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Understanding the Andrew Tate phenomenon among boys – a state of the literature review and recommendations for future directions

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DCU Anti-Bullying Centre

DCU Anti-Bullying Centre is a university designated research centre located in DCU's Institute of Education and drawing on researchers from across the university. The Centre is recognised as a centre of excellence in education and research on bullying and online safety. The Centre hosts the UNESCO Chair on Bullying and Cyberbullying. Members of the Centre engage in research to contribute to solving real world problems in bullying and online safety and have supported the development of policy in these areas with Government, the UN, and EU.

The Observatory on Cyberbullying, Cyberhate and Online Harassment is a project within DCU Anti-Bullying Centre and was established in 2021 to provide up-to-date research and advice, as well as monitoring the impact of anti-cyberbullying laws and regulations. More specifically, the Observatory focuses on researching the prevalence, contours, functions, and psychosocial impacts of cyberbullying, cyberhate, and online harassment. It also aims to explore the impact of laws and regulations on those who engage in, or are targeted by, cyberbullying, cyberhate, and online harassment. Within this complex space of online harms, increasing concern has been raised about how boys and masculinities have been targeted by radical influencers, with adverse effects on their attitudes and behaviours.

The Observatory is funded by the Department of Justice following the ratification of the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 and partly by the Department of Education under the Action Plan on Bullying (2022). The Observatory currently comprises Dr Darragh McCashin (Chair), Dr Catherine Baker, Dr Mairéad Foody, Dr Tijana Milosevic, Isobel Walsh (MSc) and Professor James O'Higgins Norman.

Introduction and aims

Contextual overview and report structure

In recent times, but especially within the past two years, there has been an increased concern about the rising prevalence of particular toxic misogynistic "influencers" online. The emergence of problematic "guru"-branded content creators is not a new phenomenon within the self-help industry, but the scale of certain clusters of harmful figures has been identified as a distinct challenge for parents, educators, researchers, as well as young people navigating key developmental life stages (Roberts and Wescott, 2024). In this report, the phenomenon of one such figure – Andrew Tate – will be addressed to contextualise relevant ongoing work on prosocial approaches to positive and healthy masculinity for boys within The Observatory project at the Anti-bullying Centre .

The core aim of this report is to provide a non-exhaustive insight into the rising threats posed by toxic and radical online influencers, current research insights and response strategies - all with the view to informing key stakeholders not limited to: teachers, parents/guardians, online regulators, policymakers and the wider research community.

This report contains the following three-part structure:

- Part one provides a descriptive overview of what will be termed the Andrew Tate phenomenon, in addition to its impact within an Irish context.

- Thereafter, part two summarises relevant key findings from the growing research literature to inform our understanding of the many factors perpetuating the (online) harms associated with this issue.

Finally, part three identifies important future directions and emerging best practices when critically considering how to address toxic influencers in the classroom, in the home and within Irish society at large.

Part one - an overview of the Tate phenomenon

Who is Andrew Tate?

Andrew Tate is a former professional kickboxer and reality television personality who has received billions of online views across TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. At one point, Tate was "the most Googled" person in 2022 (Economic Times, 2022), despite many older demographics having never heard of him. Tate - who is both British and American – is primarily known for highly misogynistic viewpoints and propagates a traditionalist worldview that emphasizes men as protectors. Additionally, Tate spreads a "red pill" ideology wherein he sees the world through the prism of *The Matrix. This simultaneously occurs alongside the* purposeful delegitimising of feminism and gender equality, whilst also promoting radical ideas. Self-described as the so-called "king of toxic masculinity", Tate's self-branding strategy is one of showcasing wealth and self-help rhetoric to his younger audience, with social media imagery consisting of glamorous luxury cars, travel, partying lifestyle, and cigars - all whilst promoting get-rich-quick programmes to viewers seeking to emulate him. The UK-based *Center for Countering Digital Hate* reported that social media companies are accruing significant profits from advertising revenue originating from channels that repost Tate videos, including videos that were classified as extreme misogyny (Counter Hate, 2022). Moreover, there have been several sock puppet experimental reports to mimic online youth behaviours which have concluded that social media algorithms are pushing increasingly radical content to boys (Baker et al., 2024; Amnesty, 2023).

At the time of writing (April 2024), Andrew Tate and his brother (Tristan) are currently facing charges of rape, human trafficking and being part of an organised crime group in Romania and the United Kingdom (UK) between 2012-2015 (both deny all charges); for which extradition has recently been granted following a forthcoming Romanian trial (Kwai, 2024).

The criminologist Professor Michael Flood has synthesized an open access resource with a description of the Tate phenomenon in terms of his specific influence(s), relationship with other male supremacist influencers, reasons underpinning their popularity, examples of misogyny and the impacts thereof. Within this resource, a full summary of Tate and the underlying contextual issues can be explored for interested readers. Further notable historical information can also be retrieved from a recent *Channel 4* exclusive exposé documentary (released January 2024) that charted the specifics of Tate's own incriminating statements (*I Am Andrew Tate, Channel 4*, 2024), despite concerns about potential unintended consequences of further platforming Tate.

In summary, all the aforementioned coverage of Tate demonstrates a highly controversial figure who has leveraged his image and self-styled notoriety to garner billions of followers across all major social media platforms, the impacts of which are continuing to reverberate across society, most notably within boys' interpretation of masculinity and its interaction with the world. This comes at a time of considerable socio-political polarisation in a post-Trump and post-COVID-19 era - the medium to long-term effects of this on young people are still being investigated. Unquestionably, the worldviews and conspiratorial messages espoused by Tate epitomise the definition of misogyny (among other harms), and their ever-presence online (despite widespread social media bans) highlights the enduring problematic engagement with young audiences.

Why is Tate of concern in an Irish context? Understanding the perspectives of parents, teachers, regulators, and the media

Similar to global trends, toxic online male influencers such as Tate have been identified in school contexts as having observable adverse impacts on pupils who are displaying increasingly misogynistic attitudes, problematic behaviours, sexism and overtly anti-feminist rhetoric (Wescott, Roberts, & Zhao, 2024).

Alongside coverage of the criminal charges outlined above, the Tate phenomenon first made regular headlines in the Irish media ecosystem in the preceding 18 months. In part driven by concern from teachers and parents, Ireland has encountered the behavioural and attitudinal impact of Tate and other online figures in a reasonably short time period (Tate was largely unknown to education and parental communities pre-2022 for example). However, as will be presented in Part Two, there may be nothing distinctly *new* here with respect to *how* and *why* the Tate phenomenon has manifested. Many researchers converge on the fact that some of the underlying factors behind any toxic influencer are relatively consistent across time - indeed, there has always been different versions of bombastic "gurus" within self-help industries (including pre-Internet eras) albeit targeting different demographics (Salerno, 2006; Sperber, 2010).

Owing to a lack of replicable high-quality evidence-based applied prevention and intervention programs that specifically target online figures such as Tate, national dialogue has centered on how to practically address the harms caused by Tate's content in practical settings for what are often both primary and secondary school pupils. *What should teachers do when a pupil raises an obviously misogynistic view based on Tate's videos? How can parents challenge their children who glorify and admire Tate without disenfranchising them? Why have social media platforms been unable to reduce*

the risks associated with such online content? Why is there appeal for figures such as Tate when his messages are so evidently harmful? Indeed, these are among the questions have often been debated in the media or communicated to the interdisciplinary team within The Anti-bullying Centre from concerned educators, parents, researchers, and policymakers across our network.

From a more macro perspective, as the European Union has now established the *Digital Services Act* (European Commission, 2022), Ireland now enters a new era of online safety regulation with the *Coimisiún na Meán* designated as the Digital Services Coordinator, thereby underscoring the importance of collectively addressing these pivotal questions for parents and educators. It remains unclear as to precisely *how* industry, regulator, citizen, State and scientific interests will be effectively balanced to achieve a sustainable model of online safety. The specific online harms brought about by the Tate phenomenon (and likewise other notable harmful content such as self-harm material) will (in)directly test how Ireland operationalises its new regulatory framework and the powers of accountability implicitly built within it.

Within local, national and international press, readers - often worried parents - have been met with distinctly contrasting messages regarding how to handle the Tate phenomenon. In addition to often heated debates pertaining to the age appropriateness of smartphones and screentime in the first instance (Przybylski, Orben, & Weinstein, 2020; Vuorre, Orben, & Przybylski, 2021), as well as the political discussion attached to online hate legislation, parents and educators have faced challenges in getting expert consensus on best practices for managing the Tate phenomenon. To take one example, in the UK, readers of *The Guardian* encountered the following two headlines in early 2023: "*Don't talk to pupils about misogynist Andrew Tate, government urges teachers in England*" (Fazackerley, A., 2023) versus "*Parents, talk to your sons about Andrew Tate – we teachers can't take him on alone*" (Okolosie, 2023) – these differing messages encapsulate the confusion felt by many at a day-to-day level.

In Ireland within early 2023, a large corpus of broadsheet Irish media covered stories on the role of Tate within Irish youth culture. Current Taoiseach (and then-Minister for Justice) Simon Harris expressed serious worry regarding Tate's popularity in Ireland and added that "…it shows what happens when the State doesn't step up to its responsibilities. I don't just mean this State, I mean in general. We need to be much better at providing age-appropriate information around sex education, around gender equality, and through the school curriculum" (Ryan, 2023).

Part two – what can the research tell us?

Emerging trends in the literature on toxic male influencers - insights from UK survey data

The ubiquitous force of Tate content is best observed in recent UK polling data which reported the following key consumption patterns among different age cohorts, which may hold some relevance for the Irish context.

The *State of Hate* report in the UK surveyed over 1,200 people aged between 16 to 24 and found clear gender differences in the interpretation of Andrew Tate content (Laming, 2023). In their poll, 45% of men reported a positive view of Andrew Tate and 26% held a negative view. Among the qualitative reasons behind why respondents liked Andrew Tate, the survey found that many thought Tate "*wants men to be real men*" and that he provides good advice. By contrast, only 1% of women aged 16 to 17 reported positive opinions of Tate – 82% reported negative viewpoints. Additionally, with regards to the UK cultural context, it was interesting to note that 16 to 17 year old boys were 21% more likely to have engaged with Tate content (79%) than to have reported that they had heard of: Rishi Sunak (58%), Sadiq Khan (44%) or Keir Starmer (32%). These findings should be interpreted with the following two potential limitations in mind. Firstly, the above data were not published within a scientifically peer-reviewed output and thus the quality of the data cannot be fully appraised, but the insights are nonetheless quite valuable. Secondly, and of most relevance to this report, the data pertains to an older age cohort (16 to 24) from a UK setting – it is therefore not clear the extent to which these patterns would mirror the attitudes and behaviours of primary-aged children in an Irish context.

However, in 2023, a YouGov Children's Omnibus survey of 1,106 participants aged between 6 to 15 examined levels of (dis)agreement with a small range of Tate opinions regarding the following domains: masculinity, work, success, and how women should be treated (Smith, 2023b). Using Likert scale response items, participants were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with each of the domains in response to the question "*As far as you understand them, do you agree or disagree with Andrew Tate's views about [domain]".* This survey produced the following key trends from their openly accessible descriptive analysis summary:

- 54% of children aged 6 to 15 had heard of Andrew Tate - this includes 60% of boys within that age bracket. However, for boys aged 13 to 15, this statistic increased to 84%.

- One in six 6 to 15 year old boys (17%) reported a positive opinion of Andrew Tate, including 23% of 13 to 15 year old boys.

- Interestingly, and perhaps signalling some pushback and critique of the Tate phenomenon, 56% of all boys in the 6 to 15 year old age group reported a negative opinion of Tate, including 63% of the 13 to 15 year old boys.

- A further point of differentiating agreement was found in relation to Tate's views on women. One in eight boys aged between 6 to 15 (12%) said that they agreed with Tate's views on women, compared to 17% of his views on masculinity and what it means to be a man, and 20% for his views on work and success. Moreover, the data suggested that more boys disagreed with Tate's views on women than agreed – 31% of all 6 to 15 year old boys, rising to 56% among the 13 to 15 year old group (with the remainder either unaware of Tate in general or his views on women specifically).

These findings provide an intriguing overview of the contrasting endorsements of Tate's influences, but again confirm the high prevalence rate of overall familiarity, and engagement with, Tate. It should also be noted that this research does not offer insight into baseline attitudes and behaviours, youth risk or protective factors for online radicalisation, and nor does it provide any inferential or predictive analysis of the data. Therefore, no robust cause and effect relationships can be interpreted from the findings yet.

A similar YouGov poll was also conducted with adults in the UK, with a considerable sample size of 2,087 participants (Smith, 2023a). In this analysis, the following key findings were reported:

- 63% of adults were familiar with Andrew Tate, 49% of which reported a negative view (with 44% reporting a "very" unfavourable view). Only 6% reported a positive opinion; and 8% had not yet formed a view despite being aware of Tate.

- Of those most likely to hold a favourable view of Tate, it was both men and young men that were found to hold a positive opinion (12%). By contrast, only 3% of all women were found to hold positive views.

- 9% of all respondents agreed with Tate's opinions, but a large majority strongly disagreed overall. Mirroring the trends outlined above, it was again men or young men aged between 18 to 29 who were most likely to agree with Tate (21% for the former, 38% for the latter).

- 6% of all respondents agreed with Tate's views on women, including 10% of men and 24% of 18 to 29 year old men. Of those giving a favourable view of Tate, 78% reported that they agreed with Tate's views concerning work and success, 64% with regards to masculinity and being a man, and 54% for how women should be treated. The data found that one in three of those with a favourable view of Tate (34%) reported that they disagreed with his opinions regarding women. As per the YouGov data on children, these findings show some contrasting endorsement of Tate's content across the domains.

- The YouGov data evidenced conflicting patterns of sentiment for those who said that they agreed with Tate's views on women - this may be because they are not engaging with the same things as those respondents who disagreed with Tate. The results indicated that many in these two different groups could be hearing different things from, or about, Tate - it is unclear precisely where or when they are forming their views.

Overall, this large UK adult dataset provides important insights into the relative prevalence of those who endorse – or outright reject – the opinions of Tate. It should be noted that this survey did not compare baseline attitudinal insights, and only covered some aspects of Tate's messaging (for example, much of his conspiratorial Matrix-themed narratives were not investigated). Nonetheless, it offers much insight into the potentially comparable patterns that could be at play among Irish adults. Consequently, this could be having a negative influence on their younger counterparts – for example, older males may role model the negative influences of Tate to younger males within their networks.

Aligning with patterns found in the YouGov Children's survey, there was some interesting variability in where respondents viewed Tate as positive yet rejected some of his specific viewpoints (specifically on women). Owing to the sensitive nature of the topics addressed by Tate via social media, the YouGov adult survey could not be replicated for the younger survey sample with children (for example, questions about sexual partners or sexual offending). Therefore, there is no data on where children may (dis)agree with specific controversial Tate messages (such as rape myths). However, YouGov's children's survey concluded that it should *"...not be taken as read that a boy saying they agree with Andrew Tate's views of women in general necessarily agrees with individual opinions Tate has expressed"*.

Emerging gender divides in younger generations?

Currently, there is no representative data pertaining to the consumption of Tate content by young people in Ireland. However, there is comparable data in other settings which may hold relevance for the Irish context with respect to broader attitudes to gender politics and inequities.

Across society more broadly, a recent *IPSOS* report with a representative UK sample of 3,716 adults found emerging evidence for gender divides among younger generations (Skinner & Gottfried, 2024). This research investigated overall attitudes to feminism, gender equity, and perceptions as to which gender "*have it tougher today*". Specifically, although larger amounts of their younger male subsample thought that it is harder to be a woman compared to a man today, thought that feminism has done more good (than harm), and reported an unfavorable view of Tate, interesting division was still uncovered within the analysis. Lead author Professor Duffy (Policy Institute, King's College London) remarked that "*A gender divide has emerged among the youngest generations in their perceptions of whether feminism has done more good or harm, what the future looks like for men and women, and key terms in the debate, like 'toxic masculinity'*". Continuously, Duffy identified real risks of fractiousness within upcoming generations, and a need to understand and listen to all subgroups to prevent influencers filling voids and exacerbating divides further. This point is especially pertinent in foreseeing the next Tate-type character to infiltrate online youth cultures.

However, despite the large representative sample size and the statistical weightings applied, it should be noted that many of the survey items were decidedly leading and binary in nature for often quite multifaceted concepts (especially for younger respondents) – this risks inadvertently extracting an attitudinal sentiment where there may not have been one in the first instance. A further point to critically take away from the overall findings is that a large portion of young boys who encounter Tate did not endorse his views, and there could even be evidence of a potential dwindling interest (Setty & Hunt, 2024).

How and why the Tate phenomenon has arose in the first place – some theoretical and empirical insights

Whilst there is a rich and multidisciplinary literature on the intersection of masculinity with online ecosystems, and broader practice-based and academic research on how we can engage young men on a variety of topics (Flood, 2019), this section will only highlight some key takeaway insights for the discursive purposes of this report's key objectives.

The extent to which top-down factors (such as patriarchal norms or institutional biases in society) interact with bottom-up factors (such as an individual's personality or risk factors for harm) has been debated across the multidisciplinary literature. Reductive binary debates surrounding innate versus constructed differences between sexes and genders have become "clickbait" topics within online communities, despite the research literature demonstrating a far more complex debate that highlights the importance of how all multilevel factors must be compassionately examined. An implicit challenge within these debates is the extent to which researchers can validly and reliably measure such multifaceted concepts such as masculinity, and perceptions thereof, across the life-course and how interventions can impact it. For example, these debates can be seen in the hotly contested (mis)use of the term "toxic masculinity" which has often been misconstrued as a fixed characteristic rather than a set of practices (Ging et al., 2024; Waling, 2023). Where casual or conflicting interpretations of these debates enter classrooms, clinical settings, or families, there can be often unnecessary division for what are ostensibly complementary ideas (Wilson et al., 2022).

Theoretically, one guiding framework that has been flexible to many social science questions is the social ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that neatly encapsulates the many top-down and bottom-up factors that likely impact the Tate phenomenon. The social ecological model states there is a nested interrelationship between an individual and their broader family, institutional, social, cultural, and political context. Indeed, coupled with the well-established self-determination theory from psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2012), there have been recent iterations of an ecological model for positive or healthy masculinity (Wilson et al., 2022).

In general, many researchers highlight a vacuum in said systems that influencers such as Tate fill in modern society. Where one layer of the social ecological model may be failing boys (such as an absence of role models or culture targeting males that perpetuates harm via problematic stereotyping), online influencers may abuse this gap for their own gain. For example, criminologist Dr Emily Setty recently wrote about the continued appeal of misogynistic influencers among some young men and what this says about how they feel about themselves, and what it means to be a male today (Setty, 2023). Additionally, Setty suggested that one needs to question what these trends say about society's failures to take the challenges young men face seriously. It is within these failures that Tate

and other influencers fill a vacuum that mimics what many self-help figures do and will likely continue to do into the future.

There is growing international evidence and data specific to Ireland to demonstrate increasing levels of psychological difficulties among all young people, including anxiety and depression (Lynch, McDonnell, Leahy, Gavin, & McNicholas, 2023; McMahon et al., 2019),but there are potential gender differences in help-seeking behaviours (for example, males display delayed help-seeking, lower awareness of services, or mental health literacy) (Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005; Haavik, Joa, Hatloy, Stain, & Langeveld, 2019; Liddon, Kingerlee, & Barry, 2018).

Understanding resistance and cultivating engagement - applied research findings

A consistent finding within applied research in real-world settings is the existence of a defensiveness, resistance or disengagement from a portion of male participants in applied projects (for example, workshops to engage dialogue, anti-violence work, deradicalisation programs). In the domain of sexual violence prevention, there is an established literature to underscore 'boomerang' effects in many age groups whereby well-intentioned interventions actually increase the risk of some subgroup attendees (Malamuth, Huppin, & Linz, 2018).

For example, zero-tolerance approaches to boys communicating problematic viewpoints risks that they feel unheard and therefore disengage and do not communicate the very views we wish to challenge or understand further (Setty, 2023). One-size-fits-all workshops may therefore not be suitable for what may be different typologies of young people who require more tailored programs. Personalised approaches may also bring about unwanted challenges such as: stigma for those identified, groupthink, and the absence of peers who would ordinarily challenge.

Importantly, there has been much debate about the potentially unhelpful overlapping of negative domains (such as violence prevention or deradicalisation) with positive ones (such as positive masculinity, prosocial gender relations or mental health self-care) when designing applied intervention, educational, or prevention programs. The next section offers some considerations for emerging best practices in navigating this space.

Part three – Future directions and best practice approaches. What can we do?

The following summary points may be useful for stakeholders planning research or programme development in this area, or educators involved in the planning and implementation of applied programs:

- *Meeting people where they are at* (Crooks, Goodall, Hughes, Jaffe, & Baker, 2007; Flood, 2019). One of the most evidenced and effective psychological interventions for a range of both clinical and non-clinical difficulties is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT posits have thoughts and feelings can impact our behaviours and are underpinned by an individual's core beliefs about themselves, others and the world around them (Kazantzis, 2022). When addressing the many multifaceted concepts and ideas regarding masculinity, it has been suggested that stakeholders still need to specify realistic individual goals and targets when discussing these broad issues with boys. For example, if delivering a schools-based programme to counter the harmful messages of radical influencers by showcasing how they are problematic in society, what would be the appropriate individual-level outcomes from attending such a programme given the variability in baseline attitudes? Going from the broad to specific can be especially challenging in time and resource limited environments that typify many educational and clinical settings. Setting realistic, clear and measurable individual and group level outcomes is key.

- *Active involvement of boys*. In tandem with point one, listening to – and actively involving boys – in both the research process and programme development is crucial. To offset the known risks of conflict, disengagement and defensiveness observed in the literature, it is imperative to devise ways of including boys throughout the lifecycle of projects and avoiding the pitfalls of tokenism therein. Where programmes or workshops start with the premise of "fixing" or trying to persuade boys to see the world a different way, this immediately negates the preceding point of meeting boys where they are *currently* at, not where one would *like* them to be at. Therefore, to facilitate dialogue – which in itself may be uncomfortable (Keddie, 2022) – requires a recognition of planning, designing, and evaluating applied programmes or research projects in this area with boys themselves. Crucially, this needs to be done *with* or *by* boys (not "to", "for", or "about" boys) – a recent umbrella review has shown that such active involvement provides a range of positive outcomes for all stakeholders (Warraitch et al., 2023). However, active involvement of young people often requires resource-heavy rigorous qualitative methodologies which has often been conducted to variable standards and with poor transparency such that implementation elsewhere becomes challenging (Steltenpohl et al., 2023). Therefore, extensive planning and dedicated resources should be afforded to the methodical inclusion of boys in any programme, body of research or activity that seeks to target their attitudes and behaviours. In keeping with the call for adopting a gender transformative approach, this engagement should be seen as an interrelated continuum of domains to allow for greater precision in our understanding of factors related to the successful and ethical engagement of boys and men over time.

- *Shared language.* As discussed earlier in the report, understanding the nuances of pervasive terminology or labels such as "toxic masculinity" in the cultural psyche versus its framing within academic literature needs to be critically considered before commencing dialogue with boys. Avoiding the use of such terms is recommended given the gendered endorsements of it according to the aforementioned IPSOS data. Similar polarised attitudes towards being identified as "woke" were also found in the IPSOS data. Critical use of language – ideally co-created between stakeholders – should precede any formal rollout of programmes. All language should be carefully considered given the balance that is required between a strengths-based approach and a deficit-model as it relates to boys and masculinities (Cole, Moffitt-Carney, Patterson, & Willard, 2021; McDermott et al., 2023) and their framings within online influencer culture(s).

- *Advancing an evidence-based approach*. Despite recognition that youth mental health problems are highly prevalent and potentially increasing (Sacco, Camilleri, Eberhardt, Umla-Runge, & Newbury-Birch, 2022), and that online and offline harms (notably, the perpetration of sexual aggression) are more likely to be committed by males (Seto & Lalumière, 2010), there remains a lack of high quality evidence on effective and replicable intervention or prevention approaches for primary-aged boys (Wright, Zounlome, & Whiston, 2020). Of concern also is a growing evidence base to suggest that universal school-based approaches to mental health issues can in fact lead to more harm and distress for certain subgroups (Foulkes & Stringaris, 2023). Similar to the unintended 'boomerang' effects identified earlier (Malamuth et al., 2018), comparable effects have been observed in meta-analysis research for anti-bullying interventions (Guzman-Holst, Zaneva, Chessell, Creswell, & Bowes, 2022). Future research and schools and policymakers should therefore seek to evidence the risk of harm or null effects of any proposed programme, and critically consider the potential of tailored programmes. Crucially, an evidence-based approach should be applied at the outset, not retrospectively, using established (ideally open) methodological approaches that can reliably capture effect sizes, statistically meaningful change across time, attrition, and rich qualitative data that transparently represents the voice of participants.

What can industry, government and regulators do?

Unquestionably, there is widespread recognition that a multi-stakeholder response is required to bring about meaningful change across many online harms currently impacting society. Where perceived incompatibilities between commercial ambitions versus the best interests of the child result in slow progress, the ultimate victims of this remain the young people, teachers and families who witness the harms produced by the Tate phenomenon.

From a rights-based standpoint, an important recent report by Livingstone et al. (Livingstone, Cantwell, Özkul, & Shekhawat, 2024) clearly explicated the misuse or potential abuse of 'best interests of the child' in digital environments. Moreover, the report states that many stakeholders are confused with the task of balancing children's interests against the wishes of parents or the commercial interests of social media companies. With respect to the Tate phenomenon, it is paramount that industry, government and regulators collectively acknowledge that the best interests of the child in digital environments is not merely the prevention of online harms, but rather a much richer and holistic approach to supporting healthy childhood development. Indeed this should extended to heathy development of boys and masculinity. Therefore, best practices should be applied: ethics-by-design, playfulness-by-design and safety-by-design need to be effectively implemented, with oversight and collaboration with Ireland's Coimisiún na Meán to ensure transparency and accountability. This also pertains to the algorithms that are regarded as perpetuating the problem.

*I*n Australia, itself a globally recognised leader in e-safety policy, the federal government has recently announced $3.5 million fund from their *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-32* for a healthy masculinities project trial aimed at tackling negative gender stereotypes perpetuated by dangerous online influencers. In recognising the connection between misogynist influencers sharing extremist messages online that impact boys' views and behaviours, this large-scale funding shows the degree to which the government feels the need to build specific programs. In addressing the announcement of these funds, Wescott and Roberts (2023) pointed out that it is currently unclear as to what research would inform the programs; and given the mixed evidence base on what works, advised that the trial should adopt direct and long-term evidence-based approaches to working with boys. In light of this approach in Australia, Ireland should consider how to resource an evidence-based approach to implementing a comparable program.

Ongoing work at The Observatory in the Anti-bullying Centre at DCU to support stakeholders

The Observatory on Cyberbullying, Cyberhate and Online Harassment was originally established in April 2021. The creation of the Observatory followed from the introduction of the *Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 (Coco's Law) in Ireland.* The Observatory primarily seeks to provide up-to-date research on the contours, functions, and impacts of cyberbullying, cyberhate, and online harassment among teenagers and adults in Ireland. Working with the *Department of Justice and the Department of Education*, The Observatory has four key deliverables spanning a three-year period (2021-2024): annual report, webinars, online repository, and empirical research.

Owing to the challenges of implementing *Coco's Law* during COVID-19, The Observatory temporarily shifted attention to the other related issues underpinning the perpetration of cyberbullying, cyberhate, and online harassment, namely the role of Andrew Tate in targeting young males and furthering online harms. In response to this phenomenon, and in consultation with stakeholders, The Observatory has three ongoing activities forthcoming:

- Scoping Review – as underscored in this report, there is a limited and mixed evidence base concerning how to intervene in addressing the harms caused by figures such as Andrew Tate. A scoping review of the evidence on interventions with boys to promote positive masculinities and combat sexism and misogyny, in conjunction with a stakeholder consultation, is currently being finalised for academic publication.

- Research Advisory Group (RAG) – a cross-discipline RAG was established to advise The Observatory and included both national and international researchers in the area.

- Toolkit development – synthesising the outputs from the preceding two activities, The Observatory is now assembling an open-access toolkit to support parents and educators in navigating the issues of problematic influencers. This toolkit will live on the online repository for The Observatory from July 2024.

Concluding remarks

This report provided a non-exhaustive insight into the threats posed by toxic online influencers targeting boys, in addition to current research insights and response strategies on what is a new phenomenon for many parents and educators. Although the focus on been on the nuances of what has been termed the Andrew Tate phenomenon, much of the discussion points may hold relevance for other areas of working with boys on the topic of masculinity, online influencers, and the prevention of harm(s).

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