

# **Antisemitism and Misogyny: Constructions of the ‘Jew’ and Femininity Within the Discourse of Masculinity Influencers in the Manosphere**

Thomas Stavrinou - PhD Student University of Passau

## **Introduction: The Manosphere & Red Pill Ideology**

The manosphere is a term that describes a decentralized network comprised of different online communities, actors and digital spaces which all coalesce around a shared sentiment of misogyny and antifeminism. It includes groups like *Men Going Their Own Way*, *Men’s Rights Activists*, *Incels*, and *Pick-Up Artists*, creating a diverse yet interconnected web of masculinist subcultures. Despite their diversity, these communities share a focus on male victimhood, grounded in the belief that feminism has become society’s dominant *zeitgeist*. In this respect, feminism is framed as a destabilizing force that subverts traditional notions of masculinity and heterosexuality. This perceived threat fuels ‘aggrieved entitlement’ among men who feel that they have been denied their rightful place in society leading to feelings of humiliation and anger. In this context, the so-called “crisis of masculinity” emerges from the perception that previously assured privileges or anticipated futures grounded in a male dividend have been disrupted or worse deliberately undermined.

Consequently, scholars have described the manosphere as engaging in a collective politics that is driven by claims of being injured subjects at the hands of modern society and feminism. This claim to victimhood is expressed in the manosphere through the metaphor of the Red Pill which has become a synecdoche for a conspiratorial world view where men are portrayed as being emasculated and brainwashed into accepting a false reality. The red pill metaphor functions as a reactionary consciousness raising project that purports to awaken the uninitiated to the realities of how the world really functions. In the manosphere this reality is concerned with the alleged primordial essence of gender which is constructed via narratives that naturalize gender hierarchies. In this sense, the red pill mimics the process of ideology unmasking – it purports to uncover how contemporary society really operates under the facade of appearances. What is ‘revealed’ then is a nefarious plot that victimizes men by violating the natural order of the two sexes and imposing an artificial reality that denies the biological truth of male primacy. The current marginalization of masculine agency is then seen as an engineered subordination that is meant to emasculate men and turn them into passive feminized subjects that can be easily controlled and manipulated.

## **From Niche to Mainstream: The Rise of Masculinity Influencers**

Although the manosphere gained prominence in the early 2010s, it is fair to say that the network has undergone significant transformations since its original conception. Initially, the manosphere could be understood as a loosely connected cluster of digital spaces, largely emblematic of what might be termed a first wave of online antifeminism. This early iteration was characterized by its own decentralized infrastructure, consisting primarily of personal blogs, stand-alone websites hosting short essays, and discussions within anonymous forums on Reddit and various imageboards. However, in recent years, manosphere themes and rhetoric have become increasingly normalized and disseminated on mainstream social media platforms such as *YouTube* and *Tik Tok*. Such platforms, with their algorithm-driven content discovery systems, have facilitated the normalization and amplification of manosphere-affiliated content, often repackaging it in more accessible, entertainment-oriented formats. As a result, antifeminist discourse is no longer confined to niche social media spaces but has actually migrated to regular social media platforms gaining significant visibility.

This shift is partly driven by the emergence of masculinity influencers who appeal to a young male audience through a performance of hypermasculinity that is presented as an antidote to a thoroughly feminized society. This performance of hypermasculinity resonates emotionally by mourning the perceived loss of manhood and promising its restoration to a former idealized state. In this context, the manosphere can be understood as a form of masculinist identity politics, offering the promise of restoring the self-confidence of a “subordinated masculinity” that struggles to reassert its dominance. These influencers not only affirm an affective sense of victimhood but also weaponize it by constructing fantasies of male omnipotence aimed at reclaiming their lost privilege. Their messaging encourages men to reassert rigid and biologically essentialist conceptions of masculinity as a means to repair the perceived powerlessness they experience. Influencers cast masculinity as a form of revolt — a revival of primal toughness meant to counter what they describe as a soft, obedient and submissive Western culture. This entails an ontological transformation into a new Man or a restored version of authentic manhood one that up to now has been characterized by being downtrodden, forgotten and humiliated.

This produces a repertoire of actions akin to what feminist philosopher Kate Manne (2017) terms the myriad of down-girl moves, through which patriarchal norms are morally enforced and policed by means of infantilizing, slurring, vilifying, shaming, and, at times, exercising overt violence aimed at controlling women.

One way these patriarchal norms are enforced and policed is through the public humiliation and shaming of women before a live audience. This has been popularized by the fresh and fit podcast which have become one of the leading figures in the manosphere with over 1,5 million subscribers on *YouTube*. Its most popular segment is the *After Hours* show where the duo sits down with groups of women to debate a variety of topics. These orchestrated spectacles function as collective disciplinary rituals in which viewers are invited to revel in, validate, and channel anger towards women who deviate from the sexist norms imposed upon them. In this sense, the *After Hours* segment exemplifies what Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) term *networked misogyny*: a digitally coordinated environment where thousands of individual users assemble to amplify and normalize targeted harassment through streams of online commentary. The audience's participation through derision, mockery and repulsion becomes a collective performance that reaffirms patriarchal authority.

### **Influencer Culture and Metapolitics of the New Right**

The ideological appeal of the manosphere extends beyond fringe groups and anonymous individuals. It requires us to analyse carefully curated and polished social media personalities whose content is widely accessible on the internet's most popular platforms. My PhD project therefore seeks to examine the intersection of antisemitism and antifeminism within the discourse of four prominent masculinity influencers who have been gaining notoriety on social media. It is important to place the emergence of these masculinity influencers within a broader trend where *YouTube* and similar social media platforms enable the transference of ideological production from traditional parties to individual figures.

Operating within an attention economy, these ideological entrepreneurs are rewarded for building and maintaining large followings, where vanity metrics such as likes and shares often become equated with political legitimacy. This refers to the commodification of politics where influencer marketing techniques are used to promote political ideas that resonate with personal and affective registers. Reactionary movements and actors have become increasingly adept at using the affordances of social media to appeal to a broader audience and to repackage their content in ways that make extremist ideas more palatable and easily shareable. The private and personal sphere becomes the main site of contestation where everyday experiences such as playing video games, working out or seeking romantic relations are seen as part of a broader metapolitical battle.

The term 'metapolitics' originates in the thought of the *Nouvelle Droite*, a strand of the far right that conceives culture as prefigurative of political transformation. Metapolitics, often described

as a form of far-right Gramscianism, is a strategy focused on changing a society's cultural norms rather than its formal political structures. The idea is that if you can influence everyday beliefs, values, and language, then right-wing ideas will gradually appear normal, reasonable, and even "common sense." In this way, cultural change becomes the groundwork for political change, allowing right-wing ideology to take hold long before it shows up in elections or policy debate. A similar dynamic is also evident in the manosphere, which seeks to resist and overturn what it perceives as a feminized social order and to reinstate a militant form of masculinity as the dominant norm.

A reactionary mood is created by social media influencers who construct a libidinal economy around their online personas, where every tweet, click, and piece of content is used to elicit particular emotional states in their audience. These influencers cultivate close and open relationships with their followers via a careful management of their online persona. This performance of authenticity has also been understood as a 'para-social relationship' because it rests on a semblance of unmediated access to the personal life of these social media personalities. Social media platforms amplify this illusion of intimacy by enabling direct and informal communication that contrasts with the professional distance typically associated with traditional media. This informal communication is expressed through the practice of livestreaming which involves broadcasting intimate reactions and personal opinions in front of an audience. Unlike traditional media, which operates in an asynchronous manner with production completed well before airing an episode - livestreaming disrupts this temporal convention. It provides a mode of contact that allows content creators and followers to interact in real time, transforming the audience from passive consumers into active participants.

In such livestreams the audience can comment in real time as the interaction unfolds, often nudging the streamer into more edgy and radical content. The live chat becomes a space where viewers can actively contribute to a climate of hostility by posting disparaging comments and slurs. Viewers can also pay to have their messages read aloud, creating a monetized incentive structure in which provocative or shocking remarks are rewarded with heightened visibility. This feedback loop encourages the streamer to escalate their rhetoric, responding to provocations and amplifying the most inflammatory remarks to maintain audience excitement. This participatory dynamic turns livestreaming into a site of collective radicalization - one in which the boundary between performer and spectator dissolves, while transforming hate from an individual emotion into a communal activity.

### **Tate Confidential Series**

A parasocial relationship is also enacted through vlogs and short videos that purport to offer backstage access to the personal lives of these influencers creating an atmosphere of authenticity with their followers. A notable example is *Tate Confidential*, a vlog and lifestyle series created by Andrew Tate and his brother Tristan Tate, which presents an ostensibly ‘unfiltered’ view of their daily lives. The series documents their travels, luxury cars, opulent homes, fitness routines, and personal interactions, giving viewers the feeling that they are witnessing unscripted moments from their everyday life. By framing these highly curated moments as candid, the series constructs a mediated closeness that encourages emotional investment, making audiences feel connected to the influencer’s identity and lifestyle.

The series is particularly effective at enabling identification with Tate's persona as an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, whose ‘successful lifestyle’ is positioned as both aspirational and unattainable. Despite the fact that this lifestyle remains inaccessible to the vast majority of his audience, the vlog format creates the impression of proximity and possibility. Each video is thematically designed to appeal to specific male fantasies—of wealth, sexual conquest, physical dominance and freedom from conventional social constraints. By consistently invoking these fantasies, the series transforms consumption of the content into a form of vicarious participation in the lifestyle itself.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on the Role of Alt-Right Influencers**

The focus on social media influencers also addresses an important methodological gap in the existing literature. The majority of studies adopt a bottom-up approach, examining the ways in which users interact with one another on online platforms and collectively produce a toxic techno-culture that fuels extreme misogyny and hate speech. These scholars belong to a theoretical strand that conceptualizes the digital far right primarily through the symbolic practices and vernacular expressions that bind users together into what has been described as a “fuzzy collectivity”. The term highlights the diffuse and amorphous structure of this networked formation. This formation is often described through the metaphor of a digital swarm: a contingent coalition of individual users whose collectivity is defined less by ideological coherence than by shared symbolic practices. These practices include the use of irony, memes, and coded language that function to demarcate boundaries between in-groups and out-groups. Belonging to such communities therefore depends largely on familiarity with the specific vocabularies, aesthetic conventions, and rituals through which members signal affiliation.

However, the strong emphasis on horizontal user-to-user interactions often sidelines the role of influencers and can create the impression of an equal communicative field in which every act of posting, commenting, or sharing carries similar weight. In practice, however, social media environments remain structured by significant asymmetries of visibility and influence. Influencers command an outsized degree of “personal media salience,” which enables them to shape agendas, mobilize attention, and leverage the affective capital accumulated within their communities. They therefore occupy a structurally privileged position within these digital ecosystems. Understanding the reciprocal relationship between influencers and their audiences is essential for grasping how meaning and collective identity are negotiated online. My project therefore examines how follower communities coalesce around influential actors and how these communities facilitate the uptake, reinterpretation, and circulation of influencer-generated discourse.

Understanding this reciprocal relationship is essential for grasping how meaning and collective identity are negotiated online. Accordingly, my project analyses how follower communities coalesce around these actors to facilitate message uptake and the reproduction of influencer-led discourse.

### **Alternative Media as Sites of Counter-Hegemonic Appeal**

In recent years there has been increased public pressure on social media companies to combat extremism online resulting in the deplatforming of individual and the removal of harmful content. This often happens in response to high profile events such as the 2017 *Unite the Right* rally Charlottesville which highlights the real-world consequences of online extremism. Although social media companies often deplatform individuals reluctantly and only after facing significant public pressure, the practice has a notable effect on limiting the visibility and reach of extremist figures. This development has also triggered a conservative backlash, with many right-wing social media personalities accusing mainstream platforms of suppressing free speech. In response, alternative tech platforms have emerged, providing far-right groups with spaces to continue their activities and mobilize supporters. These platforms, driven by an ultra-libertarian ideology, prioritize minimal content moderation and present themselves as champions of free speech in opposition to ‘Big Tech’ and government censorship.

As a result, a rapidly growing alternative ecosystem has developed, characterized by the proliferation of video-hosting platforms (e.g., Rumble), social networking sites (e.g., GAB), and alternative news outlets (e.g., Infowars). Moreover, deplatforming has provided these influencers with the discursive opportunity to present themselves as courageous truth tellers

that have been unduly silenced by the status quo. It heightens their counter-hegemonic allure because their exclusion from mainstream social media platforms is portrayed as a confirmation that they are on the right track – exposing uncomfortable truths that threatens established power structures. Within communities that see themselves as resisting mainstream narratives, deplatforming becomes a form of social capital, enhancing their credibility and reinforcing their position as voices of dissent

Political influencers have become adept at navigating both mainstream and fringe platforms, forming trans-mediated parasocial relationships with their audiences. They build initial connections on one platform and then migrate to others, using the unique features of each platform to sustain and deepen these relationships.

### **A Critical Gap in the Literature: The Overlooked Role of Antisemitism**

While the shared conspiratorial trope in these narratives has been noted in the literature, the antisemitic subtext that runs throughout this narrative has mostly gone unnoticed. Some scholars have argued that the term gender ideology is so ambiguous that it lacks any concrete substance but rather serves as an ‘empty signifier’ that facilitates the formation of political coalitions on the right. In this reading, the term ‘gender ideology’ does not target a specific object of hate but rather conjures up an abstract and diffused threat according to the psychological needs of those who deploy this concept. In this sense, gender ideology remains a slippery term that can be temporarily embodied by particular racialized figures but its appeal rests on the fact it can never be fully represented by a single object. The final source of power that stands behind it is never fully revealed since each new revelation points to something more elusive and merely adds to the infinite number of connections that have already been made.

However, while the term gender might appear vacuous at first, a latent antisemitic element might be present within this narrative even if this is not manifestly expressed on its surface. Anti-gender discourse employs a conspiratorial style which is embedded within an intellectual tradition that contains a rich reservoir of antisemitic motifs and symbols for political actors to draw upon. What makes this continuity easy to obfuscate is the coded nature of modern antisemitism that constitutes a repertoire of euphemisms and innuendo. These cues require no further clarification for their intended audience, as they act as psychological triggers that evoke antisemitic fantasies. This phenomenon has also been characterized as an "antisemitism without Jews," where terms like “Globalists” or “New World Order” rely on the audience's implicit knowledge, activating latent antisemitic meanings. The coded messages resonate only with those socialized into this symbolic system, creating a sense of exclusivity and shared

understanding among insiders. This dynamic heightens the sense of intimacy for participants while excluding outsiders who fail to grasp the underlying message.

### **Antisemitism and Gender**

The figure of the ‘Jew’ in the antisemitic imagination eludes clear-cut categorizations and cannot be conclusively placed along the intersectional markers of race, gender and class. This complexity is demonstrated by the contradictory and multifaceted depiction of the ‘Jewish Other’ that has been constructed throughout history. Consequently, the portrayal of the cosmopolitan Jew challenging national identity existed alongside a depiction of him as the archetype of both capitalism and communism. Moreover, the image of Jewish masculinity or femininity was fraught with ambivalence and functioned as the antithesis of the dominant gender regime throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this sense, antisemitic representations of Jewish men and women served as proxies for a perceived gender confusion and as the symbolic moral degeneration of the nation which had to be countered at any cost.

Jewish manhood was defined as an aberration from masculine normativity - regardless of how that norm was framed. This construction was marked by a simultaneous excess and inadequacy: the Jew was imagined as both more and less than a real man. In the European imagination, this manifested as a predatory caricature—venal, rapacious, and possessing a hypersexual appetite that threatened cultural purity. Yet, in a striking ideological pivot, this same discourse derided the Jew as effeminate, soft, and narrow-chested. These caricatures often included stereotypical mannerisms associated with women or homosexuals further blurring traditional gender boundaries. This "feminization" extended into the psychological realm, where Jewish men were pathologized with hysteria and melancholia—afflictions that *fin de siècle* medical discourse almost exclusively attributed to women. Similarly, Jewish women were frequently exoticized through the trope of the ‘Beautiful Jewess’—a dark-complexioned, 'Oriental' temptress designed to stir male fantasies. Yet, this seductive image carried a lethal undertone: she was often depicted as a predatory 'femme fatale' whose sexuality was inherently destructive and revealed a perverse masculinity.

Therefore, one could interpret antisemitism as a paranoid response to the unsettling state of ambiguity, a form of anxiety driven by a fear of that which doesn't fit neatly into categories. This anxiety arises due to the Jews' seeming capacity to straddle conventional boundaries and evade the typical criteria that are usually employed to define them.

In this sense, the ‘Jew’ in the antisemitic fantasy inhabits a space of non-belonging that carries the potential to destabilize the very foundational underpinnings upon which any identity is

built. It is through this process that antisemitism gains its specificity as an intersectional ideology that connects and integrates various gendered, racial and ethnic concerns in its attempt to uncover the contradictions and social antagonisms of modern society. Antisemitism takes on an intersectional dimension in far-right circles, where Jews are portrayed as the intellectual architects of gender ideology, allegedly wielding it as a tool to undermine the white heterosexual family. In other cultural settings where antisemitic hate speech is still a taboo Jews are not explicitly named as such but the rhetoric surrounding gender and sexual minorities carries subtle traces of conspiratorial antisemitism. Gender, much like Jewishness in such conspiracies, is depicted as deceptive and all-powerful, with terms like "homosexual lobby" evoking notions of scheming and connections to global capital. Additionally, similar to Christian antisemitism, gender is often characterized as a demonic force that needs to be exorcised from public life.

Therefore, to analyse antisemitism in isolation from other prejudices would limit our understanding of how it functions as a comprehensive and solidified worldview. For this reason, the PhD will adopt an intersectional approach to antisemitism, examining how it intersects with gender, with a particular focus on how male influencers in the manosphere articulate these issues.

The PhD project will analyse the social media content of four prominent masculinity influencers looking specifically at their output on Rumble and X. Methodologically, this analysis will be carried out using a digital ethnographic approach that aims to capture the recurrent semiotic practices of these influencers who employ their own distinct vernacular and aesthetic style in their enactment of masculinity across different social media spaces. To do so, the project incorporates a "deep-lurking" method, where the researcher immerses themselves in a virtual community in order to observe the self-presentation strategies of social media figures within a digitally mediated environment. This approach leverages the anonymity of cyberspace, allowing the researcher to blend into the online audience and observe how this interaction unfolds in real time. A digital ethnographic approach is particularly well-suited to studying antisemitism because it is context-sensitive and focuses on uncovering the implicit assumptions that members of a group take for granted. This method enables the exploration of antisemitism as a cultural code—a marker of belonging that signifies affiliation with a broader cultural milieu. As a preliminary step in data collection, it provides an essential foundation for understanding the digital landscape under investigation and identifying key discursive themes

within specific online communities. During this observational phase, a digital archive will be compiled, containing screenshots, videos, photos, and other materials for subsequent analysis. The most relevant material will be analysed in closer detail using multimodal discourse analysis. Multimodality refers to the way a message is conveyed through multiple semiotic modes, including visual elements (e.g., imagery, videos, and icons), textual components (e.g., explicit and implicit language), typography (e.g., fonts and writing styles), and auditory features (e.g., sounds, speeches, and music). A multimodal analysis is well suited for the purpose of this project because online antisemitism, in its current manifestation, is rarely expressed in overt or explicit language. Instead, it operates through more subtle and coded forms of communication that require an approach capable of capturing the interplay between different modes of meaning-making. Memes, in particular, function as powerful tools for ideological dissemination, as they combine visual elements, humour, and cultural references to reinforce antisemitic stereotypes in ways that may seem innocuous to casual viewers. Additionally, the reappropriation of symbols and the use of dog whistles - seemingly neutral symbols or phrases that carry hidden meaning within specific online communities - further complicate the task of identifying and analysing antisemitic content. Given this complexity, an analytical approach that integrates linguistic, visual, and contextual analysis is essential for uncovering the implicit meanings embedded within these digital artifacts.

Furthermore, attention will be given to the comment section on each platform to better understand how audiences interpret and respond to antisemitic cues. Given that modern antisemitism is expressed through innuendo and allusion it is important to identify the specific phrases, symbols, or rhetorical patterns that elicit an antisemitic response. By doing so, this project aims to uncover how these messages are being understood and deciphered by different audience segments, ultimately shedding light on the broader mechanisms of antisemitic discourse in digital spaces.