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# Mainstreaming the Manosphere's Misogyny Through Affective Homosocial Currencies: Exploring How Teen Boys Navigate the Andrew Tate Effect

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**Abstract**

During the summer of 2022, Andrew Tate became a focus of concern for the media, parents, and educational leaders as his sexist and misogynistic social media content became popular with young people, especially boys. To explore Tate's appeal, we conducted a discourse and content analysis of Tate's videos and a small focus group study with boys aged 13–14 from London (United Kingdom). We found that apart from the obvious ways that Tate promotes men's domination of feminine "others," his content also mainstreams misogynistic "manosphere" ideologies. Moreover, Tate plays on boy's fears about their economic futures and place in the structures of hegemonic masculinity while stylising himself as a maverick, but authentic figure who—against the context of his concocted fears—offers hope through advice about dating and entrepreneurial skills. We highlight how these tropes support Tate's business model in the affective and attention economies of social media. Through focus group analysis, we show how these tropes are potent homosocial currencies for boys, including their conceptions of Tate's content as humorous. In so doing, we contribute new theoretical perspectives on the way emotion and affect can work as homosocial currencies across digital and non-digital spaces to reify hegemonic masculinity and normalize misogyny. We conclude by suggesting that rather than attacking Tate's messages which might play into Tate's maverick identity, we should offer young people critical digital literacy education that helps them understand the business models of Tate, and influencers like him, and how they peddle in forms of gendered disinformation.

**Keywords**

affect, Andrew Tate, masculinities, misogyny, the "manosphere"

## Introduction

In the Summer of 2022, the social media influencer and entrepreneur Andrew Tate's misogynistic and sexist online content became a focus of concern for the global mainstream media (Smith, 2022; Thorburn, 2022). Tate's online videos promote ideas that women are men's property, that they should bear responsibility for rape and regressive stereotypes including that women cannot drive (Das, 2022). Following widespread condemnation of his content, in August 2022, Tate's content on YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram was banned (Wilson, 2022). Despite the ban, his content still circulates on TikTok through fan accounts (e.g., Tate Stories and Emergency Room Best Bits on YouTube), through his account on the video platform Rumble, his podcast that is still hosted on Spotify, and he continues to make headlines in relation to his arrest and charging in Romania for rape and human trafficking (BBC News, 2023). While at the time of writing, Tate is imprisoned and still banned from popular social media platforms, there are concerns the misogynistic ideologies he promotes have already taken hold among teenage boys (Fazackerley, 2023) and his arrest and bans from social media

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might only serve to reinforce the subversive aspect of his appeal. Tate's playboy macho persona which foregrounds his interest in cars and guns, and his historical focus of sharing content through platforms such as TikTok and YouTube which are popular with young people (Ofcom, 2022), makes his misogyny highly accessible to boys (Will, 2023).

In light of this, the mainstream media has raised concerns about the extent to which young people, especially boys, will be influenced by the increasing prominence of misogyny influencers, such as Tate, in social media spaces (Das, 2022; Fazackerley, 2023), but we know little about how boys are discussing gender in relation to Tate's content. In this article, through a discourse and content analysis of Tate's online videos, and a small focus group study with boys aged 13–14 from London, we seek to address this empirical gap by analyzing Tate's online content and boys' experiences of it. Theoretically, we focus on the under-studied affective and emotional dimensions of hegemonic masculinity as homosocial capital or currencies, which are mobilized via social media connectivity (Toder & Barak-Brandes, 2022). The central questions we address are: (1) What are the key themes of Tate's online content? (2) How does he incite misogynistic hate? (3) How does Tate's content appeal to boys? (4) How do boys relate to the affective and emotional aspects of Tate's content? (5) What can that tell us about how affect and emotion as homosocial currencies work on and off social media to feed into structures of hegemonic masculinity?

We start by reviewing literature about the rise of "the manosphere" and of online misogyny, then consider the recent interest in understanding the role of boys' digital homosociality in upholding harmful versions of hegemonic masculinity connected to sexual and gender-based harassment and violence. After highlighting our methodology, we split our findings into two parts: the discursive and affective analysis of Tate's online videos; and a thematic analysis of two focus group discussions with boys. We argue that aside from the obvious ways that Tate's misogyny promotes hegemonic masculinity's domination of feminine "others," Tate's sexism, misogyny, and presentation of masculinity also further mainstreams ideologies of the manosphere, which reinforce and reify a neoliberal capitalist version of hegemonic masculinity through homosocial emotive and affective currencies. We make new empirical contributions by filling a current gap in research through an analysis of Tate's use of misogyny; discourses of masculinity; and ideologies of the manosphere, alongside an exploration of how teen boys are negotiating, reproducing, or resisting his content. Theoretically, we add new understandings of how affective and emotional homosocial currencies such as fear and humor work across digital and non-digital spaces to maintain and reify hegemonic masculinity. We conclude the article by considering what our findings mean for educational professionals, policymakers, and others who want to know how we can develop relevant pedagogies to raise young people's critical awareness of content from Tate and influencers like him.

## Online Misogyny and "the Manosphere"

While misogyny obviously predates the digital era, scholars point to the role of digital technologies in facilitating new and more virulent strains of hatred and violence directed toward women. Referred to as "networked" (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016) and "post-truth" (Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018) misogyny, the mass circulation of anti-women and anti-feminist sentiments through online connectivity and spreadability is historically unprecedented (Ging & Siapera, 2019). Media and Internet Studies scholars point to the role of platform affordances, such as visibility, anonymity, algorithmic politics, echo chambers, as well as the "disinhibition effect" (Suler, 2004, p. 321) as factors which enable misogyny and anti-feminist activism to thrive in digital spaces. Furthermore, online misogyny is tied up in and often intensified by the affective (Ahmed, 2004) and attention economies (Marwick, 2015) on social media whereby controversial, shocking, "humorous" and polarizing content often rises to the top.

A key landscape for this violent digital misogyny is "the manosphere"—constituting a decentralized array of online communities, actors and digital spaces, which include men's groups, niche social media influencers, websites such as AngryHarry.com, and various subreddits on Reddit (Ging, 2019a). Men's groups such as Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), Pick-Up Artists (PUAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Traditional Christian Conservatives (TradCons), and gamer/geek culture have been identified as networked hubs for the manosphere (Ging, 2019a; Sugiura, 2021).[1] While these groups differ in their shared interests, they are generally united by a hatred of women, anti-feminism (Ging, 2019b) and the Red Pill "philosophy" (appropriated from the film *The Matrix* [Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999]), whereby taking the red pill signifies opening one's eyes to feminism's "brainwashing" (Ging, 2019b). Another trend in the manosphere is the superficial use of gender conservative evolutionary psychology ("evo psyche") to explain theories of alpha and beta masculinity and heterosexual rituals of mate selection (Ging, 2019a). According to these "philosophies", women are irrational, hypergamous, hardwired to pair with alpha males, and need to be dominated (Ging, 2019a). Other popular myths circulating in the manosphere include that men are often victims of false rape allegations (Sugiura, 2021, p. 26), that society is being "feminised", and associated to that, men are losing power and rights (Marwick and Caplan, 2018, p. 246), which unites many in the manosphere around a language of victimhood and aggrieved entitlement (Ging, 2019a).

Unfortunately, there is some evidence that the manosphere is seeping into the mainstream. These misogynistic

discourses are increasingly migrating from more alternative forums, such as 4chan and Reddit, to more popular platforms, such as Urban Dictionary (Ging et al., 2020) and TikTok (Solea and Sugiura, 2023). Despite spread to these platforms, little has been written about the role of influencers such as Tate—who have been referred to as "misogyny influencers" (Martin, 2023; see also Setty, 2023) and, as Martin (2023: np) says, generate income through "radicalising boys *(and others)* into misogyny" (Martin, 2023: np; our addition in italics). We build on Martin's helpful coining of this term, but note that the misogyny influencer's gains are broader than just about making financial income; they also generate attention and forms of affective and digital capital.

Academic research on misogyny influencers is currently limited; however, there is scholarship on social media influencers (predominantly focused on women), which emphasizes the need to achieve perceived authenticity and heightened visibility (through likes, followers, shares, comments, and so on) to succeed in the attention and affective economies of social media (Abidin, 2021; Banet-Weiser & Sturken, 2019). Although there is little research on mainstream misogyny influencers, these appeals to authenticity can be similarly observed on the manosphere. Manosphere leaders appeal to this authenticity in their emphasis on telling the "facts" or "truth." For example, Jordan Peterson became a "guru" of the manosphere through his intellectual credibility as an academic and use of "science" and evolutionary psychology to help justify misogynistic and gender essentialist philosophies (van de Ven & van Gemert, 2022). Presenting as authentic and authoritative, these manosphere influencers also play into social media's "affective economy" (Ahmed, 2004) by providing "solutions" and support for men's feelings of disenfranchisement and masculinity in crisis (Bujalka et al., 2022).

There is a growing concern that misogyny influencers such as Andrew Tate will resonate with a generation of "lost boys" (Bragg et al., 2022; Fazackerley, 2023). While empirical research on the uptake of this online misogyny among boys is lacking, there is long-standing research that highlights how boys gain homosocial currency through sharing of non-consensual images of girls, which acts as "proof" of heterosexuality, thus shoring up the boys' access to hegemonic masculinity through misogyny (Haslop & O'Rourke, 2021; Ringrose et al., 2013, 2021; Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). However, there is no current work that explores how ideas driven by misogyny influencers might also be caught up in similar homosocial dynamics and the upholding of hierarchies of hegemonic masculinity.

## Hegemonic Masculinity, Online Homosociality, and its Emotional and Affective Aspects

Connell's (1987) "hegemonic masculinity" theory has become the springboard and foundation for much work in critical masculinities studies (Haslop & O'Rourke, 2021; Jewkes et al., 2015). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the configuration of gender practice, which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 1995, p. 77). The theory is a means to analyze the attitudes and practices among men, which serve to maintain gender inequality through the domination of non-hegemonic others (including gay men, girls, women, and trans people; Jewkes et al., 2015). Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed set of traits of masculinity; it is context dependent. However, there are aspects that are common in all contexts, such as: pressure to be heterosexual; pluralistic versions of masculinity (Jewkes et al., 2015); differential access among men to power; and interactions between the way men perform masculine identity, interact (*homosociality*), and enact patriarchal power (Jewkes et al., 2015; our additions in italics).

Connell's theory has been criticized for paying too much attention to structure and being rooted in a heteronormative approach to gender and ignoring agency (Waling, 2019). It does little to capture the subjective experiences of hegemonic masculinity—what men think and feel about hegemonic or non-hegemonic masculine lives (Waling, 2019). While as Reeser (2019) highlights, in masculinity studies there is a long-standing tradition of thinking about the role of emotions as part of masculinity, the focus has been on men's limitations in feeling and expressing emotion based on Western gender norms (Seidler, 1989). Some recent scholarship has asked how affect studies can inform research about masculinities (Reeser, 2019; Reeser & Gottzén, 2018). For example, Reeser (2019) argues that affective and emotional analysis of masculinity can also help us see where normative masculinity is reified, where affect and emotion are part of the way men perform disciplined hegemonic masculinities. To Reeser's arguments about the value of affective and emotional analysis of masculinity, we would add that it has a potential to help us think about its role in the homosocial aspects of hegemonic masculinity. Homosociality—defined here as the relations and bonds between men—are where aspects of hegemonic masculinity are actively reified, resisted, or complicity agreed to (Arxer, 2011). As Kimmel (1994) has argued of homosociality:

> If masculinity is a **homosocial enactment**, its overriding emotion is **fear** [since] what we call masculinity is often a hedge against being revealed as a fraud, an exaggerated set of activities that keep others from seeing through us, and a frenzied effort to keep at bay those fears within ourselves. (pp. 129–131)

One such example is the constant pressure for men to prove their hetero virility as part of the heterosexual expectations of hegemonic masculinity. This creates competition between men, but as Sedgwick (1985) noted in her seminal work on homosociality, women as sexual objects also become a means for men to connect through a desire to (competitively)

prove their heterosexuality. In that way, fear of failing as a heterosexual hegemonic man becomes a complex affective homosocial currency between men where intimacy is created through misogyny based on the othering of women. However, there is limited research that has explored how affective aspects of homosocial relations such as these are expressed online and how they are connective and spread among younger men and boys. Or as Ahmed would have it, how emotions like fear "play a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions *homosocially* circulate between bodies and signs" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 117; our addition in italics). In her work on "affective economies," Ahmed (2004) notes that some signs, like national flags, are more affectively sticky than others because they "stick" to ideas like nationalism and "sticking together" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 130). Currently, there is little research which considers how social media influencers like Tate become, in Ahmed's language, signs that can become affectively sticky for boys and young men and how that translates into homosocial currencies which uphold and reify hegemonic masculinity.

In summary, there are some indications that misogynistic tropes of the manosphere are being mainstreamed. However, there is a dearth of research that can help us understand the increasing popularity among boys and men of a rising breed of mainstream misogyny influencers, such as Andrew Tate. More specifically, there is a gap in our empirical and theoretical understanding of the way masculinities and misogynistic hate are tied up with the emotional and affective appeal of Tate, and the way boys discuss gender through the lens of his content. In this article then, we address these gaps by looking at how Tate's content plays into the affective and attention economies of social media, but also the ways in which those economies are partially driven and supported by affective and emotional currencies of homosociality as part of hegemonic masculinity.

## Methodology

Our research approach developed iteratively after we were alerted to Andrew Tate's growing popularity through focus groups that we ran in July 2022. After attaining enhanced ethical approval, which included gaining youth and parental consent, we conducted two semi-structured focus groups, each made up of six year 9 boys, aged 13–14 from a secondary school in North London. Our focus groups were comprised of ethnically diverse participants: Group 1 included two Black, one Turkish, and two White British boys and Group 2 included two Chinese, one Indian, and two White British students. For safeguarding reasons, we did not ask the boys about their sexual or gender identity. The boys had recently taken part in workshops designed to raise their critical awareness of harmful norms of masculinity. We wanted to explore the boys' experiences of and attitudes to taking part in educational workshops about masculinity and gender equality and contextualize that into an understanding of the kinds of information they are accessing about these issues in online spaces. As such, a facilitator from the charity that led the wider educational workshops in the school joined us to provide support and continuity to the boys' experiences. The facilitator mentioned Andrew Tate's name as part of the introduction to each group and it became evident that the boys in both groups were keen to talk about his content. Two boys in Group 2 had not seen Tate's content. To ensure they could contribute to the developing discussions, we showed them a short video which was age appropriate but included a clear example of Tate's misogyny, which we later included in our analysis of Tate's content ("Andrew Tate On Being Interested In 18 Year Olds!" See Appendix 1 for full reference). Across the two groups, about half the boys had a supportive view of Tate's content, four boys did not have strong opinions either way, but still contributed to discussions about Tate, while only two boys were highly critical of his content.

We reviewed the boys' discussions about Tate using a thematic analysis technique where we searched for topics of conversation about Tate and discourses that are dominant in Tate's content such as men's victimhood. To gain a fuller understanding of online content by Tate mentioned by the boys, we analyzed Tate's online videos posted to YouTube, which is one of the most popular sites among young people for watching video content (Ofcom, 2022). We searched YouTube via Google, which allowed us to choose precise dates from 1 January 2022, to 30 June 2022, covering a recent time period that would include content the boys we interviewed would likely have viewed. That search returned to us 30 different videos that had been posted in that period (a full list of the videos and themes can be viewed in Appendix 1). We removed two videos that were clips of other longer videos already in the sample.

We took a mixed methods approach to analyzing Tate's videos. First, we conducted a basic discourse analysis using a framework adapted from Maloney et al. (2018), to become immersed in the social media content through repeated viewing before identifying dominant themes in social media videos relevant to gender and sexuality. To this approach, we added a focus on misogyny and an interest in affective-discursive perspectives (Wetherell, 2012) such as the use of shock, fear, and humor. As Shouse (2005: np) has highlighted, we should not confuse emotions with affect. In this analysis, we saw emotions as those culturally defined feelings that we understand in ourselves and express to others (Shouse, 2005: np). We follow the recent work of Reeser and Gottzén (2018) on masculinities and affect to also "understand affective masculinities as not only embodied expression regulated by gendered emotion regimes but also as the action potential of human and non-human bodies" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 149). In this way, we see affect as the way emotions such as shame and fear can be transmitted on and off social media to create non-conscious (Shouse, 2005: np) and—in

the context of men's homosociality—shared intensities of feeling. Shared affective intensities (Ringrose, 2011), which we argue, are part and parcel of heterosexualized gendered cultures and homosocial currencies that support and reify hegemonic masculinities. Once we had identified key discursive/affective themes in the data, we then conducted a basic content analysis to count the occurrence of those themes. This combination of discourse and content analysis gave us an understanding of both the relevant themes as well as their relative weightings in the data (Feltham-King & Macleod, 2016).

After we conducted our analysis of Tate's videos, we spent time going back and forth between the analysis of Tate's videos and the focus group data. We considered how the boys mobilized their knowledge of and attitudes to Tate's online content in debates about gender equality and how Tate's emotional and affective propositions play into homosocial currencies which reinforce hegemonic masculinity. By way of context, we first present an overview of our analysis of Tate's videos. We focus on the four most dominant themes and appeals to emotion/affect in his videos—a full list of the themes identified can be seen in Appendix 1. We then review the key themes of the focus groups to consider how boys discussed his content, the discourses Tate promotes and what part that played in the way they are making meaning about masculinity, gender, and gender equality. All names from the focus groups are pseudonymized and chosen by the researchers.

## Discourse/Content Analysis

### *Men are "Naturally" Dominant*

The most common discourse in the videos we reviewed was Tate's belief that men are and/or should be naturally dominant over women and other men, which brings into being the often-unsaid structuration of patriarchal power through hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) and is also a common trope of the manosphere (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022). This theme was evident in different ways in 12 of the 28 videos reviewed. For example, Tate says he would support a girlfriend who wanted an OnlyFans account, but that he would want a cut of the takings, thus suggesting he wants to be financially dominant (StandOutTV "Tate and Chian do not get along," 2022). In another video, Tate infers the dominance of men through a propensity to be violently protective, by invoking the idea that men are natural warriors who are always the ones sent to war (The Deen Show, 2022).

### *Women as Subservient and Obedient to Men*

Related to the previous theme, and the second most common in our analysis of Tate's video, is Tate's belief that women are, and should be, subservient to men. A theme in 10 of the 28 videos we reviewed and another common discourse in the manosphere (Vallerga and Zurbriggen, 2022). For example, Tate talks about the importance of women obeying men (Your Mom's House Podcast, 2022; Standout TV, 2022; The Deen Show, 2022; ViralClipz 69, 2022). He argues that one of the reasons first world Muslim countries are successful is because there is still a strong sense of "traditional" family where a woman obeys their man (The Deen Show, 2022). In another video, Tate suggests that men prefer subservient women (ViralClipz 69, 2022).

### *Weaponization and Naturalization of Gender Stereotypes*

The next most common theme in our analysis (8 of the 28 videos) was the use of regressive, sexist stereotypes about women—a misogynistic technique often used to punish women who do not conform to patriarchal norms (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022). For example, in one video, Tate promotes stereotypes of feminine passivity, subservience, and chastity (ViralClipz, 2022). While in another, he fuels outmoded claims that women are controlled by their emotions, (BFFs: Dave Portnoy, Josh Richards & Bri Chickenfry, 2022) through his claim that in a hurricane, he would prefer for his airline pilot to be a man because "males are better under stress" (BFFs: Dave Portnoy, Josh Richards & Bri Chickenfry, 2022). Some of these stereotypes echo the "evo psyche" discourses of the manosphere (Ging, 2019a, p. 649).

### *Male Victimhood and Aggrieved Masculinity*

Another common theme in many of Tate's videos (7 of 28 analyzed) is that life is harder for men than women, especially in the realms of dating and financial success. For example, he argues that it is much more difficult for men to get dates now because they must have status, wealth, charm, and friends, whereas he and his co-webcaster—Mike Thurston (2022)—both suggest women have so many more options, without defining what they are. In another clip from Tate's reality TV date with Chian, a female vodcaster, Tate suggests that most men are invisible and will be ignored or told to "f*ck off" by women in clubs (StandOutTV, 2022). In four of the videos we reviewed, Tate also draws on the analogy of "The Matrix" (based on the film of the same name, which is also heavily referenced in the Manosphere [Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 605]), to suggest that many men are unable to see the truth of the economic world they live in and that if they freed themselves from nine to five jobs they could unleash their financial potential (e.g. see CEOCAST, 2022). In this way, Tate fuels the myth that men are losers in a zero-sum gender war, aping a common discourse of a victimized and aggrieved masculinity found in the manosphere (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022; Ging, 2019a).

### Affective Analysis

Given the importance of the "emotional" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018) and "affective economies" (Ahmed, 2004) in social media and the potential for these to form part of the homosocial currencies of hegemonic masculinity, we wanted to analyze how Tate's content might play into these economies. Tate does not use facts in his content; instead, he relies on opinions that he says are "realistic." For example, when discussing his misogyny, Tate states it is not about whether he is a misogynist, but whether he is being "realistic" about gender differences (Heilpern, 2022). In doing so, Tate conveys a sense of authenticity—a lucrative currency in the affective and attention economies of social media (Abidin, 2021; Banet-Weiser & Sturken, 2019). This interpellation of "realism" and common sense is designed to create affective and emotional responses to his messaging. For example, in our analysis, we found nine videos that included offensive stereotypes of women likely to cause shock and create controversy, which Tate legitimizes through his self-declared position of realism.

Tate's ability to mobilize an affective politics of hegemonic masculinity (Ringrose et al., 2021) is also evident through another common emotional theme in his content—playing on boys and young men's fears about masculinity. This was evident in 15 of the 28 videos we analyzed. As outlined in the discursive analysis, a theme in Tate's videos is that men are being duped; that society is pulling the wool over men's eyes and if they could wake up (from "The Matrix") they could become wealthy, like Tate. Another dominant message from Tate is that men are part of a highly competitive dating marketplace and being rich is key to seducing attractive women (Mike Thurston, 2022). In this way, Tate plays on fears related to heterosexual masculinity and desirability, a well evidenced homosocial pressure of hegemonic masculinity for boys and young men (Ringrose et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021).

In seven of the videos we reviewed, Tate also invoked the potential of happiness or fulfillment to provide hope. For example, in two videos, Tate talks about his belief that many of us are being duped into believing that money will not make us happy; he concludes by saying his viewers can become rich, but they have to change their mind-set and work hard (Andrew Tate, 2022; Mike Thurston 2022). In this way, he takes the viewer on a journey where their constructed fears are able to be mitigated through the hope of learning; Tate offers just such a solution through his so-called entrepreneurial training program—"Hustler's University." This creation of need by playing on men's insecurities is a strategy also invoked by influencers of the manosphere who create "symbiotic cycles of ontological security and insecurity through the YouTube and social media content they produce" (Bujalka et al., 2022, p. 2). Tate's strategy to play on emotional and affective homosocial currencies that feed into hegemonic masculinity resonated with the ways some of the boys we spoke to reacted to Tate's content and discussions about gender equality, which we will now explore in the next section of this article.

### Focus Group Thematic Analysis

In what follows, we explore the key themes that emerged from the analysis of our focus groups. The themes we explore are: Tate as an authentic and reasonable voice; Gender (un)fairness; and Tate's performance and "humour" as homosocial currencies.

### Tate as an "Authentic" and "Reasonable" Voice

While Tate came up in discussions in different ways during the group, a prominent discourse was admiration for him as a man of authenticity. In Group 1, several boys were quick to conceptualize Tate in this way.

> Saad: I don't mind him. I mean, like just he's a cool person. He's doing what he's doing. That's why I feel like he's getting the views because he doesn't care about the response. He will just keep on doing what he does.

In the above quote, Saad highlights that he admires Tate's ability to stand up for his own beliefs in an authentic way, noting—"he doesn't care about the response." As well as reflecting the narrative that Tate portrays of himself as a "warrior" (The Deen Show, 2022), this belief about Tate's bravery aligns with "traditional" norms of masculinity and with Tate's own desire to be seen as an alpha male.

While some of the boys such as Tom were keen to highlight that they did not agree with all of Tate's content, they still saw Tate as a voice of reason in debates about gender fairness:

> Tom: So, he says that if a man is working and a woman doesn't work, then the woman should do the housework and cook for the man. I somehow agree with that only if the woman hasn't got a job and the man is paying for ev- . . . because if you're supplying them with everything, then they should at least like make sure you're in good health and clean.

Here Tom suggests that if a man is "supplying her with everything" a woman should not only be subservient, but even take on a man's health as her own responsibility. In this way, Tate's content is used as a platform to reiterate a broader discourse of aggrieved entitlement—an affective-discursive response to women's gains in gender equality (Kimmel, 2017), and a theme which our content analysis shows Tate promotes. The perception of Tate as a voice of reason on gender equality, aligns with how Tate positions himself as a

"realist" about issues of gender. For many of the boys we met, Tate's messaging that men are somehow victims as part of increasing gender equality was reflected in other conversations we had with the boys.

## *Gender (Un)Fairness and Men's Victimhood*

A pervasive discourse that emerged across several topics in both groups, especially Group 1, was that gender equality and inclusivity agendas are unfair to men. For example, during the focus groups, we revisited an exercise from the masculinity workshop that was about gender stereotypes and was designed to find out what words the boys associated to being a man or a woman and promote discussion about whether stereotypes such as women being more caring or men being stronger were fair or useful. We were interested to find out what the boys thought about the exercise. One boy was quick to answer:

Ramon: I think . . . you shouldn't encourage any of them (*gender stereotypes*) because if, if you . . . oh, if you really want to do what you want, then they should be natural. Like . . . if you're trying to mould people into something that they're not naturally then, like it's not really their choice.

Here, for Ramon, gender inclusive and equitable pedagogies in schools were linked with being forceful in regulating boys' gender and sexuality against "natural" biological instincts. In this way, the respondent reiterates a regressive model of traditional hegemonic masculinity that assumes men are not only heterosexual but also cis-gendered (Moloney and Love, 2018). This discourse echoes the ideas of biological essentialism of evolutionary psychology, which are prominent in the manosphere (Van Valkenburgh, 2021) and play an integral part of Tate's content as demonstrated in our analysis.

While these attitudes suggest that the pressures of cis-gendered heterosexuality remain central to hegemonic masculinity for boys (Ringrose et al., 2021), they are also indicative of another discourse that was evident across both groups—the fear that heterosexual men and boys are losing out to gender inclusive and equality initiatives. A theme we also noted in Tate's content, and which unites the different communities of the manosphere (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022; Ging, 2019a). Masculinist feelings of unfairness and further evidence of "backlash" (Pease, 2020) against gender equality were evident when the participants in Group 1 raised the example of women's football when discussing gender equality.

Tom: I mean, some . . . you know, some people who want equal rights, personally, I think they want more rights . . . like women football players want the same pay as men players. But it's . . . if . . . I mean, they don't get more money. They don't get enough money because I think that they don't play as well as men play because men players . . . have been playing for around, I don't know, years and years and years.

This conception that women want more than they deserve, echoes a common trope of anti-feminism present in the manosphere; the conception of gender equality as a zero-sum game, which men are losing if women gain fair payment or treatment (Ging & Siapera, 2019). It highlights the possibility for Tate and other influencers to play on boy's fears about their place in that zero-sum game.

## *Tate's Performance and Humor as Homosocial Currency*

Several boys excused Tate's use of misogynistic stereotypes by highlighting that Tate was trying to make money from the content or that his online content is part of projecting a persona. One boy in Group 2 seemed to be more knowledgeable about Tate's business affairs than others:

Arthur: He is putting on an act because what he does as a living . . . one of the ways that he does make money is through selling a course on business. And so, I think what he is doing is that he is getting this all out there and making him really famous and you know making it really funny because some of the things he says are quite comical.

On one hand, this participant highlights that he does not take Tate seriously because he is "putting on an act"; however, there is still a suggestion that the participant enjoys Tate's content when he asserts "some of the things he says are quite comical." There is a considerable amount of scholarship in critical masculinity studies, which has highlighted that humor is a potent homosocial currency for boys and men (Ringrose et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021) and is often used to dismiss misogyny or sexual harassment as "just banter" (Ringrose et al., 2021). This participant's assertion that Tate is "really funny" highlights how humor can translate into a homosocial currency for boys. Given the evidential potency for Tate's content to create homosocial currency for boys through humor, it is worth unpacking the forms of humor used more carefully.

Tate's content is not comedic in a traditional sense—it does not turn on slapstick, jokes, or situational humor. Indeed, it is difficult to know the extent to which Tate intends his content to be funny. Nevertheless, as several of the boys in our focus groups noted, Tate's content verges on the surreal; we are left wondering how seriously we should take him. In that sense, some of the boys saw Tate's content as a "wind-up"; a potent form of humor in masculinized cultures that is tied up with homosocial currencies of hegemonic

masculinity. Studies have shown that boys and men must be able to "take it" if someone is teasing them; if they cannot identify a wind-up or take it too seriously, other boys and men will ridicule them for it (Odenbring & Johansson, 2021). In other words, humor becomes part of a competitive dynamic to see who can identify the joke and suppress their emotions about being teased, which feeds into hegemonic structures of masculinity. In this way, Tate's content partly appeals to some boys through homosocial currencies of humor because they see he likes to goad and tease his audiences.

Alongside Tate's embodiment of a wind-up, there is also the use of shock and cringe in Tate's content, as one participant in Group 1 noted:

Andrew: A part of why people think he is funny is it could be memes and like modern media . . . so like things like shock value you know they aren't really hilarious after like you seeing it once or twice and certainly, they become hilarious like absolutely hilarious when you see them thousands and thousands and thousands times. So . . . there's initial shock value, this initial cringe and like it's so cringe that it becomes funny.

As the above quotes suggest, Tate's content operates in a particular affective dimension, which resonates with a digital generation who thrive on "cringe" content on social media (Carlquist et al., 2019). For example, Tate's comments about women's ability to pilot aircraft seem shocking, but that transgression also has an appeal to some boys who enjoy the rough and tumble of shock humor as it pertains to a competitive ability to endure as part of the structures of hegemonic masculinity. Tate's persona and content then, in some ways, work as "lad's banter," which has long been shown to use jokes, humor, and ridicule as an excuse to mobilize or be complicit in sexism and misogyny (Phipps & Young, 2015). In this way, Tate's content appeals to some boy's sense of humor, which gives it a gendered affective "stickiness" (Ahmed, 2004).

## Conclusion

In this article, we first distilled key themes of misogyny and hegemonic masculinity running through Andrew Tate's online video content. Much of Tate's material brings to life and popularizes ideas of the manosphere, including sexist misogyny rooted in ideas of gender conservative evolutionary psychology. Meanwhile, Tate eulogizes men that fight, build, go to war; for Tate, action is getting up, working out, setting up a business. In this way, Tate brings the hateful ideologies of the manosphere to men who are aspirational. Tate plays on boys and men's concerns about their financial futures that are already exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, the current cost of living crisis and fears about the capacity of rapidly developing artificial intelligence (AI) technology to eat into availability of jobs; worries that are especially acute for working class or potentially blue-collar audiences who might already be concerned about their economic outlook.

Tate's interest in men's financial insecurities is inextricably linked to an interest in their place in hegemonic masculinity. For Tate, having wealth helps you become alpha and that gives you access to commodities, including heterosexual sex, which is why women are positioned repeatedly as subservient objects that can be owned and therefore dominated. Like many of the more niche manosphere influencers whom Tate apes, he trades in men's fears about their place in the order of hegemonic masculinity, with men's ability to constantly prove their heterosexuality and dominance over women as tests of their place in that hierarchy (Bujalka et al., 2022; Jewkes et al., 2015).

By combining an analysis of Tate's influencer content and our focus group discussions with boys, we were able to show how Tate uses the affective and attention economies of social media—namely, Tate creates sticky (Ahmed, 2004) gendered homosocial currencies. Outdated, extreme sexist stereotypes were a common theme of Tate's videos. Making an assertion that women are unable to pilot aircraft will get attention on social media simply because it is so outlandish. In this way, while Tate's content promotes sexism and misogyny, it also peddles in the creation of shock and anger; affective strategies of transgression that have been found to work particularly well in the algorithmic structures of social media (Deem, 2019). Indeed, even those who did not agree with Tate's views, acknowledged that his mode of engagement through his (potentially) exaggerated on-screen persona is entertaining, in some cases creating watchability and visibility simply by virtue of being outrageous. Tate's ability to play on boy's fears about their place in a concocted gender war by positioning himself as an 'authentic' voice of 'realism', and to appeal to boy's interest in shock, cringe, and banter humor, are potent forms of online homosocial currency which can be routes to making Tate's misogyny seem more acceptable.

Theoretically, our article adds new perspectives on the limited work about how affect and emotion become currencies in the homosocial scaffolding of hegemonic masculinity. We have brought thinking about how humor and banter operate as homosocial currencies together with affect theory to highlight how social media "stickiness" can be gendered and caught up in the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity through misogynistic content. Moreover, we have noted the ways Tate uses fear, then hope, as affective weapons which tie together and reify capitalistic and traditional models of hegemonic masculinity. Tate's content and business ventures become solutions, ostensibly ameliorating boy's anxieties about their future economic and social status as men.

Tate's popularity among boys and young men has prompted the media, parents, and those in the education

sectors to ask how we can help improve young people's, especially boy's, critical awareness of Tate's misogyny and harmful version of masculinity. Our study (albeit limited in scope) suggests that boys' interest in Tate partly turns on his "maverick" status. Like Donald Trump (Bostdorff, 2023), Tate peddles in victim discourses. Attacking Tate's views and messages is likely to be counter-productive, potentially adding fuel to the fire of the maverick and victim identities he, and other manosphere influencers, like to foster. Instead, we argue that we should offer young people critical education, which offers positive alternative versions of masculinity and highlights the damage that harmful aspects of hegemonic masculinity can do to cisgender heterosexual boys and men, girls, women, and LGBTQ+people. Moreover, current relationships and sex education in UK schools does little to teach young people digital literacy or the perils of disinformation (Polizzi & Taylor, 2019). So much of how Tate promotes misogyny and harmful models of masculinity are tied up with the economies of social media and how volume or intensity can stand in for facts in our post-truth society (Ringrose, 2018). Helping young people understand how misogyny influencers operate and profit through their content and how they propagate forms of gendered and sexual disinformation can help undermine their business models which are built on the spread of hate.

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## Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

## Note

1. It is important to note that only subsections of geek and gamer culture are active in the manosphere and even in that subsection there are "important communicative and ideological differences" (Ging, 2019a, p. 644).

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