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ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cafs20

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To cite this article: Georgia Thomas-Parr & Marcus Gilroy-Ware (07 Feb 2025): Im/Perceptible Boyhood in a Post-Andrew Tate World, Australian Feminist Studies, DOI: 10.1080/08164649.2025.2460822

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2025.2460822

Published online: 07 Feb 2025.

AUSTRALIAN FEMINIST STUDIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2025.2460822

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Im/Perceptible Boyhood in a Post-Andrew Tate World

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how boyhood is rendered im/perceptible via the infamous social media influencer Andrew Tate, in response to testimonies of teachers that attest to his influence on boys' adoption of misogynistic, anti-feminist and sexist behaviour. Alongside the assemblage of discourses about Tate, we examine videos featuring him on the social network, a TikTok. Somewhat in contrast to the prevailing narrative that Tate's influence on and appeal to boys is confined to misogyny, much of the content featuring him centred on narratives of self-improvement, mental health, resilience and upward mobility. Negative framings or outright degradation of women – while present in some content – appeared within a much wider context in which factors ranging from highly neoliberal aspiration, harshly conservative and traditional gender roles for men and women, pseudoscientific claims about evolutionary biology and extravagant consumerist lifestyles were presented as a single belief system. We conclude that the cultural individualism encouraged and exacerbated by neoliberalism in the English-speaking developed world act as a key element in the life of boys and young men anticipating their transition to adulthood, raising questions for the opportunities that this case may offer for the development of forms of feminism that include boys.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 22 January 2024
Accepted 26 January 2025

KEYWORDS
Andrew Tate; TikTok; social media; boys; radical influencers; teen

Prelude

One Saturday in an English supermarket, a tween boy clutches five bottles to his chest. Their striking colours illuminate their bold name: 'Prime'. He stands in front of his parents, who exchange glances dubiously. The father shrugs and, before he can reconsider, the boy plunges each bottle into the trolley. This scene, witnessed by one of the authors, is a clue as to the tween/adolescent boy as the current focus of fear of, and fascination with, the pressures exacerbated by what he encounters on the internet.

We highlight Prime, although it may seem tangential to our article's central issue, precisely because it is a perfect example of the nexus of boyhood, masculinity, consumerism and internet-driven visibility that we wish to address, and signals an important

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turn in both the lived experiences and the media representation of adolescent boys and the content with which they engage. The soft drink, which emerged in British supermarkets in 2022, grew out of a remarkable combination of social media influence, masculine anxieties concerning the body, and the audacious, perhaps even cynical forms of entrepreneurship that influencers wield with their audiences, including boys (Parks, Russo, and Simon 2021). It emerged from a collaboration between two social media influencers, KSI and Logan Paul, following their 2018 pay-per-view boxing match against each other, billed as 'one of the biggest internet events in history' (Butler 2022), and was a commercial hit in anglophone countries, especially the UK, with 'excited' schoolboys apparently fighting over it (Wollaston 2023). Having been associated with these influencers-turned-boxers as its ostensible inventors, Prime's advertised active ingredients – Vitamin A, coconut water and amino acids – implied that it would promote muscle-growth, thus leading to success in fighting competitions (Paul 2022; Wilson 2023). Although this type of gendered consumerism is not new, and exemplifies longstanding associations between masculinity, athletics and the body, Prime's popularity demonstrated newer forms of marketing that utilised not only highly gendered views of selfhood and the body, but also the role of social media influence (Rohde and Mau 2021). It also suggests a resurgent 'boxerification' of masculinity that, in reaction against prior feminist discourses that sought to challenge physical confrontation as a key part of masculinity, re-normalises it as part of a highly individualised, neoliberal hierarchy of 'Alpha Male' adulthood. In the case of Prime's arrival, although its brightly-coloured bottles remain highly visible in the British shopping experience, boyhood became at once more perceptible via the discourses around a consumerism aimed at the insecurities of boys, and less so, in so far as the forms of masculinity that give Prime its appeal, such as the promise of muscular gains, entail the *erasure* of boyhood. Prime therefore serves as an invaluable reminder of an im/perceptible boyhood that, as we will show, manifests both offline and in online spaces. It is in exactly this context that we analyse another kickboxer-turned-influencer whose (social) media visibility reveals a spectre of boyhood: Andrew Tate.

Andrew Tate and Im/Perceptible Boyhood

> I have a very flashy, teenage boy's dream of a life (Tate, in: Channel 4 2024)

In recent years, Andrew Tate has come to be widely known as an unapologetically misogynistic influencer and even as the 'king of toxic masculinity' (Fazackerley 2023b). His overriding public reputation consists both of his alleged abuses towards women offline and of his flagrant statements about, and exploitation of, women through digital technologies. His views generally consist of a combination of highly regressive gender politics composed of gendered traditionalism, outright misogyny, digitally enabled entrepreneurship, and a somewhat libertarian individualism. Tate runs a monthly paid-subscription website, aimed at men, where he divulges methods for self-enrichment, which journalistic and criminal investigations have revealed to entail coercion of 'girlfriends' to earn money for him via pornographic webcam work (Mathers and McCarthy 2023; Dickson 2022; Safer Schools 2023). In the documentaries, *The Dangerous Rise of Andrew Tate* (BBC 2023), and *I am Andrew Tate* (Channel 4 2024), numerous women's anonymised testimonies attest to

the psychological, physical and sexual abuse perpetrated against them by Tate. At the time of writing, Tate is awaiting trial for multiple crimes including rape and people trafficking, but has been released from house arrest and allowed by the Romanian courts to travel freely within the EU. He vehemently denies any wrongdoing, and casts attempts to prosecute him as politically motivated attempts to suppress him.

Prior to his being removed from social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram in 2022 over concerns about his extreme views (Holpuch 2022), Tate reportedly had over 11 billion views on TikTok, 4 million followers on Twitter (now known as X), 4.6 million followers on Instagram and more than 740,000 followers on YouTube (Safer Schools 2023; Dickson 2022). Although Tate was later readmitted (as 'Cobratate') to X by Elon Musk, his voice continues to be disseminated despite his initial exile from that platform and enduring absence from others, by an unending supply of videos edited together from interviews or podcasts where he appeared and distributed by unofficial fan accounts, financially incentivised by a 49% commission rate by Tate's online subscription businesses.

In this paper, we consider Tate's activities, supporters, detractors, infamy, controversy and overall position in the cultural landscape and attention economy as a complex, irreducible assemblage which we refer to as the 'Andrew Tate problem', a concerning symptom the present conjuncture, with which feminism must contend. Our writing on this topic begins with media discussion surrounding Tate which, at first glance, appears to make him visible precisely due to his proximity to, and influence over boys. Recent media discussion is concerned with Tate's sexist radicalisation of boys in schools, where it is reported that there has consequently been a 'shocking growth of misogyny' (Fazackerley 2023b; Wescott, Roberts, and Zhao 2023; Channel 4). In some cases, this development is attributed to an absence of 'positive male role models' (Tarrant et al. 2015, 61; Grant 2023). These discourses, as we will show, are part of a paradoxical im/perceptible boyhood in which the figure of the boy is both emphasised and anonymous; both dangerous and passive. The following examples, taken from newspapers in 2023, all illustrate how boys have been placed at the centre of the discourse: '"Vulnerable boys are drawn in": Schools Fear Spread of Andrew Tate's Misogyny' (Fazackerley 2023a); 'Young Men are in Crisis and Nobody Seems to Care' (Grant 2023); 'I Fear Online Influencer Radicalised My Son' (BBC 2022); 'The Toxic "Alpha Males" Turning Britain's Teenage Boys Against Women' (Stokel-Walker 2023); 'Boys at Yorkshire Schools Idolising Misogynist Andrew Tate Warn Headteachers as They Take Drastic Action' (Robinson 2023). This coverage can also be interpreted within a larger discourse about how education, society and feminism are failing boys and men (Reeves 2022; Kimmel 2009), while simultaneously reflecting an anxiety that feminism is being 'undone' by radical influencers like Tate.

The above headlines are mostly rooted in the everyday observations, experiences and practices of teachers in the classroom, which is inevitably a pressing feminist concern in itself (Wescott, Roberts, and Zhao 2023). However, we are curious to consider both the reality and the symbolism of the boy's development in the cultural and biopolitical environment that has emerged since the newer male insecurities attributed to the #MeToo movements, and even moreso since the Covid pandemic 'locked down' the world, and – at least temporarily – put us at the mercy of screens and their content (Salway et al. 2023).

While wishing to avoid the 'false equivalency' (Laurie et al. 2021) that may be implied by relating theories of girlhood to boyhood, we argue it is useful to consider the

similarities between the contemporary boy in these discourses and the moral panics surrounding girlhood in the 1990s (Gonick 2006), when girls were caught between 'Girl Power' and an 'at-risk' vulnerability as part of coming-of-age processes that girls faced at that time. The 'Andrew Tate problem' involves similar framings of boyhood, in which recent discussion of Tate's impact, as summarised above, has suggested a growing concern about the anti-feminist/misogynistic potential of the boy figure under the influence of internet media. In the midst of these narratives, the position of boys is concerning: masculinised children in a pornified internet-sphere, subject to the compound injury of neoliberal subjecthood, regressive gender politics and contemporary manifestations of feminism. Other issues in the headlines such as knife crime among boys between the ages of 15 and 17 also reflect a growing concern about boys (e.g. Badshah 2024). There is thus a tension of visibilities regarding boyhood, caught between the anonymised spectre of boyhood online (as Tate's followers and generators of content) and the hypervisible 'at-risk'/threat of boys in media discussion of Tate's effects.

It is in this context that we set out our core enquiry: to observe how a subjective experience of Tate's persona from the perspective of an actively participating young male online audience may contrast with the aforesaid discourses surrounding Tate and boyhood in the (British) news. In writing this article, it is important to us to make clear that in choosing to focus on Tate's online persona, as (re)constructed via videos of him posted on TikTok, we do not overlook the troubling accounts of women who came forward with reports of his sexual, physical and emotional abuse towards them, nor his sexist and often ultra-conservative views generally. Nor is it our intention here to suggest that the media discourse surrounding Tate is a form of moral panic, ventured without empirical basis. Rather, we see considerable value in this enquiry though demonstrating potential for feminist critiques and interventions benefitting boys to be developed around Tate and the nexus of gender, reactionary politics and contemporary neoliberalism that he represents. Accordingly, our discussion aims to provide new insight to complement the existing journalistic and scholarly discussion of teachers' experiences of the rise in performative misogyny and sexism by boys in the classroom under Tate's ostensible influence, by examining the means by which this influence is said to be effected.

Andrew Tate and Fratriarchal Neoliberalism

We emphasise the neoliberal elements of this overall problematic for a few reasons. Firstly, as we will show below, our data overwhelmingly suggest this connection. Secondly, there is valuable prior scholarship linking the hegemonic role of neoliberal subjecthood and its cultures with gender performativity: a kernel that informs neoliberal (post)feminism and its reactionary counterpart (Banet-Weiser 2023, McRobbie2015). Although beyond the scope of this article, it is likely that the vast majority of young people face some version of this confusing array of pressures, regardless of their gender, even if it is often framed very much through gender, almost as a rite of passage in neoliberal fantasies of self-actualisation. More recently, online influencers have offered younger users the false promise of empowerment precisely through

coming of age in the 'right' ways, which are both highly gendered and informed by neoliberal hegemony (Camacho-Miñano, MacIsaac, and Rich 2019).

Banet-Weiser's observations of 'popular misogyny', which she characterises as fundamentally 'reactive' against the shaping of culture by 'popular feminism', are especially pertinent here (2023 and 2018). Aside from their superficial contradictions, these phenomena share important underlying similarities, including the same neoliberal roots. Both are also reactive to particular framings of perceived injustice, shaped by neoliberal frameworks, and both centre on anomalous 'individuals, not collectivities or structural issues' (Banet-Weiser 2023, n.p). Opportunities for surmounting popular feminism and popular misogyny – and finding movement towards meaningful structural equality – can be located in recognising these fundamental similarities in the context of neoliberal, capitalist logic. Their relationship goes beyond mere similarities or common origins however. They also remain dialogically intertwined, each providing the fuel for the other. While girls and women might use popular feminism to engage with discourses of self-making and empowerment founded on capitalist ideals such as economic success, popular misogyny seems to manifest via 'a crisis that is often blamed on those same empowered entrepreneurial women, as well as on global economic recession' (Banet-Weiser 2023). In the present context, Tate's own narratives offer a case study of this phenomenon, appearing to rise to the challenge of any assumed emasculation posed by popular feminism. Indeed, it is clear that Tate symbolises a means by which boys and men can demonstrate their individual capacities via the same means visible in popular feminism: empowerment and self-esteem constructed through consumerism, 'working' on the body, and entrepreneurial upward mobility.

Predictably, Tate's rhetoric ignores other masculinities, including genderfluid and trans masculinities to construct a homogeneous, monolithic vision of 'king' masculinity. Yet he is plainly a figure to whom Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity is particularly applicable, drawing on a hierarchy of power that gains its legitimacy through forms of exclusion, elitism and subordination via 'femmephobic' (Hoskin 2019) and androcentric ideologies. Indeed, the competitive and hierarchical selection of (and collective consenting to) those esteemed by hegemonic masculinity aligns itself with the similarly selective competitiveness espoused via neoliberal ideologies. However, in contrast to common discourses of feminist history in relation to male dominance, we wish to highlight Tate's rise to popularity among boys as being rooted in what we observe as a 'fratriarchy'. That is, whereas 'patriarchy' properly means the rule of elder men or *fathers*, we see *brotherhood* as a more valuable and appropriate lens through which to understand the power afforded to men in contemporary neoliberal societies, which operates and is perpetuated through, the protection of (and competition between) its male members. As we will discuss, Tate operates very much as an older brother who offers mentorship and 'tough love' to boys and young men, generally shaped by discourses of 'being a man', power and capital accumulation. The lens of brotherhood rather than empowered fatherhood also captures better the evident (false) sense of insurgency in reactionary subjectivity where dominant societal forces perceive themselves as oppressed, which Banet-Weiser terms the 'funhouse mirror' and which we think of as 'imaginary victimhood'. In places, including in our data below, Tate's utterances entail explicit mentions of 'brothers' and 'brotherhood', as well as a more implicit use of register and tone that is more brother-like than

father-like, both appearing ostensibly in reaction to a perceived threat of 'sisterhood', claimed by neoliberal feminism. Alongside this fraternal mode, he also frequently evokes an insurgent mode – framing men as disempowered victims, sometimes in relation to terms such as 'the matrix', 'toxic masculinity', 'rape culture' and competing hashtags such as #notallmen, #yesallwomen and so on.

Framed then as a fratriarchal phenomenon of surrogate brotherhood, bound together (particularly online) by pseudo-insurgent popular misogyny and gendered neoliberal subjecthood, analysis of the 'Andrew Tate problem' offers an opportunity to direct our conversations with boys to focus on structural issues as opposed to what has become simplified via mainstream discursive parameters. Tate has risen to prominence according to the contours of this specific gender politics, and it is in precisely this climate that, alligned with Driscoll et al. (2022), an affirmative feminism of boyhood can search for new means of empowering boys, beyond the hegemonic structures we have described.

Masculinity, Boyhood and Erasure

Under conditions in which manliness has long been equated with capital and value, and thus in which boyhood is presented as a temporary phase of disempowerment, it should be no surprise that boys might seek 'solutions' to erase their boyhood, as implied in the earlier example of the soft drink, Prime. Indeed, the psychoanalyst Miles Groth asks, 'What happens to the boy he has been when a male is compelled to become a man?' (2007, 7). Where boyhood is an 'emasculated', unvalued, subordinated status, the premature erasure of boyhood is rendered desirable: boys anticipating adulthood and wanting to feel powerful or valued may turn to certain figures and objects as a means of escaping boyhood, moving instead into a culturally-esteemed manhood. This self-erasure is an essential element of hegemonic masculinity itself, but also of the paradoxical visibility and imperceptibility of boyhood that we identify. Boys exist in a world that, through language at least, actively wills their erasure – or rather, wills their *becoming* into men. Figures, such as Tate, who purport to be the supreme arbiters on what constitutes (and does not constitute) manliness capitalise (quite literally) on these conditions, dictating in stark terms how boys can erase aspects of their own boyhood unwanted by neoliberal fratriarchy, and anticipate manhood instead.

Importantly however, we should recall that the ideologies and tone of Tate's online presence do not in fact accord with boys' entire lived experience. The im/perceptible boy we highlight traverses a range of potential contexts, and we support the contention that 'boyhood is not fixed, unitary and stable. Rather, boyhoods are multiple, plural, fluid and changing' (Equimundo 2022, 11). Engaging with Tate's content online may form a means of engaging with, and performing, dominant masculinities within a wider spectrum of ambivalences and 'nuanced performances of masculinities' that are 'contextualised to time and place. Boys can practise dominant, subordinate, personalised, caring masculinities all in one day, in different places at different times' (Jon Swain in Equimundo 2022, 11).

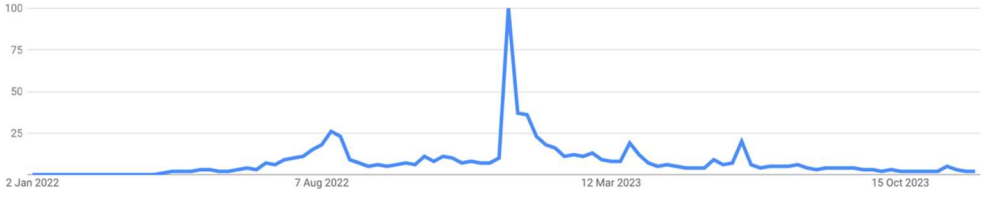
Groth observes that 'only angry, potentially destructive boys are talked about with any real interest, evidently because they anticipate the appearance of the hegemonic, domineering, aggressive male' (2007, 8). Indeed, boys are made most visible in terms of their vulnerability and its relationship to traditional adult masculinity (such as physical

violence, professional athletics, misogyny), as recent media focus on Prime's and Tate's boyhood audiences shows. Boyhood becomes perceptible, in other words, when it is linked to problematic aspects of adult male behaviour. Meanwhile, elements of boyhood that challenge an adult-centric view of hegemonic masculinity are overlooked or punished rather than celebrated. That is, insofar as boys do not conform to prevailing ideals of manhood-as-masculinity, their experiences are rendered imperceptible, since this erasure is amenable to an enduring, hegemonic centring of adult male features and subjectivities – whether valorised, stigmatised or both simultaneously. Emasculated boyhood, and other forms of boyhood that appear to contradict these hegemonic emphases on adult masculinity, are increasingly stifled in adolescence, and the adolescent boy exists on a curious precipice of possibility between the enabling and undoing of patriarchy; between regression and emancipation; between visibility and invisibility. Just as the girl, in her liminal-symbolic state, might offer the means of slipping between hegemonic structures (Deleuze and Guattari 1978), so too might the un-manly boy, emasculated and imperceptible, entail a potential to trouble hegemonic man-centred ideals of masculinity. Outside of the shadow of manhood, the boy understood more holistically becomes aligned with the girl in so far as he may be able to 'slip in everywhere between orders, acts, ages and sexes' (1978, 276).

As Driscoll and Grealy propose, an affirmative feminist boys' studies therefore needs to consider the 'everydayness of boys' gendered experiences, including both where they engage with and where they avoid ideas about ideal masculinity' (2022, 17–18), recognising that expectations and crises surrounding boyhood are not solely determined by feminism but by a much broader array of factors (not least the forms assumed by capitalism at this conjuncture). Until more of this work has been done and brought to boys however, a vacuum remains which makes Tate's and others' rise to visibility almost inevitable.

Boyhood and the 'Manosphere'

As a result of Tate's followers continually re-posting his content, Tate became hypervisible on social media platforms such as TikTok. Media coverage observed that, in July 2022, Tate had been Googled more than Donald Trump (Das 2022). In that year, interest in Tate appeared to spike between July and September, and in December, coinciding with when British school holidays fall, and thus when teenage boys may have more screen time to search for, view, edit and disseminate Tate's content.[1]



Google searches for Andrew Tate since 01 Jan 2022.

Meanwhile, boys and young men became im/perceptible in the sense that they were simultaneously concealed through their online anonymity, and revealed both by their

active contribution to Tate's hypervisibility, and their stated vulnerability to it. The 'Andrew Tate problem' thus brings to the foreground issues pertaining to boys at a moment in history when internet connections and smartphones are commonplace, internet platforms are rarely held accountable, and concerns persist about boys' exposure to online pornography and its relation to 'rape culture' (Gottzén 2023). Indeed, Tate must inevitably be situated within a longstanding techno-cultural context of prolific and vitriolic online misogyny (Poland 2016), an overall connection between misogynistic subcultures and reactionary politics that has been well established (Nagle 2017; Ging 2019). The 'manosphere' – defined as 'a group of loosely incorporated websites and social media communities where men's perspectives, needs, gripes, frustrations and desires are explicitly explored' (Farrell et al. 2019, 87). Amidst a 'masculinity in crisis' (Riley et al. 2023), it becomes a means by which internet platforms provide fora in which boys' and young men's feelings of being neglected and overlooked, and uncertainties about conflicting notions of consent and masculinity in a post-#MeToo world are can be expressed to near-universally sympathetic reception, without significant moderation, intervention or accountability. Although, theories of 'filter bubbles' have tended to be exaggerated (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. 2016) they have been observed in relatively extreme, reactionary political contexts (Bruns 2019). Consequently, misogynist and sexist ideals such as the retraditionalisation of gender can remain unchallenged and become more concentrated, illustrated by examples such the 'Gamergate' incident in summer 2014. In the present case, similar self-reinforcing patterns likely underly Tate's appeal (Setty 2023), and in fact the 'Andrew Tate problem' arguably highlights the shifting forms through which the platformisation and surveillance capitalism embodied in Meta (owner of Instagram) and ByteDance (owner of TikTok) exacerbate these longstanding discursive features of the 'manosphere'.

Boys, however, are sometimes overlooked in such studies. Even the name and concept of the 'manosphere' ostensibly omits them. Yet the boys who we know have found resonance with these areas remind us that their relationship to internet-mediated male angst should not be so easily ignored. When boys do enter the discourse, as Bailey Poland observes, teenage boyhood is frequently implicated in stereotypes of the online 'troll' who engages in inflammatory behaviour online and gains pleasure from the ability to disrupt, offend, gain attention, and incite anger: 'a bored, angry teenage boy, hiding in his parents' basement' where 'trolling' 'is the act of a child, someone who clearly doesn't mean the things posted online … it is no more than adolescent angst spread across the Internet' (2016, 25). Previous accounts of online forums where misogyny is common have suggested a deeply nihilistic aversion to expressing any thought grounded in principles, ambitions, or morals. For example, Dale Beran (2019) has suggested that sincerity is read as weakness, and accordingly, everything is 'for the lulz'. Similarly, Kimmel (2009) has observed that boys' 'seeming indifference [to academic success] is actually a badge of masculinity. Caring too much—about school, about relationships—may be seen as emasculating'. Accordingly, one interesting shift that the 'Andrew Tate Problem' represents is that he gives boys something to (safely) care about according to the traditional tropes of masculinity wrapped in shiny contemporary forms: their wealth, as cryptocurrencies and luxury cars, their bodies and physical toughness through MMA or kickboxing and weightlifting, and their sexual imaginaries through pornographic platforms.

In response to the rise of influencers who espouse misogynistic ideals, there have been a number of toolkits and websites formed: the Global Boyhood Initiative's 'How to talk to kids about radical influencers' (Equimondo 2022); Safer Schools (2023), and; the Centre for Countering Digital Hate (henceforth 'CCDH' 2023). Nonetheless, more research needs to be done that centres boys and their experiences on the internet and social media, which is comparatively lesser than those of girls, although studies are increasing (Meehan 2023; Gottzén 2023; Goodyear and Quennerstedt 2020). With this ambition in mind, this article suggests varying layers of im/perceptible boyhood in response to the spectacle of the Andrew Tate Problem, including his mediation by his own financially-incentivised male fans on TikTok. The first layer relates to the news reportage and empirical instances of teachers sharing their experiences in the classroom of boys and Tate (e.g. Fazackerley 2023a; Setty 2023). As we have shown, boyhood becomes perceptible via discourses of fear through the media, yet imperceptible in the sense that testimonies by the boys themselves are rare (admittedly something that we also fail to represent here). In the second layer, we observe a spectre of boyhood in the online activity entailed in viewing and posting Tate's content. For example, The Independent newspaper reported, 'eight in ten teenage boys watched Tate's content, citing a report that found 47 videos on YouTube depicting Tate's advocacy of 'extreme misogyny' (Oppenheim 2023; CCDH 2023). This media reportage of boys' engagement with Tate online frames our understandings of the im/perceptible boyhood that slips between the different Tate-related contexts. We direct our attention to this phenomenon for the remainder of this article, in light of an initial survey of the platform TikTok we outline shortly. From this, we observe a third layer of im/perceptible boyhood: although he presents himself as the supreme arbiter of who is and is not a man, there are moments when the spectre of boyhood flickers through Tate's mask. In him, the boy is 'psychologically alive, although hidden' (Groth 2007, 6).

Methods

Our object of study in this paper, within the overall 'Andrew Tate Problem' is the way that Tate has been actively (re)constituted, (re)distributed and (re)encountered via third-party videos of him on TikTok. We consider the potential of an imagined boy TikTok user who consumes, and possibly also edits and disseminates Tate's content.

In light of the view of media representation concerning boys who admire Tate, we have approached this initial survey as a means of generating questions regarding the feminist implications of Tate's popularity based on the content with which we were met from the assumed position of inquisitive, curious boyhood via a single TikTok account registered from within the UK. While other methodologies may be more exhaustive in their approach (see Farrell et al. 2019; Bartlett et al. 2014), our aim here has been to provide grounds for future study to gain a sense of what this content means to and for boys on social media. Here we created a new TikTok account with no email address or other personal details common to prior accounts. We entered the word 'andrew' into TikTok's search bar as though simply 'having a look'. The following three suggested searches were offered:

- 'Andrew motivation'

- 'Tate best quotes'
- 'Andrew tayt' (misspelled as a means to evade automated deletion)

As the account we created was brand new and only used once for the purposes of this research, we interpret these three suggested searches as an indication that they are three of the most common searches, each of which we then selected. 60 clips were downloaded in total – 20 from each search. After removing duplicates, we analysed 55.

Here, we acknowledge what may appear to be a weakness in our methodology, due to downloading a small sample of videos generated by a small set of search terms, which potentially overlooks the authentic and holistic experience of TikTok's algorithm producing an influx of similar and related videos, possibly more extreme than those initially downloaded to maintain user interest. The opaque algorithmic functions of the attention economy (Hwang 2020) mean that we can provide no precise account of how or why our TikTok account encountered these particular videos. Thus we cannot make any exhaustive claim as to the entire experience of the TikTok platform and its algorithm in so far as it feature's Tate-related content. Nevertheless, we aim to offer some insight through observing the gender-dichotomous, injured, neoliberal fantasies that exude this content, to supplement future research on actual experiences of boys and their admiration of 'manfluencers' (Wescott, Roberts, and Zhao 2023).

The video clips we downloaded were assigned numerical IDs from #A1 to #A55. Our approach from the outset was to determine the scale and character of Tate's anti-feminist positions that have been the focus of media panic regarding boys. As such, for our quantitative analysis, we flagged to what extent:

- Women and girls feature in the videos and how they were represented.
- Words and language used were neutral or sexist (e.g. 'bitches').
- The extent to which the videos were considered explicitly sexist/misogynistic.

Overall, we differentiated misogyny from sexism under the definition proposed by Louise Richardson-Self: misogynistic hate speech is violent, intradivisional, 'subordinating and imperialistic, tending toward exploitation' whereas sexist language is oppressive but not violent or expressing hatred towards girls/women (2018, 268). From this, we framed our initial interrogation of the materials we found around the following questions: 'Did the content mention women and girls?'; 'Did the content explicitly communicate misogyny or sexism?'; 'Did the content explicitly refer to "men" or masculinity, or make any appeal or prescription as to the priorities or behaviours of men (and thus boys anticipating manhood)?'; 'In what ways did the content *not* explicitly mentioning women and girls still evoke a patriarchal imagination?'.

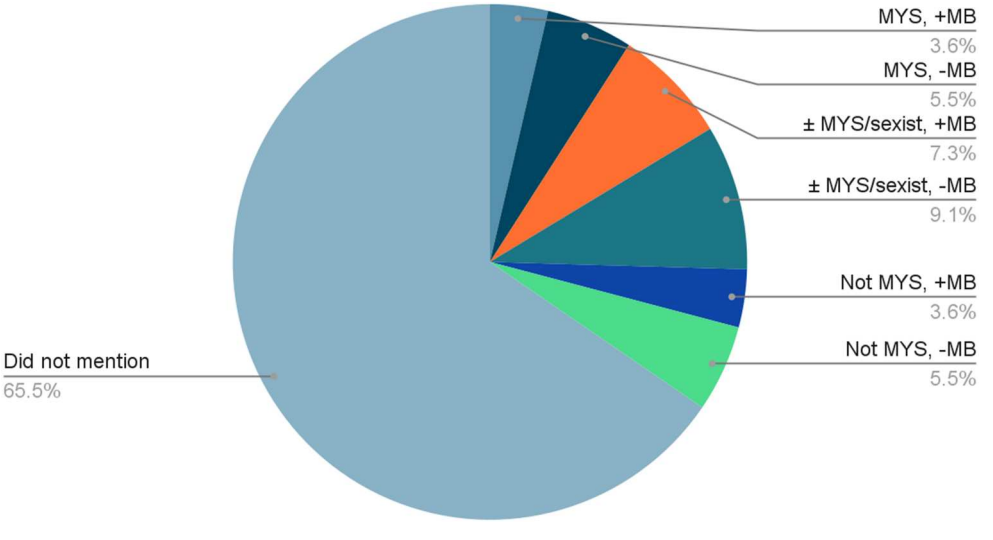
One more caveat we should mention here is, since we cannot ascertain the demographic behind the creation of these anonymous accounts posting Tate's content, we cannot make any definitive claim as to the actual users of the accounts that were selected from our sample that they were produced (or viewed by) boys. In other words, these videos are not in themselves proof that boyhood was implicated in their *production*. Rather, we analyse them as a media experience *should an audience of boys be incidentally or habitually exposed to it*. If, as is suggested by media reports of Tate (including the accounts of schoolteachers), boys and young men are a core demographic of Tate's

followers, it is worth trying to ascertain what is meaningful to them through an analysis of these videos as they are experienced on TikTok. Future studies may wish to take this one significant step further, however: asking the boys themselves.

Findings

We observed a somewhat different experience compared with, for instance, The Observer's investigation (Das 2022) – perhaps since we conducted our study approximately one year later.[2] From our understandings of the prior media coverage of Tate, we expected most videos to relate to misogynistic statements about women and girls, their corollary statements about men, masculinity and male victimhood, and themes around fighting both competitively and in violent confrontations. The videos we came across that featured Tate operated via sexist and male-centric discourses but were not always flagrantly misogynistic.

Overall, we were surprised to find that the prevailing characterisation of Tate as a straightforward misogynist whose *primary* message is that of degrading and abusing women was not supported by our observations. While these themes did arise, and were seldom meaningfully problematised in the videos, approximately only one-third of the videos we analysed mentioned women and girls. Only five (9.1% of the overall sample) were explicitly sexist according to our criteria, and only nine more contained anything that could be classed as misogynist or sexist according to our criteria – a combined total of 14 (25.45%). The videos in our selection did contain sexist discourses in their naturalising of patriarchally-bound sex differences as being to the benefit of boys and men (and girls and women), 'naturalizing sex differences, in order to justify patriarchal social arrangements, by making them seem inevitable' (Manne 2017, 79). However, the overall proportion of videos containing explicit misogyny, sexism or sexist topes or behaviour was 21.8%. By contrast, the focus of these videos was on money, achievement, material gain, the body, individualism and self-discipline. We discuss the neoliberal sensibilities of this shortly.



Videos mentioning women and girls.

Of the 55 videos analysed, 19 videos explicitly mentioned women and girls (34.5%). Of these, five were unambiguously misogynist in our interpretation (9.1%), while sexist elements were present in seven more of the videos that contained women or discussion of women (12.72%). The remaining seven clips mentioning women and girls (e.g. #A47, #A50) contained elements that did not constitute hatred or abuse of women and girls, but centred on sexist/gender essentialist elements. Of the above 19 clips mentioning women, just two featured the voice of a woman in the conversation: #A15 a female interviewer, and #A20 a video in which two young women read quotes from a Tate video about how 'special' women are, reacting favourably until they are told that these are Tate's words. By contrast, two videos contain women who disagree with, and are talked over by Tate, representing him as 'winning' the conversation and the women as idiotic and inferior (the second video even has 'face palm' videos edited in to further the 'eye roll' directed at the woman in the video).

Where women are not discussed or present in the videos, the sexist discourse lessens.[3] Therefore, we take into consideration the motivations of the accounts editing this content which may suggest an indifference towards Tate's sexism, and more of an emphasis on what may be desirable about Tate as being a figure of 'successful' neoliberal manhood, nonetheless embedded in patriarchal structures and binary rules. As such, the question to be asked of these videos is not to what extent are they sexist, but rather, how they present neoliberal manhood and its success as being contingent on a patriarchal system.

While Tate represents a thoroughly adversarial ideological position to feminism, and opposition to feminism frequently characterised online male spaces (Ging 2019), the words 'feminism' and 'feminist' themselves were not regular keywords, and only four videos made any explicit mention of them. For instance, in #A3, an unknown interviewee states that the reason why Andrew is so famous is because he 'says what he thinks' on contentious topics including feminism. Moreover, two videos (#A14 and #A50) featured Tate using the word whilst communicating more general theories of 'the elite' and 'the modern world' respectively. One featured Tate speaking but not using the word although it featured in the title: 'Tate owns ignorant feminist' (#A28) where a woman tells Tate he does not listen because he is a 'white man', before he reveals that his father is Black. None of the videos contained any engagement with features of feminism. In this sense, the content was created not as a means of opening a feminist discussion with Tate, but in using online content to produce a 'space' in which an implicit, antagonistic feminism was banished or silenced.

In overviewing these materials and publishing these findings we do not wish to downplay Tate's misogyny, sexism or their harms. Indeed, we feel that an overly quantitative conclusion would risk overlooking these elements. Discourses around media effects are complicated and contentious, but offer no firm assurance that the *majority* of media content encountered by a user must contain problematic messaging such as hate speech, misinformation or the encouragement of violence in order to be harmful. Even a small percentage of the content (such as the 9.1% we found) may be enough to represent a significant, harmful impact.

The point lies not in the extent to which Tate is sexist, but rather how his rhetoric exists in and actively creates a space that normalises sexist microaggressions, or 'microsexisms', along a continuum of sexism, misogyny and gender-based violence (Ging and Siapera 2018). In short, the videos in our selection do not challenge existing understandings of

Tate's world as being structured by patriarchy and misogyny. However, the content of these videos did clearly emphasise other subjects pertaining to neoliberal manhood and im/perceptible boyhood. Indeed, as Wescott et al. note in their study of teachers who have encountered boys' espousal of Tate, 'Tate's positioning of men as victims of progressive culture that affords women opportunities to compensate for historical inequities has found appeal among boys' (2023, 174). This is indeed a rhetoric that permeates our selection of videos which are centred on men and boys as being victims of feminist progress.

The smaller proportion of perceivably misogynistic content than expected could have two meanings. Firstly, it could indicate that explicitly misogynistic content is of less interest to the creators posting the videos. To the extent that boys have become an *audience* of viewers can be believed that these videos can be interpreted as a reflection of what is meaningful to boys about Tate, which is potentially not as concerned with the misogynistic elements that are so sensationalised by media discourse. Instead of boys becoming straightforwardly radicalised as misogynists by videos of Tate, we think it is plausible to consider them as agents of their own online engagement. Since the videos are evidently excerpted from long-form content, and internet scholarship has long resisted clean separation between audience and uploader (van Dijck 2009), misogynistic elements may have been edited out of the videos during this process to focus on other aspects of Tate's discourse. As above, we do acknowledge however that a precise calculation of who exactly produces or watched the videos is not possible and cannot in itself be definitive. Secondly, the reaction to Tate's prevalence in schools and among boys and young men has characterised him as a misogynist and evaluated his impact largely in this realm. Tate and his fans seem to be aware of this (e.g. #A17 and #A26) and able to adapt to these discourses (e.g. #A22, #A50). Therefore, it is possible that the creators of these videos, whoever they might be, are aware of Tate's trial and criticisms, and avoid content that draws this critique, perhaps as a means of protecting Tate. Regardless, our discussion moves to those themes that emerged from our observations of these videos that have something to say about the neoliberal boyhood/manhood and fratriarchal paradigms that emerge through them.

Discussion

A number of interrelated themes arose in our selection that, we argue, are indicative of Tate's appeal. These included various forms of neoliberalism and its framing of aspirational, gendered selfhood, which, as we will show, connect to themes of brotherhood, self-control and a certain 'curation' of the body and mind. A further examination of the cultural and political significance of these videos as an assemblage of media objects will be provided subsequently to this paper.

In light of the videos of our selection, we use this space to consider the possibility of im/perceptible boyhood, which may offer insights into these inner worlds of boys and the (anti-) feminist imaginaries implicated in them. Our analysis is informed by locating boys in an uncertain world where they search for meaning and identity as they anticipate the transition to adulthood and the uncertainties of daily life under neoliberalism, where Tate appears to offer simple explanations on what constitutes manhood and masculinity (and conversely womanhood and femininity, under his essentialist terms).

For the videos we analyse, one element was represented more than expected: the repeated and persistent affirmations of a hyper-individualistic, technology-enabled, private accumulation associated explicitly with 'toxic' masculinity (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016), which makes everything about 'winning', in which 'boys don't lose' (Corbett 2009, 177) – a core element that we recognise as forming fratriarchal structures. This is a further reminder of the neoliberal conditions under which young adults anticipate adulthood. While there has been much discussion of Tate's influence on boys in terms of misogyny and sexism, there has been far less discussion of the possibility that his influence may be encouraging their adoption of a hyper-individualism, stripped of the moral safeguards naively imagined to prevent market-driven politics and societies from becoming nihilistic.

In #A36 Tate says, sincerely, 'Never find yourself looking at your situation and feeling sorry for yourself. There's no such thing as excuses, life is black or white, you win or lose, you're either successful or you are not'. In #A12, he evokes his teenage boy self, remembering when he would go to bed thinking about expensive cars, saying to himself, 'I refuse … [to be] a peasant'. Tate urges achievement, but not any achievement will do. It must be achievement according to a physical, masculinist, accumulative and sharply neoliberal ethos.

We suggest more than one thing is happening here. On the one hand, Tate takes something that *happens* to boys (adolescence and adulthood); strips it to its bare essentials and 'tells it as it is' –

> Life for the average man is gonna get harder … you need to find more ways to stand out and be unique. And the only way to really do those things, unfortunately, as a man is to suffer. It's very hard to become a man who's respected, has stories, is capable, when he only had a nice life and nice experiences. (#A39)

– and then fashions it into something they may want to be (rich, tough, and successful with women) all of which also conjure superficial images of adulthood: money, violence, and sex without suggesting the development of social responsibility or civic duty. The 'nice life' that he presents is the result of 'trauma' and 'hard work', and, in support of this fantasy, lived out by Tate himself, is the need for and fetishisation of extreme wealth. A boy under the guise of manliness, Tate provides a model of 'becoming a man' without the optional 'growing up' element. Tate is accountable to no one, other than himself and his 'brothers': 'One of the best things about brotherhood is accountability' (#A11). This highlights the other theme of brotherhood we observed as part of Tate's potential appeal which offers an alternative to conventional framings of 'patriarchy' which is rooted in *fathers*. It enables the term 'fratriarchy', where power is passed from brother to brother (as opposed to patriarchal descendance). The following quote from Laurie et al seems pertinent here: 'Remember the boys' code: We protect each other at all costs' (2021, 84). In #A11, Tate says:

> Do you have a brother? … The bond of brotherhood is something that's intrinsic to masculinity. If you don't have a biological brother, then you find your brother.

Here brotherhood becomes synonymous with belonging where Tate adopts the role as older brother for his boy followers, forming a parasocial belonging. Curiously, Tate offers male-bonding and belongingness while simultaneously basing his rhetoric on

competition – existing in a paranoid dog-eat-dog world as part of the brotherhood that he sells: 'One of the reasons why my life is so fantastic and I'm such a high-performing human being is because I live with other competitive men' (#A33). His competitiveness is centred on shaming boys and men who are not 'man' enough (BBC 2023), where elitism is a core, structuring element of his world.

While we expected strong themes of physical fitness, strength, and gym culture, only eight referred to physical training. However, the gym was tied to Tate's esteeming 'discipline' and self-control of the mind. In #A49, similar to #A41, Tate urges 'discipline' and takes issue with the term 'motivation'. We see a young man/teen boy ask him, 'So Andrew, how do I do it?' He responds: 'People who train every day don't want to train every day. … Motivation is the wrong word. They are not motivated, they are DISCIPLINED', he bellows. In the background, we hear the young man's voice, 'I have a question, Andrew—'. The scene is symbolic of what Tate has come to represent: the loud voice that boys turn to in their search for answers.

Here 'discipline' is presented as a means of fighting against what Tate refers to as 'the powers that be, [that] want men to be fat, weak and compliant' (#A40). Tate's emphasis on training the body is presented in opposition to a systemic elitism that he aligns with a tyrannical feminism that relies on the sedentary obedience of men. He offers an idealised manhood that is continually 'at war'. In #A27, he is reminiscent of a spy or soldier, always alert: 'I will pay unlimited money for security … to have the table with my back against the wall … to have peace of mind'. He performs the fantasy of a James Bond-type character as a fantasy of manhood constantly under threat (BBC 2023).

Of the 55 videos we analysed, thirteen evoked themes of resilience and self-reliance. Eight of these overlapped with the 17 videos that mentioned masculinity and manhood. In #A39, titled 'Tate's advice to be the man', the following depicts Tate dressed in a suit and sunglasses talking to camera, cut with a video of him lifting weights:

> The things that made you the best version of you are usually the worst things that happened to you … If a psychologist came to me and said, 'I will cure you', I would say 'No thank you, I can cure myself'.

Another video, #A46, shows an unknown figure using a jump-rope, with the caption, 'Do the impossible and you'll never doubt yourself again' in seeming tribute to what his adherence to Tate has given him. Tate's rhetoric emphasises the importance of physical strength in general, but also as a defensive advantage in fighting situations (e.g. #A19), where a toned body is a means of being attractive to women (e.g. #A38). Two other videos (#A48 and #A51) referred to vaping, of which Tate is an opponent (he contradictorily supports cigar-smoking). In one such video (#A52), a young man/teen boy asks Tate, 'Do you want a vape … brother?'; Tate jettisons the vape; the young man laughs.

Mental health, work and gym workouts, and their interrelation with masculinity in Tate's epistemological foundations were more evident. These videos were also largely about business, money, and accelerated upward economic mobility; and society, government institutions and power. One of the leading themes that emerges is Tate's presentation as a guru presenting an ideology centred on suffering as growth: 'If you want to be something as a man, you need to go to war in some form […] Trauma is absolutely necessary in the development of a man. The worst life a man could possibly live is one

without suffering' (#A34). Performative ideologies of manhood are thus founded on a rhetoric of sacrifice. As #A25 is titled, 'Tate on men's mental health':

> I try and encourage men to be strong. … 'If you're depressed, you need to get in the gym. A strong body is a strong mind'. … Men are encouraged to talk and open up, but when I talk and open up and get massive influence and start helping people, they're gonna silence me. I have been nothing but a net positive for the world.

Notably, Tate's use of the term 'net positive', besides its quantitative connotation, reflects a wider presentation of himself in these videos as a means of helping boys and men, fostering self-respect through the attainment of a 'winning' mentality, and ultimately, wealth itself. The evocations of strength and training functioned as a lens through which to view others' achievements, such as entrepreneurial success, that life and aspiration were being treated as a muscle.[4] For example, in #A41 Tate simply tells 'every single man listening' that he wants them to

> work very hard and […] be proud of yourself. And if you do those two things, you'll be amazed how far, how close you'll come to your goals. In fact, if you work hard and you're proud of yourself, every single goal you have in mind right now, you're gonna surpass.

In most of these videos, the body is an unconscious lens for replacing the meritocratic upward mobility that has been eliminated from Western societies (Littler 2017). As Groth (2007) argues, the boy becomes erased in the process of becoming a man. We thus read these videos as offering boys/young men highly neoliberalised forms of self-erasure that promise self-actualisation via the attainment of manhood, constituted in a contemporary form of 'homo economicus'. In the videos we analysed, themes of using self-discipline to attain upward mobility and self-enrichment as a kind of manhood were interwoven with those of the body in training (implicitly ableist in its being situated in the ability to train; fight and win; work to provide) and, by extension, the mind as the locus of that discipline and control; brotherhood as the social environment for this transformation.

We should also note the im/perceptibility of boys within the actual videos themselves. Some videos featured young men, yet the rhetoric that surrounded them rendered their boyhood invisible. This is where the boundary between im/perceptibility becomes blurred, which is reflected through language. For example, in the (2023) BBC documentary, Tate states that he cannot control what, say, 'a 15-year old Singaporean', posts about him. Not only is this distant, abstract figure already a ghostly presence, but the word 'boy' here is a conspicuous omission. Indeed, the only time that the word 'boy' is heard in our selection is #A37, where a teen-looking boy gives Tate a shave. 'Not bad', Tate says, 'I'm proud of you, young man, you're gonna go very far, how much do I owe you?'. 'Whatever the Top G wants to pay', the boy responds.[5] Tate tells his brother, 'Send our boy ten grand'. Tate high-fives the dumbstruck boy, 'Done: you're rich now', performatively showing the camera his phone transferring $10,000 of bitcoin to the boy's account. Notably, the word 'boy' is rendered acceptable here: he is not just *a* boy, but rather *our boy*. Boyhood is present in a fraternal, quasi-familial setting, while simultaneously remaining invisible.

In #A32, Tate discusses 'a seventeen-year-old kid' he met who asked to photograph Tate's car,

> I said to him, 'Why?' … [he said] 'If I take pictures of expensive cars and email them to people, I'll have the email addresses of the richest people in Romania'. … He got himself a full-time job that day. He understood: be near the money. Now he's making ten grand a month, in Romania, for me.

Both #A37 and #A32 then, are presented as neoliberal-aspirational, with Tate elevating two boys out of relative poverty and into his circle of wealth. School is presented as a waste of time; earning money is the only thing that matters (#A42: 'When was the last time you sat down with your friends and refused to talk about anything else [except] how to make money?'). In this sense, boys become empowered through Tate, who elevates their social status from the position of valueless 'broke' boys into valuable 'rich' men. His own narrative of self-proclaimed success finds appeal with those similarly looking to come of age via neoliberal hegemony.

Not all the videos were in support of Tate, however. Two videos featured teens/young men who mocked him. One (#A24) combines a video – showing Tate walking behind a woman who spins around to avoid hitting a wall. 'Women!' Tate sneers – with a clip of a young man parodying Tate's voice and walk, presenting him as an idiot. In #A18 a young man in his late teens/early 20s holds a mic and asks another young man on the street who his 'biggest role model' is:

> Interviewee: I'm Muslim, so I'd say the Prophet Mohammed … But right now someone who does kind of inspire me and this is quite controversial: Andrew Tate.
>
> Interviewer: (laughing) Oh no, you were doing so well.

In this video we see a narrative of Tate that is underrepresented: as a form of guilty pleasure versus ironic disdain.[6] This irony matches that of a postfeminist rhetoric, highlighting how a hollowed-out 'popular feminism' and the 'popular misogyny' Tate embodies may well have come to be interdependent to some degree, as a messy, unified spectacle of the discursive neoliberal landscape (see Banet-Weiser 2023).

Conclusion: Im/Perceptible Boyhood and the Future of Feminism

As Sarah Banet-Weiser (2023) argues, a 'rage' has built up over time between the mutually-reinforcing discourses of feminism and popular misogyny – superficially hostile opposites that are in fact both centred on neoliberal subjectivity and individual accumulation, disguised by language of self-definition and empowerment. While a full account of the varying applications of 'neoliberalism' has been beyond the scope of this article, it is essential to recognise from this predicament that even if they share key underlying features, the multiple *neoliberalisms* of today appear radically contradictory in their superficial details, including with respect to the gender relation. In our analysis, Tate has risen to visibility precisely in the symbiotic rift between these two cultural forces, configuring himself as a vehemently market-friendly, yet traditional fantasy of manhood that promises a hollow model of agency and synthetic brotherhood to contemporary boys in order to navigate the highly unequal, male-dominated, digitally-mediated, market-structured world that boys inevitably start to apprehend. As we have observed, the figure of the boy has long been rendered invisible by the centring of 'manliness' as normative masculinity. What Tate shows us is that the precise forms assumed by this

erasure of boyhood also shift with time, and have become increasingly adapted to help boys navigate historically contradictory pressures: traditional masculinity must now be combined and even conflated with digital and economic prowess that is deeply neoliberal.

The 'Andrew Tate problem', and especially the materials we have examined, therefore indicate that real feminist progress for boys can still only be found by movement *away* from neoliberal hegemony. The question is how we can build a sustainable and inclusive feminism *beyond* the desire for individualised, self-interested gains. How long can the contemporary boy, whose amenability to feminism should not be underestimated despite the seeming allure of Tate, wait for an answer? As with the contrast we have found between press representation of Tate and his TikTok persona, some of this answer lies in how gender relations, men and boys, and feminism itself are represented, and the impact that popular feminist and misogynist discourses have on these representations to boys. Although seemingly tangential, here we highlight the 2023 film *Barbie*, co-produced in association with Mattel, as a popular-feminist representation of the cultural tensions between popular feminism and popular misogyny at this conjuncture. As part of the film's plot, Ken discovers traditional patriarchy on his trip out of 'Barbieland' to Earth, as a result of which he acquires a sense of victimhood in reaction against the apparently postfeminist Barbie world that, compared to the more patriarchal arrangement of 'Earth' privileges Barbies. He enters into a misogynist, fratriarchal alliance with the other Kens to gain control of Barbieland, which is eventually defeated. In some ways, this Ken is surely intended, albeit somewhat ironically, to parody the 'red pill' of prior generations of online misogyny and represent the injured and disempowered boy(ish) subject who cannot cope with popular feminism. In other words, in so far as it has produced the *Barbie* film itself, popular feminism appears to be aware that it draws the ire of popular misogyny, to which it responds with gentle ridicule. Furthermore, when Ken's fratriarchal resistance ultimately fails, he says at the film's very end, 'When I found out the patriarchy wasn't just about horses, I lost interest'. It is here that the representation is most counter-productive. The suggestion that the alluring absolutism and false certainty of traditional masculinity and the subjugation of women is due solely to the superficial, hedonic trappings of its getup – horses for Ken, or Bugattis for Tate and his followers – is at best a distracting over-simplification of the failings of popular feminism, or the impact of neoliberalism. Andrew Tate – and the growing world of online male-orientated influencers – gains his popularity with boys, not just for the various 'horses' (or Bugattis and other masculine antics) he presents, but precisely for the types of belonging and empowerment he symbolises, however mendaciously, alongside the illusion of 'winning' and getting back at the 'Barbies' for 'having it all'.

Indicative of a rather more dystopian series of representative practices, Tate's popularity illustrates that rather than being a shiny, yet hollow exterior, the incentives, or 'horses' that boys are offered as invitations toward a new feminist imaginary must speak genuinely to their fears, hopes, and anxieties about their place in the world – now, and in the future. Shaped by debates on gender identity politics, feminism is faced with new dilemmas and possibilities. Its legacy will surely be determined by its ability to be less market-driven and more inclusive and collective, and collaboration with boys about the forms of allure that Tate holds may allow it to better accommodate the forms of agency and belonging towards which boys might turn. Indeed, there

is a need to demonstrate the collective gains available to everyone upon addressing these systems and structures of inequality. Just as feminism has an affirmative potential for boyhood, we might also approach the 'Andrew Tate problem' as it relates to boys as an opportunity for the growth of feminism: observing the feminist possibilities latent in boyhood. The boy now encompasses similar subversive potential to the liminal-symbolic girl, using creative agency to trouble those patriarchal ideals of manhood that are slowest to change. The longstanding trope is that a child, told not to press a big red button, will eventually press it out of curiosity or intrinsic mischief when left unsupervised. Sadly there is no big red button to destroy patriarchy, but through approaches that respect and include boys as valuable peers in the insurgency against patriarchy, they may still become allies in that struggle rather than being mobilised against it by figures such as Tate.

Notes

1. As our study was conducted a year following this spike, this timing will most likely have shaped the videos we encountered in our sample and the resulting interpretations which we acknowledge here.
2. This may be in part that stories about misogynist boys are better for media sales and website hits.
3. For example, #A15 stated that it was 'natural' for men to want to have more than one female partner as part of the same pattern of living, and evoked an abstract, unspecified history of 'every single sultan' having 'more than one chick'. This statement portrays an Orientalist, imperialist, hetero-masculine, hypersexualised fantasy of the harem which normalises sexist, racist and heterogendered and hierarchical relations between men and women, figuring women as man's 'property', defining his status through heterosexual, polygamous parameters, and signifying 'male power over infinitely substitutable females' (Shohat and Stam 1994, 164), which are, of course, core Tate claims.
4. As with the Prime energy drink or the celebrity billionaire status of Elon Musk, we see an adjacency between online male communities and the fetishisation of a kind of nihilistic entrepreneurialism, carried out for its own sake.
5. Top G' is Tate's favoured nickname.
6. Tate's conversion to Islam has also raised concerns over his influence on Muslim boys (ITV News 2023).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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