side.
– Noah

Noah's experience mirrors a broader trend where digital platforms amplify polarizing messages, where both content glorifying the hypermasculine, disciplined, independent man, and on the other end, content that harshly criticizes men in general garner many views. For some boys, this polarization creates a dilemma—they feel pressure to live up to traditional masculinity ideals but also don't want to be associated with this negative portrayal of men.

This balancing act between conflicting ideals was something many boys described. They expressed that they had internalized a double standard: on one hand, they are encouraged to be open about their feelings, but on the other, they risk being seen as weak if they show too much vulnerability. This shaped their social interactions and led them to adapt depending on the context. Elias, for example, said he could be open with his girlfriend, but held back in his friend group:

I don't talk about feelings with my guy friends, but maybe I do with my girlfriend.
– Elias

This shows how Elias relationship to masculinity changed depending on the setting—feeling more comfortable expressing his emotions in intimate relationships. It suggests that traditional masculinity norms still have a strong hold in some environments, while emotional openness is increasingly accepted in others. This also matches research showing that boys often internalize norms of emotional control and independence but still seek emotional support in close relationships (Ferrara & Vergara, 2024; Movember, 2019).

Given these conflicting expectations, the boys' choices of role models are especially interesting. When asked who they looked up to, the boys often mentioned close relationships like fathers and brothers, but also athletes who embodied certain ideals of masculinity. For Oliver, it was his brother who stood out as a role model:

The only one I can think of is my brother […] He's older, has a lot of experience, and is confident.
– Oliver

When it came to the qualities that mattered in a role model, some boys pointed to athletic achievement. Their role model's skills inspired them, as Jakob described his older brother, whom he admired for being good at football:

Being with him, being able to do the same things as him, becoming just as good at things as him.
– Jakob

Some of the boys also emphasized that a role model should be someone who respects others. William put it like this:

Respect is important. And not getting in other people's way, being able to do your thing without ruining it for others. And actually being able to enjoy life while everything else is going on.
– William

For William, it was important that a role model knew how to enjoy life in the moment, without hurting others. Noah focused more on the idea that a role model should fundamentally be a good person, and someone you had a personal connection with:

> *A male role model for most people should just be a good person, someone who's managed to accomplish something in life, and someone you have a personal connection with—someone who's maybe open about their feelings.*
> *— Noah*

Here too, the idea emerged that a role model should be open about their emotions and inspire others to be just as open. This was echoed by several of the boys, and Oliver put it this way:

> *That you respect everyone, that you don't have to be a masculine type—you can be more sensitive as a man. [...] You have to be able to show feelings too, otherwise you become a cold person.*
> *— Oliver*

Oliver expressed a more modern view of masculinity, where emotional openness and relational skills played an important role. Several confirmed Oliver's view, which reflects an ongoing shift in which emotional expressiveness is increasingly recognized as a vital part of being a man (NOU 2024: 8). This aligns with broader societal trends where men are increasingly encouraged to show vulnerability and empathy (Reeves, 2022).

Fitness, Belonging, and Pressure Around Body Image

One trend we asked the boys about was *Looksmaxxing*—a phenomenon where people try to maximize their appearance through specific workout routines, strict diets, or even surgical procedures (Hammer & Storbækken, 2022; Perliger et al., 2023). This phenomenon used to be confined to the more fringe parts of the manosphere but has in recent years become part of the broader digital landscape for many boys and young men. The boys we spoke with were well acquainted with the trend. Some described it primarily as a humorous fad. Still, several acknowledged that there has been an increased focus on body and appearance among young men. This aligns with broader societal trends showing that young men are

increasingly experiencing pressure to conform to specific body standards and ideals (Wendelborg et al., 2025). Several pointed out that social media amplified this pressure, creating an unrealistic picture of how boys and men are supposed to look. As William put it:

> *Social media has a big impact on expectations for how you're supposed to look. If everyone you see on social media looks good, has muscles, money, and nice clothes, then you get a false impression of how you're supposed to look and be.*
> *– William*

Some believed this focus on appearance could lead to unhealthy habits or extreme measures to achieve an idealized look. One of the boys reflected on how exposure to this kind of content could lead to the use of steroids or other drastic steps:

> *There are lots of people who watch those kinds of videos, where everyone's super fit, and a lot of them are cheating and using steroids, so that could influence others to use them too—to try and feel more confident.*
> *– Ludvig*

For many young people, social media becomes an arena where beauty standards are not just shaped but reinforced (Baker et al., 2024), and where not fitting into these norms can create insecurity. This pressure around appearance and body image can also influence how boys approach exercise—not only as a way to stay healthy, but as a key part of their identity and social status. As one boy said:

> *Everyone works out now. If you don't, you feel left out.*
> *– Focus Group 2*

This shows how gym culture can create a sense of exclusion for those who don't participate. Some boys also described feeling a certain pressure to work out. Elias explained:

> *I work out because I want to, but sometimes it feels like I have to.*
> *– Elias*

Working out and building muscle can become part of a masculine performance, where boys measure themselves against ideals of being strong and muscular (Glass, 2024). Exercise can be a positive space for self-development, but it can also contribute to unhealthy pressure. Many of the boys reported seeing daily videos and images of men with extremely muscular bodies. This can lead to the perception that this is the only acceptable way to look. Oliver described it like this:

> *I'm always seeing people who are insanely strong. They have perfect bodies, and it makes me feel like I need to work out more.*
> *– Oliver*

Exposure to such body ideals can lead to feelings of guilt and shame over not training more. In the worst cases, it can contribute to overtraining and excessive control over diet, which may lead to eating disorders and body image issues (Eriksen et al., 2017; Hansen et al., 2024). On the other hand, exercise can also improve mental health, reduce anxiety and depression, and provide a sense of control and accomplishment (Glass, 2024)—an aspect the boys were also aware of:

> *If I'm feeling bad, I go to the gym. It helps.*
> *– Focus Group 1*

As we can see, some of the boys had ambivalent attitudes toward fitness and body image. They wanted to work out and build strong bodies, but at the same time several acknowledged that this could result in unhealthy pressure. This reflects a broader discussion where norms of masculinity can both offer opportunities and pose challenges for boys (Barker et al., 2023; NOU 2024: 8).

Recommendations: What Now?

Through this project, we have gained valuable insight into how a group of teenage boys navigate a digital landscape that both shapes and challenges their understanding of masculinity, equality, and mental health. Based on current research and the findings from this project, we have developed a set of recommendations aimed at fostering a more inclusive and nuanced approach to gender equality work policies targeted towards boys. The recommendations are organized by target groups to clarify what is relevant for different stakeholders.

For the general public

A more empathetic approach when working with boys

When it comes to gender equality, our findings show that boys' perspectives are often more nuanced than what is reflected in public. They support gender equality, but some feel that the discussion mainly focuses on women's rights, while men's challenges receive less recognition. Boys often feel that their perspectives are misunderstood or underestimated in debates about gender equality. It is important to acknowledge their experiences and foster a more inclusive conversation by:

- ♂ **Broadening the conversation about gender equality**: Boys need to feel that gender equality is also about them—not just as allies for women's rights, but as individuals whose lives, challenges, and opportunities matter.

- ♂ **Speaking more respectfully about boys:** Polarizing rhetoric only creates more division. We recommend using language that recognizes boys' diverse experiences and challenges.

For professionals working with boys

More focus on boys' mental health

Several of the boys we spoke with expressed that challenges connected to boys' mental health are not taken seriously and that showing vulnerability is still associated with a sense of shame. Social media could be both a source of support and a burden. They asked for concrete tools to manage stress and pressure, as well as more male role models.

Another key finding was how body image and fitness culture shaped the boys' self-perception. Working out was described as a positive coping strategy, but it could also feel like a necessity to fit in. To address these issues, we recommend:

- ♂ **Increased efforts focused on boys' mental health:** There is a need for gender-sensitive health services and greater efforts to normalize conversations about mental health among boys.

- ♂ **Increase awareness about body image pressure:** Adults working with children must be aware that boys' body image is also affected by social media. There is a need for strong professional development on how training and the pursuit of the ideal male body can lead to eating and body image disorders among boys.

- ♂ **Integrate mental health into boys' arenas:** In addition to adapting traditional health services to boys' needs, mental health should be integrated into the settings where boys already are—such as sports, gaming communities, or vocational education.

Understanding Boys' Needs

A key goal of the project has been to understand how social media impacts boys' lives, experiences, and perceptions. Our findings show that algorithms on social media platforms play a major role in shaping what information and role models boys are exposed to. The boys we interviewed were aware of how algorithms shaped their feeds. Despite this awareness, they still seemed to be influenced—especially in terms of how they viewed masculinity and ideals connected to physical appearance.

Instead of starting the conversation about influencers like Andrew Tate with immediate condemnation, we must try to understand why some boys are drawn to him and similar figures. We recommend the following when it comes to better understanding boys' needs:

- ♂ **Shifting focus from "supply" to "demand":** The boys we interviewed didn't necessarily view these influencers as ideological leaders, but rather as people who speak to them about issues they find relevant. The conversation should therefore be about what the boys are seeking out when watching these videos—not just a critique of the content they consume.

- ♂ **Using curiosity instead of confrontation:** Boys often shut down if they feel attacked for their interests. Meeting them with openness and curiosity leads to more constructive conversations.

- ♂ **Offering alternatives:** If boys are drawn to these spaces because they're seeking community, direction, or a sense of achievement, we need to create better alternatives. We recommend establishing safe spaces where boys can meet in person to discuss topics like identity, masculinity, and mental health. These could be in the form of school-run health services, low-threshold offerings at youth clubs, or open forums in sports clubs - such as in Reform's *Coaching Boys* project, where coaches receive tools to talk to boys about masculinity, friendship, and

mental health. We need safe spaces where even the quieter boys feel supported in putting their thoughts and experiences into words.

More research about the impact of influencers

The boys' interviewed had many nuanced and complex reflections when it came to Andrew Tate. Many said they were inspired by his messages about self-discipline, financial independence, and personal responsibility, while also distancing themselves from his misogynistic statements. Even though Tate's popularity has declined, his ideas live on through new influencers and digital trends.

None of the boys we spoke with gave the impression of being supporters of Tate—but we know they are many who support him. To develop effective measures that prevent more boys from being drawn to extreme or harmful ideals of masculinity, we must:

- ♂ **Gain more research-based insight:** We need more knowledge about how influencers and their content affect boys, and what factors make certain boys more susceptible to polarizing or radicalizing content.

- ♂ **Avoid generalization:** Both research and media communication tend to emphasize the extreme and negative when discussing boys' digital media use. It's important to explore the full spectrum of boys' experiences, including curiosity, humor, community, and a desire for growth.

- ♂ **Avoid unnecessary alarmism**: We must stop exaggerating Tate's influence and acknowledge boys' capacity for critical thinking. Overblown fear can increase polarization and cause boys who feel alienated from the debates about gender equality to seek out more extreme spaces.

Expanding the norms of what it means to be a man

Our findings show that boys experience conflicting expectations about what it means to be a man. On one hand, traditional ideals of strength, discipline, and independence are reinforced by social media, while on the other, society increasingly encourages emotional openness and vulnerability. Some of the boys said it was difficult to balance these demands. Today's masculinity norms can feel narrow and exclusive. We should work to expand what it means to be a man by:

- ♂ **Promoting diverse ways of being a man:** Policies and programs targeting boys and men should recognize that there are many ways to be a man. We need efforts that help boys explore different aspects of masculinity—without fear of being ridiculed.

- ♂ **Highlighting positive and caring masculinities**: Governments and public actors can help show that there are multiple ways to be a man—both within and outside traditional gender roles. This includes showing that care and responsibility for others are natural parts of being a man. Broader representation like this can expand boys' understanding of masculinity.
- ♂ **Elevating male role models:** Recruiting and showcasing men in caregiving professions, education, and support services can help provide boys with more nuanced understandings of masculinity.

Conclusion

We find that today's boys are navigating a complex landscape in which traditional and modern ideals of masculinity coexist. Social media plays a key role in how they understand themselves and the world around them, and they experience both positive and negative aspects of this digital reality. To meet boys' needs and challenges in society today, it is crucial to recognize their perspectives, challenge gender stereotypes, and strengthen access to positive role models and mental health support. A more inclusive and nuanced conversation about boys, gender equality, and social media will benefit not only the boys themselves—but society as a whole. We hope this report can contribute to that goal.

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