

Research Brief: Pickup Artists (PUAs)

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Pickup Artists (PUAs): What You Need to Know

Pickup Artists (PUAs) are a distinct faction of the “manosphere:” a broad set of male supremacist, anti-feminist, misogynist and sometimes violent groups that exist largely online.

Pickup artists are a subculture of men whose goal is to “seduce” women through charm, manipulation and/or coercion. PUA concepts, terminology, communities organized primarily around men’s lodges and conferences first emerged in the 1970s. Since 2000, PUAs have expanded their narrative to include objectification of women and rejection of shifts in dating “roles,” and re-upped their focus on pseudo-psychology and dating advice. Due to the concerning influence among young men of individuals like Roosh V and [Andrew Tate](#), PUAs have recently become a focus of activists and scholars alike.

Core Beliefs:

Pickup artists believe that changing gender roles in modern Western society have forced straight men to use more aggressive tactics to maintain previous levels of “success” in dating and casual sex. Colloquially, the measure of a man’s aptitude for sexual conquest is referred to as his “game.”

Core Behaviors:

“Game” has two elements. *Outer game* includes social skills, physical fitness/attractiveness, fashion sense and grooming/hygiene. *Inner game* includes understanding of how to exploit women’s psychology, confidence and self-esteem.

More seasoned PUAs often gatekeep – and monetize – their “tips” for improving one’s game. Aspiring PUAs purchase books, courses or other materials authored/distributed by prominent PUAs. Entire pickup artist communities live and organize online, and real-life events/meetups are commonplace.

While there is nothing extreme about seeking to improve your physical fitness, improving your grooming habits or learning how to hold a conversation, Pick Up Artists contaminate these harmless messages with misinformed and offensive stereotypes about women, gender roles and relationships. By introducing these harmful narratives alongside putatively helpful ones, they seek to legitimize and normalize misogyny.

The shift from solely focusing on self-improvement and “seduction techniques” to offering opinions on gender relations, feminism and androcentrism (the belief that society should center around men) promotes dangerous behaviors including harassing and/or threatening women. PUAs leverage social media to grow their influence and spread their message. By preying on the insecurities of boys and young men (tied to physical attractiveness, fitness or body image issues, as well as social approval/romantic attention from women), PUAs extort their time, attention and money.

Many extremists, including Pick Up Artists, use humor and advice-giving as ways to expose new individuals to their ideas, slowly eroding their targets’ skepticism and making it more permissible to laugh alongside them, listen to their ideas, buy their courses -- and eventually begin to manipulate the women in their lives.

Notable Pickup Artists

The modern PUA movement has adapted to the digital era, emphasizing online communication and social media. This shift reflects a broader societal move away from physical gatherings, impacting how advice on dating, relationships and self-improvement is shared and consumed. This digital evolution allows these messages to reach younger and more impressionable audiences and has contributed to the radicalization of a large cohort of young men into extreme misogyny.

[Roosh V \(Daryush Valizadeh\)](#) is one such leader who gained prominence through his blog and books on seduction and self-improvement. Between 2007 and 2012, Roosh V published a series of books advocating for the use of manipulative or harassing language to undermine the confidence of women or to convince them to sleep with him. He focused several of his books on how best to manipulate the women of various countries – including Iceland, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay and more -- into sex, as part of a practice known as “sex tourism.” His websites and forums, [rooshv.com](#), [rooshvforum.com](#) and [returnofkings.com](#), were once home to a plethora of “pickup tips,” or ways to improve one’s game and discussions in which members would share advice or brag about their successes.

In the mid-2010s, Roosh separated from the PUA community. He has since publicly converted to Orthodox Christianity and “repented” for his past, but his past work continues to influence pickup artistry.

[Andrew Tate](#), a self-described misogynist, is a British-American former kickboxer and reality television star who uses his platform to teach his acolytes that women are inferior and morally deficient beings who are good only for sex and status building, and who deserve to be physically, sexually and emotionally abused. Tate encourages his followers to pay a steep membership fee to his website “War Room,” where, [according to leaks from August 2023](#), Tate teaches his followers how to groom their partners into online sex work. Tate and his brother are currently facing charges of sex trafficking and rape in Romania. While some of Tate’s accounts on social media platforms have been removed, [The Guardian](#) reports that his videos have been viewed over 11.6 billion times.

Both Roosh V and Andrew Tate have leveraged social media platforms to reach a wide audience, using provocative content and direct engagement with their followers to promote their ideologies. They have also expanded their messaging beyond dating and relationships to include commentary on broader social and political issues, often framing their views as a form of ["red-pilled"](#) enlightenment for young men.

The History of Pickup Artists

The Pickup Artist (PUA) subculture has evolved significantly since its inception in the late 20th century. That said, even the earliest PUA subculture promoted manipulative and sometimes predatory behavior towards women.

Initially shared in secretive clubs and workshops where men gathered in person to learn strategies for attracting women, these early meetings -- often led by key figures in the community -- focused on techniques for initiating conversations, building attraction and seduction. This approach has been heavily criticized for objectifying women and treating them as conquests.

Key Figures in the Early PUA Subculture

Ross Jeffries, known for developing Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques for seduction and influencing behavior, was one of the pioneers in the PUA community, focusing on the use of coercive language and psychological manipulation techniques to attract women. Jeffries also included messages on how men could improve sexual appeal through maintaining a healthier lifestyle as well as enhancing one's personality, personal style and grooming.

Neil Strauss, another prominent early PUA, made his impact on the community through his book, *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists*. This volume documented his immersion into the PUA community, showcasing the use of psychological tricks and routines to manipulate women. Strauss became a central figure, popularizing PUA techniques and bringing the movement into the mainstream. While his popularity did shed light on the inner workings of the PUA community, it also glamorized and normalized behavior that many consider at best disrespectful and at worst actively harmful.

Mystery (Erik von Markovik), another key figure in the PUA subculture, developed the "Mystery Method," which focuses on using magic tricks and scripted routines to attract women. This approach has been criticized for its artificiality and for promoting a shallow understanding of human relationships. Von Markovik also hosted the reality game show "The Pickup Artist", in which male contestants who suffered from a lack of success with women were taught to use the "Mystery Method" to obtain success with different kinds of women in different kinds of settings. This program, which ran for two seasons, modeled this manipulative and unhealthy behavior to audiences across the USA.

David DeAngelo's "Double Your Dating" brand, while less focused on manipulation, promotes a view of relationships as games to be played and women as prizes to be won. This mentality has been criticized for fostering a sense of male entitlement and for dehumanizing women.

Notable Incidents:

PUAs have come under scrutiny for their disturbing and violent behavior towards women. While the cases below are not exhaustive, they are representative of the kind of behavior that the PUA subculture promotes. There have been several high-profile incidents involving PUAs harassing women in public, some of which have resulted in criminal prosecution.

In 2014, Julien Blanc, a PUA associated with the company Real Social Dynamics, sparked outrage for his [controversial seminars and social media posts](#) promoting aggressive and coercive tactics to pick up women. Blanc's behavior, which included advocating for choking women, led to widespread condemnation and the cancellation of his seminars in several countries.

Adnan Ahmed was arrested in 2019 in Scotland for harassing women on the streets. Ahmed, also known as "Addy A-Game," [was convicted of several charges](#), including behaving in a threatening and abusive manner. He was sentenced to prison for two years and placed on a sex offender registry for 10 years. [His conviction was overturned on appeal in 2020.](#)

James Sears, a Canadian PUA and neo-Nazi who also goes by the pseudonym "Dimitri the Lover" has a history of harassing women and promoting antisemitic and misogynistic views. In 2019, he was [convicted of promoting hatred against women and Jews](#) and was sentenced to jail time. After

being released on parole on October 14, 2021, he was [arrested again for violating parole](#) on February 3, 2022.