

Social Media & Toxic Masculinity: Andrew Tate

Introduction

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Andrew Tate, the self-proclaimed TikTok 'megabrand', has been a controversial figure and stands accused of some sordid crimes. Despite this, he is an eminent influencer and has won a large global following, especially among boys and young men, because he undoubtedly has the gift of the gab and can be inspirational at times, firing off punchy soundbites and impassioned discourses. The internet is replete with testimonies of young men whose lives have been transformed for the better by heeding Tate's exhortations.

Until his interview with Bassem Yousuf, Piers Morgan's highest viewed interview (14 million YouTube views) was with Andrew Tate. What is the secret behind his magnetism? Apart from the way he says it, *what* is it that he says, which draws in so many young men?

The 'Matrix'

Andrew Tate is often heard referring to "the Matrix". He explains that he's appropriated the term from the film series, but he refers to it in a more metaphorical sense. Tate's 'Matrix' is a quasi-paranoid belief that the world is controlled by certain powers that require the status quo to be maintained, including keeping people stuck in their nine-to-five jobs, paying their taxes and serving corporations. It is hard to deny that governments and corporations do need a loyal workforce to maintain their profits/ taxes. He goes further with this though, arguing that, as with the movie, the aim is to keep people unaware of this deeper reality and those who identify it and speak out about it will be hunted down by the Matrix.

He blames the Matrix for concocting the accusations against him and casting him in jail, to hinder his impact. Before being charged in Romania, he had already been banned from most social media platforms.

We cannot deny that the world and indeed politics, is influenced by interest groups - after all, powerful groups will use their power to keep their power, but there are plenty of people in the Western world who have the freedom to, and indeed, do speak out and they are not being bumped off!

Against Depression

Andrew admits to having had a challenging childhood, but he emphasises that young men need to stop feeling sorry for themselves and making excuses for their inability to achieve. He stresses the need for young men to just accept that life will be challenging and it's their role as men to face the challenges with strength and determination. This is probably the meaning behind his claim that depression is not real, i.e. that the more you believe in it, the more it will control you and become your excuse to remain a perpetual "brokie" in Tate's words. "Your mind must be stronger than your feelings," he advises.

He also encourages men to embrace sadness and pain because although most people get stuck in their sadness, there is an opportunity to reflect and learn and to therefore, turn it to good: "Stress is the only condition under which your body and mind will ever perform miracles." He also advises, "If you want the happy tomorrows, you need the truths that hurt today."

A cause of depression is to dwell on the past, to keep looking at it with sadness and regret. Tate argues that a future orientation will cure this: "A man without a vision for his future always returns to his past."

Clearly, there is an appeal to this message - although we must stress that clinical depression is a genuine condition, an illness, and a structured approach to it, with professional help has been scientifically proven to help lead people out of it.

Masculinity

There is an archetype of boyhood, the desire to explore, to play, to indulge the self, to get upset when things don't go your way. The archetypal man, which Andrew alludes to so often, is someone who steps out of these traps of boyhood, the self-indulgence and self-pity and looks towards his long term aims, which he pursues with vigour and determination. "Your future is the result of your daily actions. You're defined by what you do today. Lazy now, loser later. Get to work."

For Andrew, the meaning of masculinity is to find one's inner strength, to grow that strength, to be tough, to endure pain and struggle to better oneself, physically and financially. This is his meaning of manhood. And he argues that too many men are stuck on their couches, or in their 'pitiable' low paid jobs because they lack the inner conviction and courage to better themselves.

“You’ve been given another day of life. How will you use it? Will you wait until tomorrow as you’ve done for years or decide today is the day you commit to excellence?”

This is an inspiring message, without doubt. Where some people find Tate distasteful is that he seems to define success as the vast riches that can afford the extremely hedonistic lifestyle that he has exemplified, with glamorous women, fast cars, fancy villas and private jets. Is this where the pursuit for manhood is supposed to lead? For Muslims, certainly not.

Women

The other dimension to Tate's masculinity, which is where it becomes 'toxic', is his idea of how men should relate to women.

For Tate, true men should aspire to become the archetypal father or patriarch. As well as pursuing strength to better themselves, the ideal man uses his strength to provide and protect, to move from looking after his own interests to serving the interests of his loved ones.

Again, there is an appeal to this idea and indeed, Islam teaches that in an ideal situation, men should assume the role of providing for the women around them. “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means.” (Qur'an 4:34)

This formula was suited to a traditional urban set-up where men went out to work and women stayed home to look after the children. Today however, most families require two 'breadwinners' to survive and sometimes the woman is higher paid. Does this then emasculate the man? There are also so many families, e.g. single parent families, where the sole provider is the mother.

There is a darker dimension to such framings of masculinity in that they sometimes lead to controlling behaviour, e.g. demanding what "my women" can and can't do, or even spend: "it's my money, I'll tell you how you can spend it." Controlling behaviour is oppressive and can become a form of domestic abuse.

Tate has in fact been quoted saying these kinds of things and following presentation. In one interview he argued that he was “absolutely a misogynist”, and added: “I'm a realist and when you're a realist, you're sexist. There's no way you can be rooted in reality and not be sexist.”

Islam

Early on, Andrew aligned with the far right and has been caught speaking negatively about Islam.

Later, in a famous video, whilst a Christian, Andrew is seen speaking positively about Islam arguing that it's the only religion that refuses to bend with the times and stands true to its values. This appeal drew him towards Islam until he officially proclaimed his conversion from orthodox Christianity to Islam in 2022. His conversion shook the world and led to much jubilation amongst Muslims. It could also be argued that his conversion has led many of his followers who would normally have distrusted Islam to start seeing it in a new light.

In prison, he spent his time exercising, fasting and reading the Qur'an. He is unashamed about his conversion and in most interviews, he will emphasise that Islam is the only valid religion today.

The Past

With such positive messaging for boys and young men, it may seem surprising that his influence was greeted with alarm in classrooms. Schools scrambled to find ways of counteracting his message, even banning hand gestures that Tate was famous for. Why?

Firstly, because of the materialistic lifestyle he represents, and we have already discussed.

Secondly, shockingly, the Tate brothers ran a pornography site, based from their villa compound in Romania. They would lure young women in with promises of love and then lead them into their pornography business. This is what led to their imprisonment. What is particularly troubling for Muslims though, is that Andrew Tate tries to defend this sordid past, rather than apologising for it and express regret.

Thirdly, his attitude to women and crude language he used regarding them. Dr Khalid details some of this in the following presentation. It is this toxic, misogynistic dimension to Tate's form of masculinity that has particularly concerned teachers, commentators, and many Muslims alike.

Andrew has argued that some of his more outrageous comments were just him joking. For Muslims, these comments are appalling, and we would have hoped that he would simply apologise for them, rather than defending them.

Conversion rarely leads to an instantaneously total transformation, and we are all on a journey, including converts. We hope and pray for Andrew on his journey of growth and that he publicly distances himself from the dark comments of his past.

What follows is a presentation highlighting the concerns about toxic masculinity generally and Andrew's messaging more particularly, and then, a look at the gentleness that characterises Islamic masculinity and gender relations.