

SEMINAR TOPIC AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Masculinity in a Time of Change

Crisis, Culture War, and the Search for Constructive Models of Manhood

Seminar Focus

Traditional male roles and privileges can no longer be assumed. This seminar begins by asking what it means to be a man under these changed conditions and whether masculinity is undergoing a genuine crisis or whether the language of crisis distorts a more complex social transformation.

We will then consider competing responses to this uncertainty. Some call for a return to older gender roles or emphasize dominance and hierarchy; others seek to redefine masculinity in more egalitarian terms. The seminar will examine how these responses have become entangled with the culture wars and how uncertainty about manhood can be mobilized as a political force. For a full topic description, see <https://lewesseminar.com/schedule>.

Aim of the Discussion

The goal is neither to defend a single model of manhood nor to dismiss concerns about men's changing social position. Rather, the seminar will assess rival interpretations of masculinity and ask what a healthy model of masculinity might look like in a society..

Instructions

Explore the embedded links and resources posted to the seminar website, and then write a response of at least 200 words. Although there are many sources, most are brief, and none is overly technical or academic. However, you may wish to choose what you want to focus upon. At the end of these instructions are writing prompts, but feel free to respond as you wish. Email your written response to **lewesseminar@gmail.com** no later than **Monday, October 12**. Please read all the posted responses **prior** to the seminar meeting on **Wednesday, October 14, at 3 pm**.

Some Notes about Our Sources

1. We have a variety of sources, including YouTube clips, short videos, and articles. If a source is available online, I've provided a link; otherwise you can find it on the seminar website.
2. Because the topic of masculinity has been caught up in the culture wars, some of the sources inevitably take a somewhat, if not, explicit, partisan view. I've tried to include sources, however, from a variety of perspectives.
3. The source, *The Atlantic*, is behind a paywall, but usually nonsubscribers can access a limited number of articles for free. If you can't, email me at redmondm0@gmail.com, and I will "gift" you links.
4. I have built an interactive website you can use to explore our resources. You will find it here: <https://notebook.google.com/notebook/b4e92da3-5e2a-4544-b878-7c2bfe2c428c>. The website is fairly easy to use, but you'll find some brief instructions on the seminar website. This website is powered by Gemini's frontier AI model.

Guide

You may wish to begin your exploration with a quick look at two Wikipedia articles.

On Masculinity: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masculinity>

On Masculism: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masculism>

Much of the current discussion about masculinity turns on the question whether masculinity is principally biologically determined or socially constructed.

Our first source is a poll by the Pew Research Center on American attitudes on this question.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/10/17/how-americans-see-differences-between-men-and-women/>

In this source, the pundit David French, currently with the *New York Times* and formerly with the *National Review*, argues that masculinity is at least partially biologically determined.

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/05/understanding-the-inescapable-reality-of-masculinity/>

French explains his view more fully in the video *French Remarks on American Masculinity*. This video is excerpted from a panel discussion on masculinity at the Milken Institute in 2019. In the short video, entitled, *Davis Responds to French*, Davis offers a contrasting view.

But perhaps masculinity is not biologically determined, and instead is essentially socially constructed. Sara Rich, writing in the *The Atlantic*, tells us what that might look like *in practice* from someone who is a parent.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/06/imagining-a-better-boyhood/562232/>

Is the discussion about masculinity just an academic discussion or something more? Many people argue that masculinity, especially that of young men, is in crisis today.

Here is a short CBS News video Report:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuytE0pprFM>

For a deeper discussion, Richard Reeves argues in an excerpt from his book, *Of Boys and Men*, that the modern male is struggling and that it matters. You'll find the excerpt here: <https://bigthink.com/the-present/toxic-masculinity-myth/>.

If you prefer to listen to Reeves explain his view, try this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBG1Wgg32Ok&t=3s>

Arguably the discussion of masculinity has become caught up in the culture wars and has been weaponized. Below are two contrasting articles.

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/01/toxic-masculinity-myth-fuels-culture-wars/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/2026/06/conservative-masculinism-misogyny/686939/>

And then this short article, *Two versions of masculinity are on the 2024 ballot*, by Ivna Saric, Axios.com.

<https://www.axios.com/2024/08/24/walz-trump-emhoff-masculinity-fatherhood>

No discussion of masculinity today is complete without a dive into what is called the manosphere. You find the manosphere principally online -- on Youtube, Instagram, Tiktop, podcasts, and in various discussion forums, some quite dark. It includes men's-rights activists, "red pill" communities, incels, pickup artists, Men Going Their Own Way, traditionalist influencers, male self-improvement entrepreneurs, and male-oriented political podcasters.

Many consider the movement broadly as antifeminist or misogynistic. Check out a few of the short clips below to get a sense of why people might think so.

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/IWAeQen2UHE>

https://www.youtube.com/shorts/U6svS4P2_04

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkLeWFZgtP4&list=PLZQgIL6L_K74&index=35

<https://avoiceformen.com/m-g-t-o-w/on-killing-the-alpha-male/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_g7dXpOSr88&list=PLZQgIL6L_K74&index=4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HkZhBNBmjQ&list=PLZQgIL6L_K74&index=23

You will likely remember the 1999 movie *The Matrix*. Morpheus offers Neo a choice between "the blue pill" and "the red pill." The blue pill represents the conventional view of things, which Morpheus says is a comfortable illusion, but the red pill represents the real truth. For Morpheus it takes courage to take the red pill. **Manosphere influencers frequently describe masculinity as a choice between the blue pill and the red pill. These represent two radically different views of masculinity.**

Watch the video "Red Pill vs. Blue Pill" for an overview. You can explore this distinction further at:

<https://notebook.google.com/notebook/b5d40cf2-95d1-4ee3-9517-5c6d884d262f?pli=1>

While some online manosphere influencers insist that the manosphere is not inherently antifeminist or misogynistic, there is little doubt that there are darker aspects to the movement, sometimes called "toxic masculinity."

The 2020 documentary *TFW no GF* chronicles the bleakness of some parts of the manosphere movement. Here is a link to the video trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nefjHr6Btas>

Perhaps the darkest and most concerning aspect is the incel (“involuntary celibate”) movement. It is largely an online subculture of men and young teenagers who define themselves by their inability to obtain desired romantic or sexual relationships, sometimes spilling over into misogyny and violence. This movement was a subtext of the award winning drama series *Adolescence*. Below are its trailer and a Wikipedia article. In the video, pay close attention to the explanation of the 80/20 rule of sexual attraction that occurs at 1:26, and think about the likely impact of such a belief in young men going through puberty.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk5OxqtpBR4>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolescence_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolescence_(TV_series))

Writing Prompts

1. Are strength, courage, ambition, and competitiveness inherently masculine—or are they human qualities principally shaped by culture and circumstance?
2. Must these traits conflict with empathy, equality, care, and emotional openness?
3. Why do some contemporary accounts of masculinity appeal to dominance, hierarchy, and traditional gender roles?
4. How does anxiety about masculinity become politically powerful, particularly within the culture wars and the manosphere?
5. What would a positive vision of masculinity look like, and how can society nurture it?

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