

# No hook-ups and men must pay: inside the sicko femosphere

A growing army of female gold-diggers are urging women to ditch their romantic delusions, be more aggressive in the dating game — and snare a ‘high-value’ man

**Sarah Ditum**

Men are inherently selfish. They're only interested in one thing. If you do manage to hook one into a relationship, don't be surprised if you find yourself doing all the housework and tending to his emotions as well as his sexual desires — at least, until he decides to replace you with an even more compliant “bangmaid”.

I ought to make it clear that these are not my personal beliefs. But if you hang around long enough in the quarter of the internet known as the “femosphere”, these are the messages you are going to hear. You'll also discover that there's a solution: women need to harden their hearts and learn to manipulate men, the same way that men have purportedly been manipulating women for millennia.

While the manosphere — a loose network of male influencers who share a retrograde take on gender roles — has grabbed headlines, [Netflix dramas](#) and a splashy [Louis Theroux documentary](#), the femosphere tends to go under the radar. But it's a real phenomenon, with tendrils that run through TikTok,

Instagram, YouTube and podcasting. And it has real influence on how many young women are approaching the business of dating.

It also attracts vicious backlash, which is why Savannah, a London-based podcaster in her early thirties, only agrees to talk to me pseudonymously. Until last year, Savannah was a co-host of The Female Dating Strategy podcast, which grew out of a successful community on the discussion site Reddit. She first discovered the world of Female Dating Strategy (FDS) in 2019, just after ending what she describes as “an on-again, off-again situationship”. “It spoke to me because it was a group of women who were quite blunt about dating, and it reflected my own experiences,” she tells me over Zoom. “I was like, OK, this isn’t just me.”

For Savannah, one of the big appeals of FDS was it doesn’t coddle women. Instead, it stresses “accountability and self-improvement” — usually in uncompromising terms. In the FDS glossary on Reddit you’ll be introduced to concepts like the “PickMe” (“a woman who degrades herself and her value for the fleeting attention of men”) and “Cockholm Syndrome” (“a woman who is so male identified she defends the worst men beyond all logic or reason”).

You’ll also meet, crucially, the “High Value Male” and the “Low Value Male” (HVM and LVM, for short). These are the fundamental currency of the FDS world. The whole point of the strategy is to minimise the amount of time you expend on the latter and maximise your chances of meeting the former.

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## Femosphere lingo

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- High-value woman (HVW) A woman who prioritises self-worth, standards and boundaries.
- Levelling up Improving yourself (looks, finances, mindset, lifestyle).

- ❑ Cool girl A woman who downplays her needs to appear easygoing to men.
- ❑ Decentre men Not making men the focus of your life.
- ❑ Dark feminine energy Having confidence, mystery, intelligence and control.
- ❑ Seductive intelligence Using emotional and social awareness to your advantage.
- ❑ Aura Your overall vibe.
- ❑ Detachment Not becoming emotionally dependent on men.
- ❑ Lean back energy Letting others pursue instead of chasing.
- ❑ Strategic vulnerability Sharing selectively to create connection.

In FDS-speak, a high-value man is defined as: “A man that is respectful, loyal and faithful. He loves to show his woman that he can provide — he pays for dates and a relatively higher proportion of expenses in the relationship.” That last point has proved to be one of the most contentious elements of FDS advice.

“The refusal to go 50-50 is probably the most controversial aspect of FDS philosophy,” Savannah says, ruefully. But, she points out, it’s not so much about the amount. “When you look at the broader landscape, women are the ones who carry the child. They’re often paid less as well. If you consider the average pension pot for men and women, the gap is absolutely shocking.”

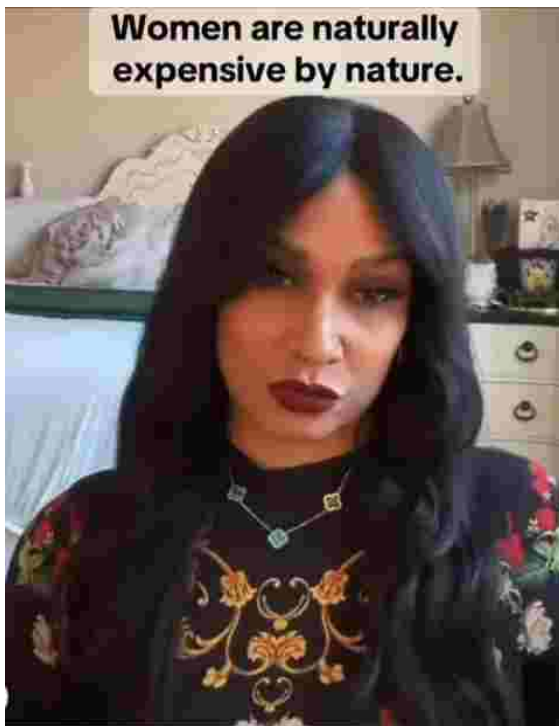
So insisting a man pays is a form of redistribution to compensate for the overall gender gap? “It’s also about intention. If a man’s asked you out, I think it’s polite [for him] to pay, and women invest a lot of time and effort into preparing for said date. Even if a man doesn’t pay for a date, that doesn’t mean he’ll be any less entitled.”

That a man should be capable of providing is paramount in much of the femosphere. TikToker SheraSeven (real name Leticia Padua) has 1.4 million followers. She promotes “hypergamy” — the idea that women should “date up”, prioritising financial security over love, and using their “feminine energy” to get it. (She also uses the term “gold-digger” approvingly.) Her catchphrase, “Sprinkle sprinkle,” has been hashtagged more than 137,000 times on the platform and is promoted to teenage users.

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If all this strikes you as unromantic, that’s precisely the point. “I think that introducing romance into marriage was one of the biggest scams for women,” Savannah says. “Marriage is affirmative action for undesirable men.” From her perspective, marriage is “a business transaction first”. “I’m not averse to marriage, but for me, there’s definitely going to be a practical consideration. Do the numbers make sense?”

All this talk of wage gaps, maternity discrimination and male entitlement may sound familiar from feminism. But while FDS and other parts of the femosphere share some of feminism’s basic analysis, they’re also animated by a profound disillusionment with much of what contemporary feminism has to offer. “FDS has that realist angle, and this is where we differ from other branches of feminism,” Savannah says.



SHERASEVEN/INSTAGRAM

Dr Jilly Kay, senior lecturer in communication and media at Loughborough University, has researched the femosphere and sees despair with feminism as a common theme. "In the femosphere, it's what's sometimes called 'pink pill philosophy', which is a gender-flipped version of the red pill." (In the manosphere, "taking the red pill" means waking up to the supposed truth that feminism controls the world against men's interests.)

"The crucial thing is this idea that liberal feminism is a con," Kay continues. "Liberal feminism, they say, wants women to think that they can be like men, participating in the public sphere and being sexually active in the same way that men are. [But] there are costs for women that there aren't for men." Kay is sceptical about the direction of the femosphere, but she's sympathetic to this critique.

## **In the femosphere, men are the problem sex**

In the femosphere, as in the manosphere, it's taken for granted that men and women are different — not only physically, but also psychologically. In the

manosphere, this is viewed as evidence of female inferiority. In the femosphere, it's men who are seen as the problem sex.

Influencer Kanika Batra has made a career of enlightening women regarding the brutal truth about men. The 30-year-old Australian (and former Miss Universe finalist) was diagnosed with antisocial behaviour disorder at the age of 21. In layman's terms, she's a certified sociopath, which she believes gives her a particular insight into men.

"I have the same sort of mind as these men," she tells me over Zoom, "because antisocial personality disorder is quite significant in lowering empathy." The implication here is that men are inherently less empathetic than women. Her book, *Sociopathic Dating Bible*, aims to train women out of the habits that make them vulnerable, and give them the advantage over men. Batra was originally inspired to start making femosphere content by her online encounters with the manosphere. "It's telling women that they're expired by 25. That they serve no purpose. They should be submissive. They should only want to be a mother and a stay-at-home wife."

Batra rebelled against domestic femininity at an early age. When she was 13, her mother attempted to teach her how to cook. "And I said, 'Are you going to teach my brother how to cook?' And she said, 'No, he's a boy.' I was still very much a girlie girl. I love dresses, skirts, all that stuff. But I would refuse cooking, cleaning. Like, I'm not just designed for this because I have a vagina."

## **'I am strongly against hook-up culture'**

But while Batra is infuriated by sexism, she also thinks that feminism "sold women out". "I am strongly against hook-up culture and any kind of casual sex. I think that's disgusting. I love the feminists of the Seventies, but the

sexual revolution was just handing men vaginas on a platter. Now women are trying to fool themselves into thinking that they can sleep around.

“Men love the chase. Otherwise they get bored. That’s why I tell women to be very confusing, to be bitchy and cold and difficult, because difficult women capture the attention of men.” The problem is that most women aren’t equipped to take Batra’s prescription. “Women are soft. They’re fragile. They don’t have a spine, so they like to live vicariously through me.”

She warms to her theme. “They cannot implement anything I say because they’re like, what if it hurts his feelings? Lady, are you insane? He would throw you in front of a bus if there were any material gain for him. Men don’t think like we do. Women are stupid in this sense, where they think, we can build this life together and he’s gonna love me.”

Perhaps surprisingly given these beliefs, Batra is married to former tennis pro Sam Matheson. Their marriage gets to the heart of one of the fundamental contradictions that the femosphere is trying to resolve. For the past decade or so, popular feminism and the culture in general have been clear on one thing: men are trash and best avoided. This is a position that hardened in the light of MeToo.

Sure, only a minority of men are dangerous abusers. But as one widely circulated meme pointed out, is that really any reassurance? “Imagine a bowl of M&Ms. Ten per cent of them are poisoned. Go ahead.” It’s implied that the rational response would be to foreswear M&Ms entirely, and that by analogy, women ought to do the same with men.

Some of the most extreme parts of the femosphere have tried to put that into action. The South Korean 4B movement is a million miles from any kind of dating strategy. The “B” stands for “bi”, meaning “no” in Korean, and adherents

commit to rejecting men in four ways: no dating, no marriage, no sex and no having children. But this is impracticable for most women, the majority of whom, after all, are straight.

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That conflict (men are terrible, we want them anyway) has given rise to a phenomenon known as “heteropessimism”. “Basically, it’s this idea that straight women will performatively say, ‘I wish I weren’t straight; I wish I were a lesbian,’ while nevertheless continuing to date men,” explains Phoebe Maltz Bovy, author of the book *The Last Straight Woman: On Desiring Men*. Feminism in the MeToo era had little constructive to say for women who still wanted intimacy with men, Maltz Bovy says. “There’s something dismissive and silly and futile about the ‘just stop dating men’ type of advice.” The femosphere, however cynical it can be, is at least offering hope that women and men can have relationships, if you follow the rules.

Sukaina Benzakour is a 31-year-old influencer and dating coach from London. Her mission is to teach women to “decentre men” and harness their “dark feminine energy” to attract the kind of men they actually want. Dark femininity, she explains over Zoom, means “owning that confident side of you. It’s rebellious, free, liberating.”

Is it also about manipulation? She laughs. “I associate dark feminine energy with psychology tricks to get what you want. It’s about helping women use those tools that they have.” From Benzakour’s perspective, underhand tactics are justified because, she says, “I feel like we’re in a gender war. We’re in a dating crisis.”

Take the manipulation too far, though, and Benzakour says it turns into “toxic femininity”, in which women are “operating from their ego and hiding behind this mask of, oh, I’m a feminine woman”.

Toxic femininity sounds like a counterpart to toxic masculinity, and in the manosphere it’s often presented as an equal and opposite force. But while toxic femininity is clearly unappealing, it doesn’t entail the physical violence and endemic sexual exploitation that are associated with toxic masculinity. Bluntly, we’ve yet to see a female Harvey Weinstein.

## **‘I’m the antidote to Andrew Tate’**

Similarly, the femosphere can’t be understood as simply the pink equivalent of the manosphere. Batra, who’s been described by some as a “female Andrew Tate”, is offended by the comparison. “I’m the antidote to Andrew Tate.”

Setting alarmism aside, there’s still something about the femosphere that I find bleak, even if I can sympathise with a lot of what these women are saying. Dating is depressing. That’s why relationship guides for women have always found a market. Much of femosphere advice is essentially familiar from books like the Nineties dating bible *The Rules*.

What feels new about the femosphere is the level of bad faith it promotes between the sexes. I don’t want to believe that thinking like a sociopath is the only way to have a successful relationship with a man. I don’t want to suspect every man of being low value until he proves himself otherwise. I don’t want every potential heterosexual encounter to be an arms race of manipulation.

But the femosphere influencers would probably say I’m just a hopeless romantic, deluding myself and encouraging the kind of low expectations that they believe ultimately hurt all women. “I do believe there’s hope for love,” Benzakour tells me. “But men, you need to catch up with the women. You need to do the work.”

