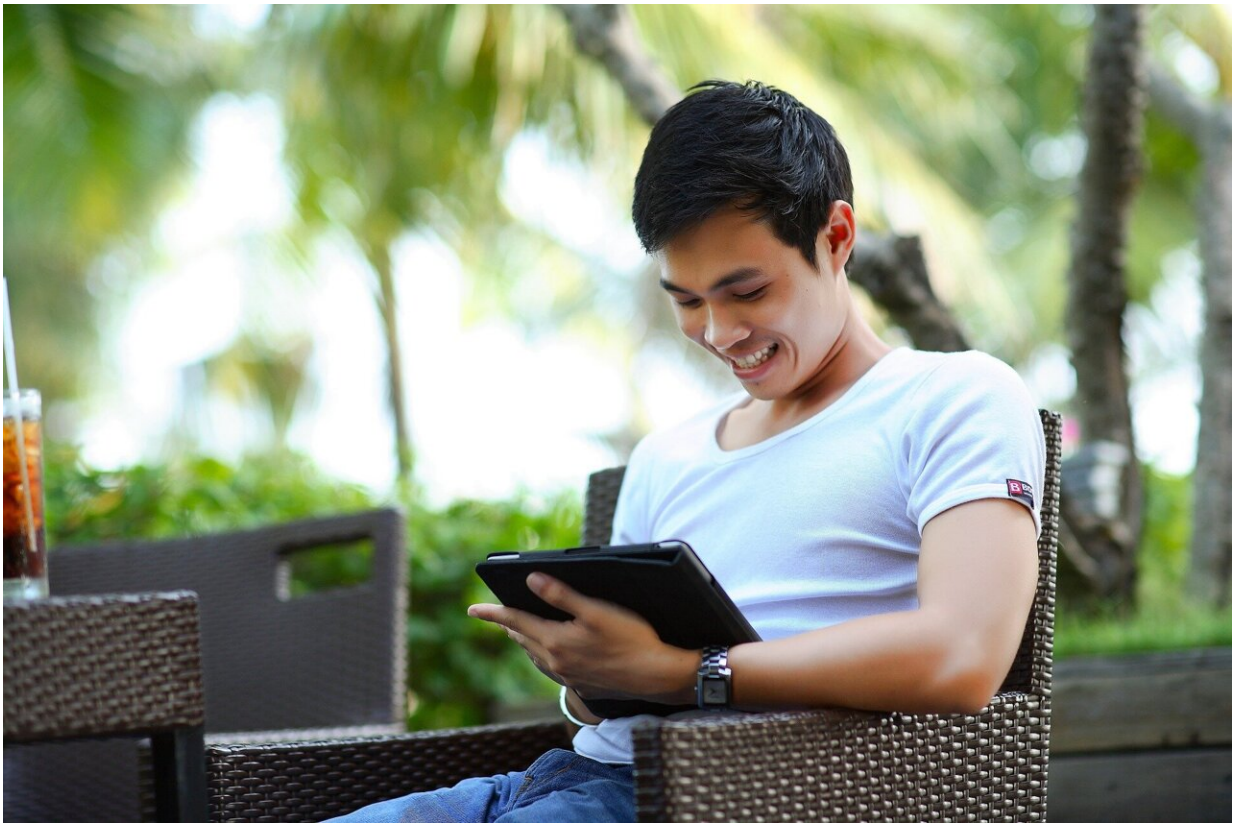


Research explores young men navigating the anxieties and pressures of online spaces

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Deakin University, eSafety and Queensland University of Technology joint research released today has found that young men are both victims and perpetrators of online harm.

The report, "[Being a young man online: Tensions, complexities and possibilities](#)," showed many young men valued the freedom the internet offered to explore, experiment and represent themselves. This included doing so in ways they would not typically do so offline.

While the internet and [social media](#) provided a space for young men to explore their sexuality, make connections and gain a sense of belonging, those surveyed also said it was a place where negativity and abuse were common.

This included sexism, racism, transphobia among other forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Research lead Professor Amanda Keddie of Deakin's Centre for Research for Educational Impact (REDI) said that young men today have gravitated toward self-improvement and empowerment content online.

They also feel anxiety and pressure to be seen as the best version of themselves and seek out role models for guidance.

"Whether it was their emotional vulnerabilities, their [physical appearance](#) or their financial and life goals, young men today clearly navigate a complex online and offline environment where they feel a lot of pressure from perceived [social expectations](#) on what it means to be a man," Professor Keddie said.

"This can create a situation where some are drawn to a small number of highly influential but harmful voices that do not resonate with broader community expectations.

"But we must stress that young men are not just perpetrators of online harm; our research shows they are victims too. Our study participants

described gaming communities as places where it was normal to respond to abuse with abuse. Others saw things like aggression and discrimination as an inherent or expected part of being online."

The [qualitative study](#) delved into the experiences of more than 100 young men aged 16 to 21 years through 25 focus groups and 25 follow-up individual interviews. It is one of the most in-depth investigations into the contemporary online lives of young men in Australia.

eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said navigating adolescence and early adulthood had always been a confronting rite of passage, but today's generation was one of the first to grow up in a world straddling the offline and online dimensions.

"Young men are also coming of age against a backdrop of complicated and contested public discussions about what modern-day masculinity means, potentially making the process of figuring out who they are and what they stand for more confusing and fraught," Ms. Inman Grant said. "As Australia's online safety educator, we wanted to understand how to support young men in online spaces in ways that have meaningful impact and are relevant to them. And we wanted to channel those insights into our kids, youth, parent and educator resources."

To translate these insights into relevant online safety advice, eSafety is consulting with relevant practitioners, including Daniel Principe, Movember, R4Respect, Richie Hardcore, The Man Cave and The Men's Project.

Ms. Inman Grant said it was important to keep listening and learning from young men.

"Pleasingly, the research showed many young men were critical consumers of what they saw online. We want parents, carers and

educators to help boys, tweens and teens hone these critical reasoning skills and instill a healthy sense of online agency and responsibility. We know prevention is the best defense against online harms.

"Tech companies also need to be more accountable for user safety, especially the impacts of recommender algorithms. These systems can result in young people being served increasingly harmful content that can erode respect for oneself and others, as well as perpetuate ideas rooted in misogyny."

More information: [Being a young man online: Tensions, complexities and possibilities](#) (2024).

Provided by Deakin University

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