

ALL MEN

MALE VOICES TELLING THEIR STORIES TO MAKE A CHANGE

07 The soccer chat

Excerpts of testimonies are heard.

Man 1:

I think I stopped at the door of that room and that was enough for me.

Man 2:

I have those chats too. I can't explain it, the only thing I can say is that it's a male thing.

Man 3:

I don't have any soccer chats, okay? But...

Musical interlude

Irene:

Welcome to all men. And also welcome to all the other people listening. Those who listen to these episodes later, perhaps in binge listening mode, one after the other, won't notice that almost two months have passed between the previous episode and this one. Officially, the podcast took a break with the arrival of summer, but the truth is different: I needed to put some distance between myself and all these stories, all these voices, and all the emotions they trigger in me. The path I have decided to take is not an easy one, even though I am increasingly convinced of its usefulness. And I know that women and people socialized as women who listen to these episodes know exactly what I am talking about. To understand certain mechanisms, it is necessary to suspend judgment, but this is not easy when these mechanisms make your life worse in a quantifiable way.

One thing that is becoming increasingly clear to me is that, in any case, many people find these mechanisms toxic. In the last episode, I asked you what it was like for you to talk about these issues with your male friends, assuming you were able to talk about these issues with them. Here are some of the responses I received.

Testimony 1:

I don't have many friends, and the only person I talk to about equality and inclusivity is the same person who recommended that I follow the podcast. On rare occasions, I have discussed it at home with my eldest daughter and my wife. I have never seriously addressed the topic with other men.

Testimony 2:

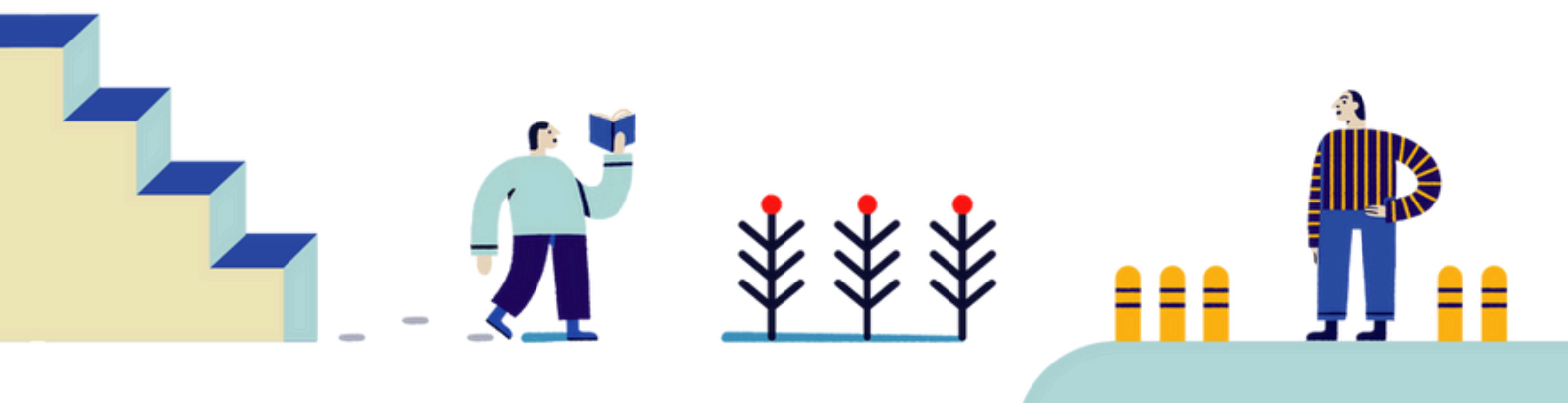
I wish! It's hard to find friends who want to talk/discuss. Most of my male acquaintances (actually, a large part of my female acquaintances too...) are more interested in talking about themselves than in talking/discussing. And anyway, in most cases where I do find male friends willing to talk about these issues, we quickly stop being friends.

Testimony 3:

Male friends? What male friends? My male friendships have drastically decreased over the past ten years or so, long before I became interested in feminism and gender identity issues. And this is for one simple reason: excluding soccer, which I have never liked, and excluding pussy since I have been in a stable relationship, the topics of discussion with the average male are significantly reduced. To quote Corrado Guzzanti (T.N. Italian satirical actor and comedian), I almost always find myself in this situation "Aboriginal, but you and I...what should we say to each other?"

Irene:

This is "All Men - Male voices telling their stories to make a change", a podcast that starts with the belief that the role of the male in eliminating gender-based violence is central, but that does not mean it is simple. And so men will be the ones to talk about it, because if the problem is systemic, the solution has to be collective. Today's topic, as you may have guessed from the spoilers at the beginning of the episode, concerns soccer chats.



A soccer chat is generally understood to be a chat frequented by men only, who may know each other more or less well, where a sort of unofficial “free-for-all” is established with regard to the content that can be posted. In some, where members generally know each other, content of questionable taste can be found, but it remains within the limits of legality. In others, often very popular and with guaranteed anonymity, where men do not know each other personally in most cases, criminally prosecutable content is posted. We will look at the details later, but suffice to say that you don't need to play soccer to have one (or more) “soccer chat rooms.”

You will hear some men use terms such as objectification and revenge porn. I will take a minute to explain them briefly for those who may not know their meaning. Objectification is a form of dehumanization, that is, the mechanism by which a person is stripped of their humanity so that empathy towards them is not felt and any violence against them is justified. There are different forms of dehumanization, from animalization (think of the posters where Jews were depicted as rats) to demonization (he is a monster, she is a witch). The most common form of dehumanization that women suffer is objectification. We are reduced to objects, to inanimate pieces that can be disposed of. One saying sums it up: what do you call a beautiful woman? A piece of pussy, a hot chick. In short, you get the picture.

Revenge porn refers to all those situations where photos/videos and, in general, intimate material of a person are made public without their consent. In reality, the most correct term to use is non-consensual sharing of intimate material. This is because revenge porn is ambiguous. Revenge implies a wrong that has been previously suffered. Whereas often the only ‘fault’ of women who are victims of revenge porn is that they have ended a relationship with a man who then decides to ‘take revenge’ by making public intimate material that was sent to him and was supposed to remain private. These are not acts of revenge, they are expressions of power. So let's call them by their name.

Given the above, I feel it is only right to issue a trigger warning to readers. We will be talking about pornography, the non-consensual sharing of intimate material and, therefore, necessarily about violence. If this is not a good time for you to deal with these issues, listen to yourself and move on. We'll talk again later.



One last disclaimer goes out to women and people socialized as women who will listen to this episode: you will get angry. You will get angry about the content, about the tone sometimes used by the men, and about many other things. But it will also be extremely interesting, because it will be like peeking through a keyhole to look into a room to which we don't easily have the keys.

The question I used to introduce the topic to the interviewees went something like this: A friend of mine once said to me, "Irene, no matter how much you think you know, you'll never know what really happens in a men-only soccer chat group." What do you think of this statement? How familiar does it sound to you? How much does it make you nod your head in agreement?

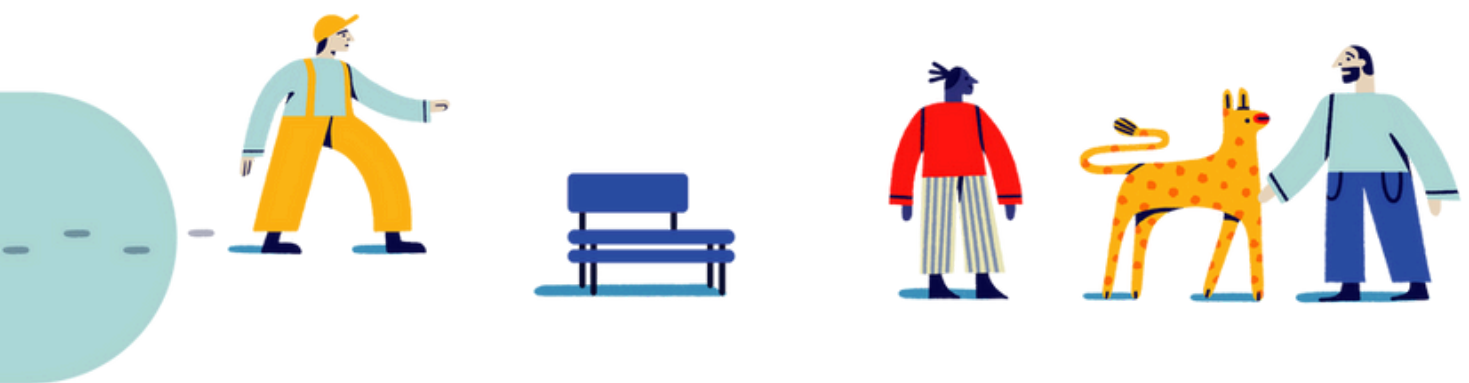
Man 1:

I also use the term soccer chat to illustrate my point, just as people use condo meetings to give an example of non-existent, indeed toxic and unacceptable, interpersonal relationships. We use the condo meeting to describe the worst of interpersonal relationships, the inability to listen to each other, etc., and we use the soccer chat to describe a series of comments that are nonsensical, uncalled-for, and crude. I have never played soccer, I don't know what a soccer chat is, I understand that it is used as a metaphor, as an example for this thing.

But I have no idea what they say in the soccer chat, and I don't want to know. I'm glad I don't know what they say in the soccer chat, but I can imagine, because obviously there's no need to be in a soccer chat. You can sit in a bar listening to the table next to you with three people talking, saying things that make me think, "I'm going to punch them all" but then they'll arrest me, so it's better to pay and get out of there. But the depths of the human mind are depressing. So I don't know what they say, and I'm glad I don't know. But I can imagine, if I had to write a script, I could probably get close.

Man 2:

Yes, it makes me nod my head a lot. More than chats, I've always lived in hyper-masculine environments. I've always done combat sports, I've done boxing. In fact, in boxing locker rooms, there's a world made up of pure, simple objectification and disgusting hypertrophic masculinity, especially from guys my age who are egged on by men older than us or at least bigger than us, who could easily be my father's age. And it scares me to see these men who have this kind of closed-mindedness, this misogyny in every sentence they say.



The way they talk about their wives, about how much of a bother their wives are at home, about how much of a pain in the ass they are at home, about how they went on vacation to Amsterdam to go on a hooker tour. Calmly, candidly, as if there were no one in front of them judging them. In fact, no one judges them because no one says anything about what they say. They accept it and say yes, yes, let's laugh, like that. And I laughed at these things many times. I laughed so many times that looking back, I said to myself, fuck, I could have intervened. But I was alone against the others. Or maybe there was someone in that group who would have done the same thing I did, but didn't expose themselves. And not exposing myself, not intervening there, made me complicit in all this cultural quagmire that really disgusted me from the first moment I came into contact with this type of environment. Because I felt that something was wrong. It's a feeling you have as a man, you feel that something is wrong. You can't quite understand what it is, but you feel that something is wrong with the fact that a 45-year-old man is describing exactly how he would like to sleep with his boxing classmate, who is at that very moment showering in the changing room next to you and who is probably the same age as his daughter. This puts you in a position where you would like to intervene but feel you cannot do so because otherwise you would lose prestige in front of others or be attacked, especially in an environment such as the locker room.

Man 3:

Yes, let's say I understand very well. Actually, I imagine so. I have received images of boobs, bottoms, or vaginas, in short, of female bodies, in chat rooms many times. That has happened to me several times. I mean, even though, if I read what you see in newspaper investigations, much worse things can happen, and I have no trouble believing it. At least, I don't think I've ever received content such as revenge porn or child pornography or non-consensual images. Mostly it was images of models or things taken from the internet. However, I have no trouble believing that such things can happen. I think I stopped at the door of that room and that was enough for me. It was already embarrassing enough to receive certain images, which I tended to delete from my gallery pretty quickly because it scared me... Scared me is perhaps an exaggeration, but it embarrassed me, the thought that while I was looking at some kind of image and scrolling through my gallery, an image of a naked woman might appear among the photos. It embarrassed me a little, it made me feel a little out of place. A little inadequate, perhaps.



Man 4:

Well, I don't know if I've ever been in a chat room with only men in the sense that your friend describes. I've certainly been in situations where I was a passer-by and then left, where, being only men (not only that: being only men of a certain type), there were basically some people who made certain comments in a certain way, so, I don't know, "all women are sluts", and if everyone is talking like that, it's one thing; if in a large enough group, only one person does it and no one says anything, it's a bit like the silence of the others muffles the outburst of a single person. That's the kind of experience I've had with men-only chats. One thing that comes to mind and makes me nod my head in agreement, instead, is related to the fact that there are chats, groups, forums, where men basically share personal material without consent. I realized this several years ago, in the sense that one thing that unites men, in my experience as a heterosexual man, is porn.

I remember in middle school, during computer science class, the teacher wasn't there, and a group of boys were huddled together, along with a classmate who had repeated a few years, who introduced us to the sacred scriptures and then showed us videos, photos, and images, and there we were (how old were we? 11, 12) watching, without understanding anything we were watching, but it was hidden stuff, stuff we were doing in secret, so it was automatically interesting and curious. From that moment on, just like a few years earlier when we used to swap soccer player trading cards in class, our relationship with material that wasn't even erotic but more pornographic was something that united the boys. By this I don't mean that we shake hands, get to know each other and then exchange websites to do things, but I know of contexts in which men-only chats, for example, become a receptacle for these things. These things can be a meme about a woman who was a porn star between 2005 and 2007, for example, which is something everyone can relate to, and everyone says, 'Oh, OK, I understand that' because everyone knows who she is immediately, and everyone immediately bonds over it. And that's one thing. I think this has never happened to me, but I know it exists and it's something that really disgusts me, a moment when material about the girlfriend or ex-girlfriend of one of the participants is shared in the chat and made available to the group. So when I think of chats involving only men, I also think of these things, not just these things, because I also think of more good natured situations. But the way in which, systematically and extensively, there are men all over Italy, all over Europe, all over the world, who have this network for the purpose of exchanging this type of photo, video, and personal data is shocking. It is a form of violence that has no equivalent, no parallel.



Man 5:

At a certain age, however, you try to filter out certain acquaintances, although I'm not convinced that eugenics in relationships is a healthy thing. We all have our problematic and toxic aspects. There is a level of filtering, but then certain things happen, and that's another case where you feel entitled to either spoil the fun or miss that appointment to spoil the fun because it's not the right time, they wouldn't understand anyway, and it would be almost like a boomerang that emphasizes even more the fact that you're the woke one. But it's definitely something that happens in private chat conversations, you know, it's definitely not a mystery.

Man 6:

It sounds pretty familiar to me, not that much, I mean, maybe I've done some cleaning up from a certain point of view... But if I think about my WhatsApp right now, I would be able to leave the chat after the first shitty message, I don't know how to say it. And maybe that's not the right answer, I don't know, I mean, come on, how would I know, but I've definitely been in those famous all-male chats in my life, and that definitely sounds familiar, luckily not enough, in the sense that I don't feel comfortable, I mean, I don't feel at home in an all-male WhatsApp chat.

Man 7:

Certain phrases like "in that place there's pussy" (T.N. to say that is full of chicks), thinking and talking about women in reference to their genitalia, definitely happened to me. And that's what I witnessed and heard and probably even participated in. There was this ambivalence on my part, right? Wanting to be part of it and feeling repulsed by it at the same time. This trait became more pronounced especially when I began my transition, wanting to bring out my masculinity and feel recognized as a man. And so I even ended up using that kind of language because I was seeking their approval. I was seeking the approval of the male reference group, so I simply lowered myself to their level, right? Because my masculinity, at that specific moment in my journey, also depended on the recognition of others and of males.

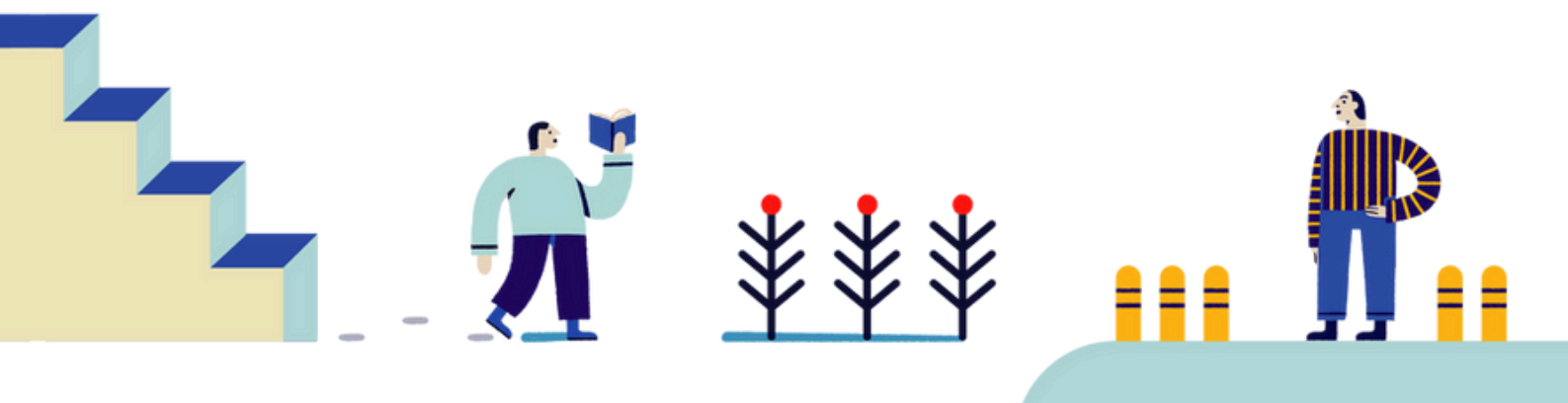


Man 8:

Well, I nod my head in agreement because I think every man has a fair number of acquaintances who fit the description of those people who make trashy comments in men-only chat rooms. I have to say that I'm quite lucky in this respect too, in the sense that, not being accustomed to this type of masculinity, I'm fortunate to have a group of friends where our chat literally makes fun of all forms of toxic masculinity. It's our main chat. The name itself is an inside joke about being the alpha male and the fact that we are not. Because we have never engaged in this kind of behavior. But yes, I am aware of it, because I know many men who, at the slightest opportunity to be alone with me or with others, throw themselves into stuff that makes you say, 'Are you really telling me this? I dare not imagine what they might do protected by anonymous online chats for men only. Want to hear something even more aberrant? It's not just a matter of people I know. Sometimes I've been in situations where... I'm in a store with strangers and there's a man making a horrible sexist joke or something. And he would look at me for approval just because I was a man too. It often happened with the greengrocer near my house, who would make a joke every time a woman bought something phallic and then look at me. And I would think, "What do you want?" But yes, it happens.

Man 9:

I was kicked out of a lot of soccer chats because I pointed out things that seemed crazy to me, completely crazy, that were completely crazy. The use of the body, for example the fact that the videos circulating in soccer chats very often do not have the women's head. I'm not here to explain it, it's clear what the reason is, but there are plenty of studies that explain the depersonalization, the attempt at objectification, to try to simply consider women as a body designed for your pleasure. Those chats there, the chats of only men, whether they are in soccer or not, but soccer is indicative because it could be a place for opening up and instead it is the place of juvenile antics. And that is healthy if at a certain point it ends, but if it is overextended, it prevents intimacy and is a daily, weekly torture. Well, those places there are toxic places within which we educate ourselves to represent the masculine, to perform the masculine. And I immediately, as a kid (there wasn't a soccer chat yet at the time I was playing soccer right at the beginning, then it simply moved from the locker room to the chat), I remember that, for example, it was very difficult talk about the body of men, talk about the body of handsome men. It was easy to talk about beautiful women, but I never had any problem saying I liked a man. What's the problem?



It was like a betrayal, you know? A massive betrayal. Something that... was just such a terrible feeling. It's difficult to explain it to those who haven't experienced it. It's as if everyone is telling you you're not just betraying yourself, you're betraying all of us and everyone like us. There were two paths in front of it, actually three. One was to run away and never date again. The other was to be conniving, but to be conniving could manifest itself in multiple ways. Either by participating in those same speeches, in those same tones, or by remaining silent. Because by keeping quiet in that context, you're still saying that stuff suits you. And it's something that at first... so many people say, "no, but I agree with you, but you know Gino, you know what he's like..." Oh yes, fuck it. I mean, it is not right that this is the case. It shouldn't be like that and you shouldn't have to suffer. Or you pass for being a traitor. And living the traitor's situation is tough, it's difficult. Because you're betraying your gender, because you're not the straight guy they want. Because you don't have that desire to constantly conquer something and you don't have the anxiety of having to prove who you are by saying how hot that one girl is, how hot that other one is. It is a very tiring performance and completely unnecessary for understanding who you are. It's just to put on an... Armor that protects you to a small extent from the shocks of the world, but otherwise... It's like armor that protects you outside, but it has a lot of spikes inside. So you put it on and it shapes you inside, and on the outside it protects you a little but in reality the big shocks are caused by the armour itself. And so I've seen a lot of these chats. When men are alone, they very often end up justifying this idea of the animal they carry inside. I agree, many of us carry animals inside. I don't know if... If it is limited to men or if it also concerns women. I don't have the tools to know. But I know that I have an animal inside. This does not mean that that animal has the right to have all the space and that I have no duty to understand how to limit it. I'm not saying that the animal should be killed, because I don't think it can be killed at all. And I don't even think it can be stigmatized to the point of saying "you will never emerge". Nor that it can ever be looked after to the fullest. And I realize that this can be bad, it can be a little scary for both men and women. However, this position is what I believe, that there is this animal in many men and that it is an animal that can never really be tamed. But you can learn to do it. And learning to deal with it also means learning to escape all those situations in which that animal is considered cool. Because it's not cool. It's something that's there. And on the other hand, learn to make sure that in those situations where that animal is glorified to the point of harming someone else, directly or indirectly, then raise your hand and prevent that thing from happening. It's difficult in that case, I realize. It's not easy. I remember it especially when you're little and you find yourself in a locker full of 17-year-olds and you're 12, 13, it's difficult to take a stand because they just run at you.



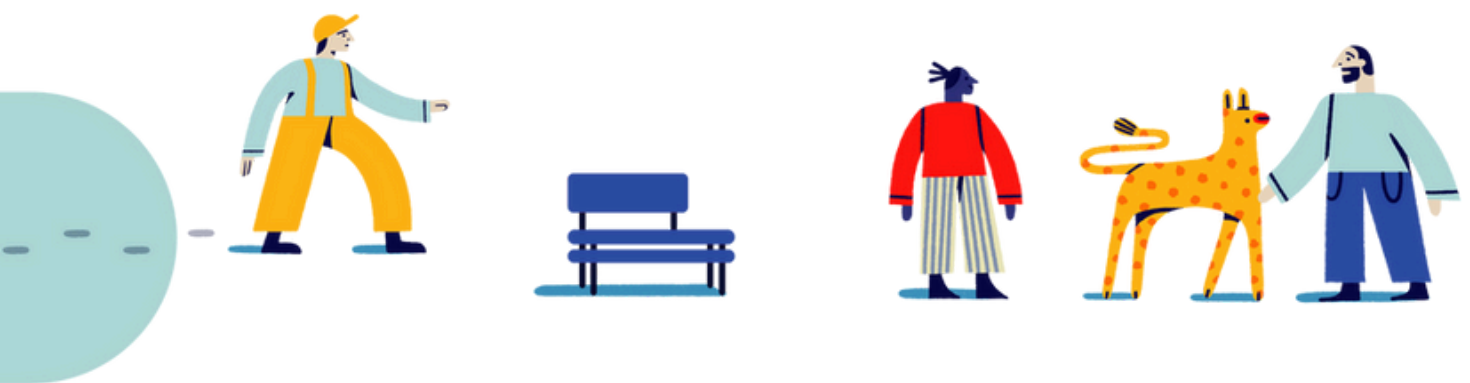
But when you're older at some point you have responsibility for the mod. You have responsibility for the type of speeches that are made and the type of manifestation that is generated. Because it is a toxic imagery, devastating for everyone. Truly devastating for everyone, in this sense, masculine. And then, obviously, for every woman.

Man 10:

So on the one hand I'm always surprised by the stories my female friends tell me about straight men. I'm gay and partly because it's natural, partly by choice, over the years, obviously, the people closest to me are women or gay men or people who are at least a little knowledgeable on these issues. I have a few men-only chats, but they are gay men-only chats, where yes, we discuss handsome guys, but also drag queens and things like that. Actually, though, thinking about it for a moment, I'm perhaps disappointed but not surprised. In the sense that, thinking about it carefully, I realize that unfortunately these things are very likely. What happens, in a way, is somewhat expected, and that's a bit sad.

Man 11:

Very much so, nodding my head. Because it's true, I don't know if there's a female equivalent of a fantasy football group or something like that. Maybe the group of moms at the nursery school, I don't know. That's a very sexist thing to say... But yes, anyway, a herd mentality develops, a group mentality where there's a lot of messing around, there's a bit of common ground, let's say, discussions that aren't really philosophical, let's put it that way. So I agree with the statement, it sounds familiar to me. I realize that even I, within WhatsApp groups, can have a much higher level of attention and tolerance threshold for certain things than I might have in a different environment. For me, many things are almost slapstick comedy, that is, a really basic level of comedy where you know you'll get easy applause if you bring up this kind of interaction. So all the memes around dick jokes, anything involving dick, pussy, scatological humor, or anything like that, will get you easy applause. In an age where we are all looking for likes on social media, this is also true in WhatsApp groups, perhaps even more so in WhatsApp groups, because it is the circle of friends from whom you want validation even more.



Man 12:

Yes, of course. Yes yes, of course, of course. Yes, a lot. This phrase sounds very familiar to me. Then it doesn't mean that it is necessarily a demeaning thing towards women, but yes, it is always there, not in all of them (T.N. only man group chats), but there is always some return, some reference, there is always some joke that goes there to parry. And then out of mere camaraderie everyone gets into it and everyone answers, maybe not everyone, but almost everyone, many, makes jokes out of it. But including me, I'm not hiding, that is, I mean I'm not a saint, of course, needless to say, it happens, it happens very often. Unfortunately or luckily I don't know, I mean, sometimes I think that if it stays on Whatsapp, on a Whatsapp chat and that's it, it's a way, maybe a stupid way, but a bit of a fun way to do locker room, as they say. Now, I don't know if the same thing happens in women's chats, because I have no idea about that, but here's the thing: if it happens, and I want to specify that it's only in WhatsApp chats, sometimes I even laugh about it, maybe I respond to the joke too, but yes, it happens.

Man 13:

It makes me nod my head in agreement, highly. Because I've been in some chats where at a certain point I say, I mean, enough is enough, I'm not trying to be moralistic or prudish, but these things can be avoided. So, these situations exist, and I'm not saying you can't joke about certain topics, but I joke about certain topics without ever making fun of the topic, never ridiculing the topic, simply turning the joke on myself, and instead I see some groups where the F-word (T.N. a gay insult) is used all the time, as a joke, as an insult, no, I don't agree with that, it's not something I like.

Man 14:

No comment. That's very true. I don't have any soccer chat groups, ok? But certainly in certain chats with certain male friends, I say things that my female friends would never hear, I won't lie about that. What do you want to know? What is said in these chats or what... What do you want to know, Irene, about these chats? In my case, I have a chat group with only men, my male relatives, called Yoruba Demons, where we celebrate the relational and romantic flaws of Nigerian Yoruba men and share memes...



Man 16:

No, I don't understand, honestly. I mean, I think it depends on the type of chat. If we're talking about the famous soccer chat, then this statement is probably true, and it applies to me too. I don't even want to know, for the sake of my sanity. If, on the other hand, we're talking about a chat that isn't about soccer, then I think you can get a very clear idea. In the sense that I can give you an answer for the chats I am part of, or have been part of. There have never been terrible, unspeakable, unrepeatable things, there has never been non-consensual diffusion of other people's pornography or other people's intimacy. There has never been violent talk towards women. There have been and still are many elements of sexism in expressions, prejudices, comments, and reasoning. So, in my opinion, if we stick to this type of chat, I believe you can have a clear idea, perhaps even better than me, because you know much more than I do, of what goes on inside a chat. If we are talking about the chat that came out, I don't remember now if it was on Telegram, there was a journalistic investigation into comments on normal photos of women, obscene sexualized comments. There was this channel where they collected material that was also child pornography.

Well then, probably not, you have no idea, luckily neither do I, and perhaps it's better if none of those present know, for the sake of their mental health, because there are things that need to be known and dealt with, but only when you have the necessary defenses to face them. I don't have them at the moment. So maybe I don't even want to know, but not to bury my head in the sand, because I'm not part of it and I would try to tackle the problem from another angle without having to bang my head against a brick wall.

Man 17:

It sounds very familiar to me, of course, because I've been in chats like that myself. I don't really agree with the "you'll never know" argument. Of course you can know, you create a fake identity, you enter the chat and you know. Obviously, having a different body, you can't feel what I feel, and that's the most accurate way to talk about a phenomenon like that, in my opinion. For example, you may hear many things you don't like, many things that disgust you, many repulsive things. What you can't hear is how satisfying those places, those conversations, those words, that way of speaking of the other gender are. Obviously, you can't feel that. And why is it satisfying? It's satisfying because it comforts you. It's precisely the most appealing mechanism of gender stereotypes and clichés. It makes you feel at home. What does home mean? It makes you feel like you're in a place where you can unleash and use to the fullest those powers that society has told you are yours because of your gender.



And this cannot be done in reality, because reality is unfortunately governed by the law, it is governed by this humanity that—damn it—you have to show it, because the people around you are sensitive living beings. In those places, you abandon a certain humanity and let yourself go. But it is important to understand why you have been accustomed to thinking that your gender reality lies in that wildness. Because, when you think about it, this means you have created a frustrating gender identity. That is, a gender identity in which you are told about a whole series of amazing possibilities that you will never be able to use in reality. Damn, that sucks. Those chats should actually make you realize that they are a deception, a utopia, a mirage, but one that supports your terrible relationship with reality. When you discover how many wonderful things you can do in reality, then that type of communication, that type of chat, no longer interests you, because you understand where the catch is, where the deception is. It wasn't one of the possibilities that someone was preventing me from having. It was a real god complex that didn't take into account the human beings around me. So in this sense, the phrase can have meaning. It's not that you can't understand it, you can't feel it. Because no one ever told you about that delusion of omnipotence for your gender. They never told you that it was one of your possibilities. Or at least, if it happens, it's told to an infinitesimal number of women... who don't have that kind of chat anyway.

Musical interlude

Irene:

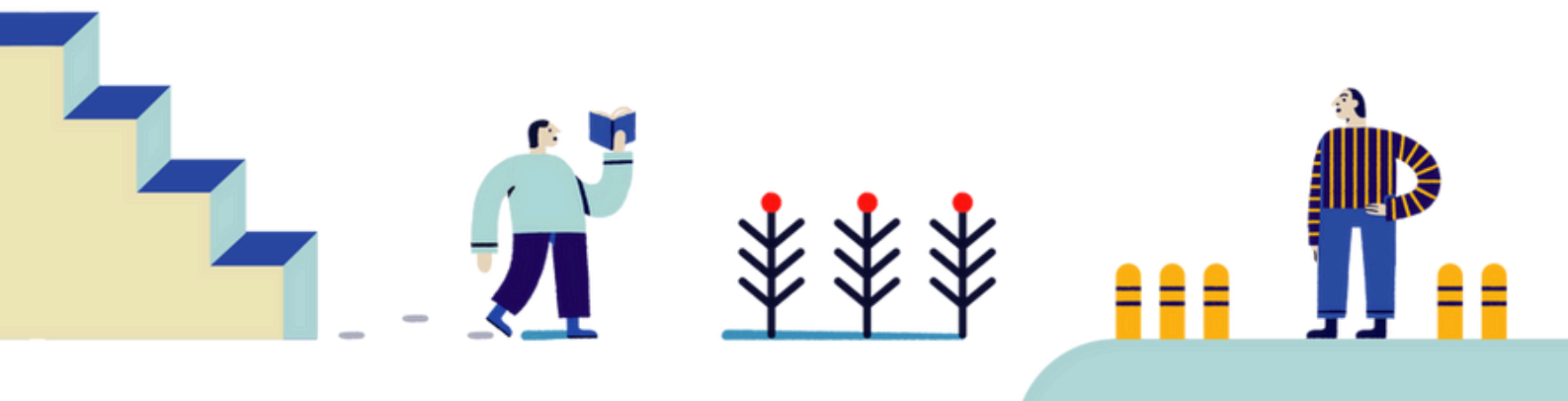
Eh, "women don't have that kind of chat anyway" Shall we start from here? There are so many things to say that we have to choose a starting point, but we'll touch on them all. I know that many of you will have asked yourselves this question

Man 1:

Do you girls have chats?

Irene:

I imagine you're curious to know the answer. Do we women have only-girl chats with our friends to send each other porn? The short answer is NO. Mind you, I'm not saying that certain topics aren't discussed among female friends and that photos of men aren't shared in chats (but they are usually full-length, famous and therefore well-known, often clothed, etc.), but the approach is completely different.



If I send a photo of an actor I really like in a chat, I don't say what I would do to him, but what I would have him do to me. We're not talking about linguistic details here, it changes the whole meaning. Making a list of things I would do to a man would take into account nothing but my desire. For example, it would not take into account his consent. Or the fact that he has free will. I can make a list of things I would do with an object, not to a person. Because I can't, I'm not able to, regardless of his will, even if I'm speaking hypothetically. What I can tell my friends is what I'd like that man to do to me, imagining him as an active and enthusiastic participant. And it's not that I don't have certain thoughts out of moral superiority, it's that no one has instilled in my gender a god complex, making us believe that we can do anything, have everything, dispose of anyone. So it doesn't come naturally to me to use a certain approach. But, apart from that, the truth is that in group chats with my female friends, we don't send each other porn because we have more interesting things to talk about and because we have the tools to talk about them. After we've said that someone is hot, we've exhausted the subject. We move on to talking about ourselves, our lives. We tell each other how we are, we ask each other, even several times a day if it's a difficult moment. We give each other advice, whether professional or personal. We listen to each other. We encourage each other to do things that scare us but that we would like to try. We send each other links to newly released songs that remind us of each other. We recommend books to each other. We gossip, in the sense that we exchange useful information. We write to each other the same things we would say if we were sitting at the same table. We talk about ourselves. And that's because we're allowed to talk about our emotions; no one will ever tell us we're not womanly enough if we talk about our worries. We are taught to talk to each other, to confide in each other. When the men are in the dining room watching Formula One, the women are in the kitchen, and while they slice, cook, and prepare, they ask each other, "So, how are you?". It's a scene I've witnessed millions of times. My mother, my grandmother, the messy kitchen table, and their voices telling their stories. When you grow up like that, it's easier to repeat the pattern with your female friends. I'll tell you more, it's also easy to repeat it with your male friends, who are often happy to have a chat because they don't have many opportunities to talk about themselves with a friend. Precisely because they are often in male-only contexts, this ability to talk honestly about themselves, making themselves vulnerable, is not practiced.

Man 2:

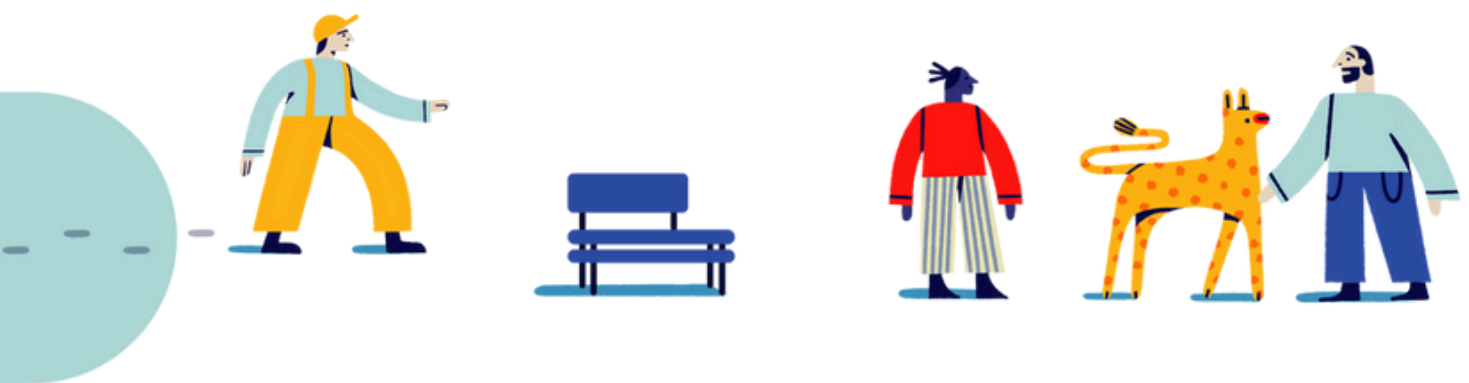
It could be a place of closeness, but instead it's a place of juvenile antics.



Irene:

But the need to share doesn't go away, so people try to satisfy it through the channels that are allowed. Linking a porn video to a friend is, in its own way, a moment of sharing.

I'm starting from here because I want to clarify a point. If we're talking about chats between friends where nothing criminally prosecutable is happening, I don't think it's useful to make it a moral issue. Nor to point fingers or try to make someone feel guilty. No one is saying that you should only talk about quantum physics and philosophy in chat rooms. The problem is not that you send a porn link in the chat room, the problem starts when you don't know why you're doing it, when you never ask yourself why, and when you don't check your behavior. These are uncomfortable questions, but if you're here, it's certainly not to be comfortable, so I imagine I'm not taking you by surprise. Why do you feel the need to share that link? Why do you want to get some easy applause? Why don't you feel comfortable sharing anything else? Why does it define you in some way? Why don't you know how else to perform your gender in a place full of men where approval is often highly sought after? Maybe it's all of these reasons, maybe it's others. Never before have I missed a co-host as much as in this episode, a man who would ask these questions to the interviewees. I would have liked to see the dynamic, perhaps I would have grasped a few more arguments, I would have better understood the light-hearted and funny side of it, which I imagine there is. With this perspective, however, my own, I see something else very clearly. It seems to me that the underlying thought is 'since we're not doing anything wrong', in the sense that there is no non-consensual sharing of intimate material or worse, 'all in all, the problem doesn't exist'. I wish that were true. I wish it were enough not to do certain things in order to avoid falling into certain ways of thinking. For example, I wish that constant exposure to images of women's bodies did not tragically make it easier to start thinking of them only as objects. But we know that things go differently. If I get used to seeing subjectivity described and presented only in a certain way, I will begin to take it for granted that that way is the only way, that that particular detail can overlap the whole. If I continue to see only a breast or a butt, my brain will find it increasingly difficult to remember that those parts belong to a whole that is much more than the sum of those individual parts. And I then find this reflected in the way I approach that whole. Not everyone who sends certain types of photos and videos in the soccer chat then shares nude photos of their exes, God forbid. But if you send photos of your ex, it's likely that you started with sending random photos and videos in the soccer chat. It's an iceberg: chats where unrepeatable things happen are the tip, but underneath there is a whole culture that supports it and that also passes through the fun that makes people laugh and that "if it stays in chat, what harm does it do?"



That's why some men have said that silence makes you an accomplice, because if you don't try to stop your friend from posting trash in chat, you're making it easier for him to continue doing so also in other places, perhaps with even fewer inhibitions.

Man 3:

I'm not even convinced that relationship eugenics is a healthy thing.

Man 4:

I would be able to leave the chat after the first shitty message, I don't know how to say it. Maybe that's not the right answer, I don't know.

Irene:

"Decluttering your contacts" is convenient and a quick way to stop seeing certain things, but it certainly doesn't make them stop existing. You've simply decided you don't want to see them anymore. Understandable. Too bad that if there's one person your friend might listen to, it's you. Who should tell him to stop with those GIFs? Me? Maybe it would be worth staying in those places to show that there can be an alternative, assuming they let you stay, of course. I don't know what would happen if, after yet another pornographic GIF, one of the chat participants tagged the friend in question and said, "Listen, bullshit aside, how are you?". Not "a completely different matter," but certainly a more serious matter is the issue of anonymous and highly frequented chat rooms where illegal content, child pornography, and so on are sent. More than one man has said, "I don't know what goes on in there, and I don't want to know." I think it's very easy to empathize with this statement. I know there's filth in there, I don't want to go near it, I don't want to know anything about it. Although I understand this point of view very well, I can't help thinking, "It must be nice to be you." It must be nice to have the privilege of being able to say, "I don't know and I don't care." Of course, you don't have to check if you've ended up in those chats too. The last interviewee said, "You may know what's in those chats, but you can't feel what I feel in those chats, as a man." That's very true, and it's an interpretation that I found enlightening, but it also works the other way around. As a man, you really have to make an enormous effort to empathize, identify, and listen in order to understand what it might be like for a woman to enter one of those chats with the anxiety of finding photos of herself or her friends. Knowing that it has already happened. It is a level of anxiety and apprehension that fathers of daughters can perhaps relate to, asking themselves, "What if they put photos of my daughter in there?" But the reality is worse.

