

! WARNING
Contains
descriptions of
sexual assault
and extreme
language some
might find
upsetting



The rise of the mega misogynists

They make outrageous statements. They're banned from social media. Yet, despite huge strides towards gender equality in some areas of society, a new breed of misogynist is thriving. Is it just that controversy sells, or is something more insidious going on? Harriet Hall enters their world to find out...

ILLUSTRATION: MICHELLE THOMPSON

He

was nowhere until he was everywhere. Over a few short, hectic weeks this summer, his name was searched more times than Donald Trump or Kim Kardashian. And then he disappeared. His stratospheric internet fame led to an outright blanket ban from almost all social media, with Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube all citing violations of their policies (Twitter had removed him some time earlier). The ex-*Big Brother* contestant turned self-appointed lifestyle guru finally appeared to fade into the digital ether.

And now? Former kickboxing world champion Andrew Tate, a man who has been labelled 'violently misogynistic', is in my living room. Almost. We're talking over Zoom; Tate is in an Airbnb – a reproduction of Michelangelo's *Creation Of Adam* hangs on the wall behind him, forming the backdrop to our conversation, which returns to religion several times and how Tate moulds men in his image. He tells me no one wants to hear 'his side' of the story. I suspect much of the media doesn't want to platform him – a consideration that the *Cosmopolitan UK* team debated in depth over the course of several days. But Tate already has global infamy, so we decided to speak to him. *Not* to boost his ego, or give air to his damaging views, but instead to find out why men like him thrive. Because, despite the outpouring of criticism directed at him, Tate still has an army of loyal fans. What does his influence mean to them? Could the men in our lives be among them? And what does his success say about society? I immersed myself in his world to find out.

Andrew Tate is nothing new. He slots neatly into a long line of men who have gained cult-like followings online, with content promising self-improvement and a community where men feeling confused or angry can vent and receive the validation they don't feel they can find elsewhere. Tate is but one small part of the manosphere, a digital ecosystem that includes: pick-up artists (PUAs); involuntary celibates; men going their own way; and so-called 'men's rights activists'.

Even if you're not familiar with the manosphere, you've probably heard of at least one of its inhabitants. There's Neil Strauss, and his bestseller *The Game*, which armed men with unscrupulous dating tactics such as 'isolating the target' and lowering women's self-esteem by 'negging' them with backhanded compliments. It sold 2.5million copies. Strauss wasn't the first PUA, but *The Game* brought the 'art of seduction' to the mainstream, so much so that negging and other tactics can still be spotted in action. Then there's 'dating coach' Julien Blanc and 'neo-masculinist' Daryush Valizadeh (Roosh V) – who, in 2014 and 2016 respectively were the subjects of petitions to be barred from several countries after being accused of promoting violent sexual assault. Blanc, who later claimed his comments had been 'a horrible attempt at humour' was barred from entering the UK and had his Australian visa revoked. Roosh, meanwhile, said his blog post had merely been a 'satirical thought experiment'.

So where does Tate fit into all this? The 35-year-old son of a trailblazing African American chess grandmaster grew up in Chicago and was raised on a council estate in Luton by his mother after his parents split up. Now, he teaches men to beef up and get rich to attract women, occupying a space somewhere between a PUA and a life coach, sharing images of his macho lifestyle – fast cars, cigars, girls and guns (which some say are fakes) – with his followers, as well as offering them dubious financial advice.

His notoriety extends far beyond his carefully curated corner of the internet, with news stories including his expulsion from 2016's *Big Brother* after a series of racist and homophobic tweets were unearthed alongside a video in which he appeared to be beating a woman with a belt. Tate and the woman claiming to be in the video both say the act was

consensual. Campaign group Hope Not Hate has also argued that Tate has a 'long history' of links with the far right, pointing to his support for English Defence League co-founder Tommy Robinson. Then, in April this year, Tate and his brother Tristan's Romanian home was raided by police under suspicion of human trafficking. No arrests were made, and Tate has dismissed it as a set-up by his critics, but the Romanian Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism confirmed to *Cosmopolitan UK* that an investigation was ongoing and included rape allegations. Despite (or more likely because of) this, Tate's infamy has not ceased. He may be banned from mainstream social platforms but – as he'll later tell me – men are still flocking to him for guidance.

Meeting Andrew Tate

'Video call is amazing idea. Tomorrow?' [sic] is Tate's response when I agree to an interview, then before we meet, he sends me an hour-long video entitled 'Andrew Tate's final message', saying it is 'the TRUTH about what's happening to me'. In it, Tate claims his comments have been taken out of context and sad music plays as he describes himself as having had a 'very hard life'.

Given Tate's erratic email manner, in which he threatens to sue me before we've even spoken, I brace for a hard time. But when we do eventually talk, he is, *largely*, polite. He is on time and repeatedly flatters me for being a 'real journalist' for speaking directly to him (though he hates the 'media machine', natch). Soon enough, he's on his soapbox, extolling the virtues of men being 'real men' and condemning 'skinny vegan soy boys' and calling me 'my dear'.

Tate speaks in a hyperbolic, Trumpian manner, making statements such as, 'I wanna make something very, very clear, everyone loves me,' and, 'Since they banned me, turned me into a martyr, I have unlimited support like never before. Hundreds of thousands of emails of support, huge media offers from alternative platforms, millions of dollars.' He says he is 'the only person in national or international consciousness who cares about how men feel'. He says men are 'completely underrepresented on every single level, they always have been', then cites high suicide rates, poor school performance,

Tate speaks in a hyperbolic, Trumpian manner



high male prison populations and what he sees as the increasing feminisation of men in pop culture. 'We're tired of being told that we have this massive privilege, while our lives are extremely difficult.'

Tate's persistence that women have the real upper hand in society ignores the reality that they continue to face inequality and discrimination on a daily basis, with one in four women raped or sexually assaulted and rape reports on the increase. While there are male rape victims, men also make up the majority of perpetrators – 98%. Women also continue to face inequality at work, with the UK gender pay gap increasing to 15.4% in 2021, just 8% of FTSE 100 companies having a female CEO and women being more likely than men to earn below the Living Wage, despite still doing 75% of the unpaid care work globally.

But while – intersectionality aside – men are the absolute least marginalised community on the planet, there are some kernels of truth amid the tsunami of untruths and exaggerations Tate trumpets. Suicide is a serious concern – and the leading cause of death for men under 50 in the UK; men are also more likely than women to sleep rough; and they experience more social isolation than girls and women, reporting significantly less life satisfaction than women, while also being less likely to access support when they are struggling. According to a recent *Cosmopolitan UK* survey, 92% of you worry about the mental health of the men in your life. And 65% of you think they don't have any positive role models. Is it this gap in the market that Tate has muscled in on?

One of the key platforms through which Tate connects to his fans is his online course Hustler's University (HU). For \$49.99 a month, 100k [Tate claims] subscribers can access advice on topics including cryptocurrency, copywriting, e-commerce and even dating (via the PHD – Pimpin' Hoes Degree – yes, really). An *Observer* investigation in August this year found that members of HU were being encouraged to inundate social media with clips of Tate, directing people to the course and earning affiliate revenue in the process. It is understood that this is how Tate cultivated his 4.7m Instagram followers and over 12bn views on TikTok before the platforms shut him down. Among the clips, Tate says women should 'bear some responsibility' for being raped and talks about how he prefers to date 18- to 19-year-olds because they've 'been through less dick'. Not only that, but he also says that '99% of the world's problems would

be solved if females walked through life with their body count [their number of sexual partners] on their forehead'.

But Tate's content is not all bigotry and bravado. The self-help market has never been bigger. And in many ways, Tate is simply tapping into it. Much of his messaging seems to align with the ethos of manifestation – change your mindset to change your life. He tells his followers, 'You have to believe you can achieve anything,' and that 'feeling depressed is real [...] but must be used as a motivation to alter your circumstances'. He sermonises social mobility through self-belief and hard graft. It's easy to see how he might appeal to someone struggling with low confidence and little social support.

Tate insists that most of what's been said about him is 'media selectiveness'. He won't backtrack or apologise, saying he has been 'unfairly vilified'. When I put some of his more alarming statements about women to him, he doubles down – 'I stand by everything I've ever said.' He says that teaching men to 'protect and provide' helps their mental health, framing comments about women being men's property as religious. 'Attacking me is attacking Christianity, it's attacking the Qur'an.'

Later that week, I follow Tate into his underground community. Since being banned from social media, he and thousands of his followers have decamped to encrypted messaging services as well as video platform Rumble, popular among the alt-right. It's here that Tate, referring to himself as Top G, hosts his late-night 'Emergency Meeting' with his brother Tristan, saying, 'We're going to penetrate the Matrix.' The pair claim as many as 70,000 people are watching the live stream and encourage them to film it and share the videos across social media (the first video has since garnered over 800,000 views). When *Cosmopolitan UK* reached out to Rumble for comment, they declined to reply, instead tweeting our email along with the message, 'Like everyone else, you're welcome to join Rumble, but first look in the mirror.'

I pose as a man to enquire about joining HU and am given a code and directed to several Tate groups. In one, he organises 'crypto pumps', encouraging his followers to buy certain currencies en masse and then sell them off piecemeal as the price increases – potentially illegal with real stocks but currently not in the unregulated crypto world. In others, he shares masculine dogma, photographs of women he's slept with and links to his courses, as well as promoting the teachings of other men. One, called Stirling Cooper (who the brothers later endorse on Rumble), sells a sexual dominance course that includes advice such as 'smack her in the face with your dick', and 'fist her pussy'. Another is David Bond, who teaches how to 'cheat' dating apps because they're 'rigged against men'. Conflictingly, Tate also shares a list of ways to 'be a G' including, 'G's treat all women with respect'.

Hard to find a good manosphere

'It really gets me a little bit angry [...] He would never do anything to hurt women,' retorts 32-year-old Nino Haralambidis, when I ask how he feels about misogyny accusations against Tate. When Nino first came across Tate via YouTube in 2018, he thought he was 'such an ass', but soon warmed to him. 'He is just trying to be very provocative, but the message behind it is really good. He is trying to give men more power, more self-confidence.' Nino credits Tate with building his self-esteem and the success of his online business. Nino is not what I was expecting. He is smiley, affable and amenable to my questions. He has a long-term girlfriend who he says also believes 'the good [Tate] does far outweighs the things people might misinterpret'. But, soon enough, Nino begins to parrot Tate-isms. 'I feel like women who are most happy are not the women in the CEO stuff, but more the women who have a family, who have kids and a good husband.'

Nino is clearly somewhat of a superfan. And, it seems, there are varying degrees of Tate fandom: those who find humour in his bombastic diatribes and

How can we dissuade men from the manosphere?

those who sign up for his courses and follow him to whatever social network he pops up on next. Then there are those who have somehow lost direction – and view the ultra-rich lifestyle Tate portrays as an easy route out of misery in an increasingly status-driven world. Not everyone who follows Tate or has shared one of his videos will agree with everything he says or get sucked into superfandom like Nino, but – whether those watching his content realise it or not – there's a market for misogyny that does not begin, or end, with Tate.

Just as Tate appears to be inspired by the manosphere members before him, there are people cropping up across several platforms whose views are eerily similar to his and still remain live on some sites, peddling their sexist wares and turning a profit. Alongside Cooper and Bond, there's Tate collaborator Sneako, who also shares 'motivational' advice alongside more troubling views such as: 'feminism is about taking all the power while men are struggling'; and 'a woman's worth is what she looks like and a man's worth is your masculinity, is your respect'. Sneako has been banned from TikTok, Twitter and YouTube but – at the time of printing – is still on Instagram. Podcaster duo Fresh&Fit are also live across several platforms, sharing views like: women 'naturally wanna be submissive'; and 'women know deep down that they're not f***ing leaders'. They all share Tate's toxic combination that thrives in our attention economy – packaging themselves as one-stop solutions to life's ills, with a good dollop of controversy thrown in, to guarantee quick and easy clicks. As Tate himself once said, 'What you ideally want is a mix of 60% to 70% fans and 30% to 40% haters. You want arguments, you want war.' Callum Hood, head of research at the Center for Countering Digital Hate, explains that there's a financial incentive in spreading hate. 'Just think of Roosh V and his site. They make ad revenue on their controversial websites – this is the business model.' He also points to Paul Elam, who once launched 'Bash a Violent Bitch Month' on his site and is still on YouTube monetising his alarming views.

The world he's created

So where do we go from here? The 'war' and 'arguments' that Tate knows can boost his following (and bank balance) have very real consequences that ripple down, impacting young women across the globe.

On Mumsnet, one woman shared that her boyfriend claimed that Tate had 'set men free and made it so they can finally speak their



minds'. This was followed by comments such as 'women are like annoying children' and they 'take advantage of men'. She pleaded with the community for advice on what she should do. During Tate's popularity peak, teachers took to social media to raise concerns about boys in their classes quoting the influencer and even refusing to do homework assigned by female teachers. Meanwhile, Plan International research from August 2020 revealed that more than half of young women had experienced online harassment. Research also shows a correlation between online misogyny and real-life behaviour, with several studies linking 'traditional views of masculinity' to a higher likelihood of violence against women. Our poll also showed that 59% of you had noticed a recent rise in casual sexism.

As for men, the problems mentioned here remain. Despite Tate previously saying that he's 'saved thousands of men from depression', men's mental health is in trouble – and Tate is a misdirect. Tate's (and others' like him) *Don't Worry Darling* desire to return to rigid gender roles leads followers down a path that can surely only worsen their mindset in the long term. Numerous studies oppose this approach, showing that the pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes – such as being tough and in control – is associated with an increased risk of depression. Laura Bates, founder of the Everyday Sexism Project and author of *Men Who Hate Women*, echoes my reflections. 'The great irony is that if there is a crisis in masculinity it is precisely because of the outdated, stereotypical pressures for men to be strong and invulnerable that Tate and his ilk champion,' she says, adding that, in her view, 'the truth is that they have no real interest in addressing issues that affect men because that wouldn't be profitable for them'.

We're left with a quandary. If these men are profiting from outrage, is the answer to ignore them entirely? In Tate's own words, this would only cut off 30% to 40% of his following. In which case, what can be done to dissuade men from turning to

Where to get help
White Ribbon
 ...works with men and boys to end violence against women and girls
Samaritans
 If you're struggling with any mental health issues, the free support line is available 24/7
Rape Crisis
 Specialised, independent and confidential support for women and girls who have experienced any form of sexual violence
UK Feminista
 ...provides training and resources in a bid to end sexism in schools, as well as working with survivors

the manosphere when faced with a crisis? Early education and proper mental health support for men and boys is essential, but we must protect women from the dangers of misogynistic messaging, too. Charities are urging the government to bring forward the Online Safety Bill – which, at the time of writing, remains paused in its passage through parliament – and for it to include a Violence Against Women and Girls Code of Practice.

Positively, in June, research from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy found that men are far more likely to go to therapy now than they were a decade ago, so progress is being made. Conversations are happening, legislation is in motion and, while drilling down into the more unsavoury parts of the internet is troubling, these views are widely condemned when they seep into the mainstream. What we can do is to continue to emphasise the positive aspects of masculinity and to remind ourselves that the vast majority of men don't want to live in a society where we see this extreme normalisation of misogyny. And for those who find comfort or even entertainment in men such as Tate, reiterating that one ostensibly innocent 'share' or 'follow' can open up a gateway to the mainstream acceptance of violence against women and that there are myriad alternative spaces where they can be heard.

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