Neoliberalism and the Red Pill:

How Andrew Tate Used Populist Discourse to Spread Online Misogyny

Vlad Bujdei-Tebeica

**Summary**

Online misogyny surged post-2008 economic crisis, leading to the crystallisation and popularisation of the red pill ideology. Initially limited to online niche circles, Andrew Tate brought it into mainstream discourse by capitalising on male disillusionment and transforming his followers into agents contributing to his wealth accumulation. Tate’s platform reveals a mix of misogyny, populism, and neoliberal individualism, unifying disconnected male groups. His discourse has social and economic aspects: the social paints men as disempowered victims and women as manipulative controllers, while the economic promotes commodifying women and achieving “financial freedom” through exploitation. This convergence of neoliberal “hustle culture” and Red Pill misogyny normalises human sex trafficking in the minds of susceptible men, an offence for which Andrew Tate is currently under investigation by the Romanian Directorate for Investigating Organised Crime and Terrorism.

**Keywords:** Populism, manosphere, Red Pill, misogyny, anti-feminism, neoliberalism

**Introduction**

Online misogyny, the red pill movement and incel culture have been extensively studied over the past decade (Moloney 2018; Ging 2017; Byerly 2020; Van Valkenburgh 2018). Despite this, none of these concepts gained anywhere near the same attention as Andrew Tate in 2022. While relevant in and of themselves, they were relegated to specific online communities such as r/TheRedPill, some sub-forums on the 4/chan social media platform, theredpillroom.blogspot.ie, angryharry.com and manosphere.com (Ging 2017). On the other hand, at his peak, in July-August 2022, Andrew Tate was being searched for 25 times more frequently on search engines than all of these concepts combined[[1]](#footnote-1). This article examines how, using a combination of neoliberal and populist ideology, Andrew Tate managed to capacitate an already frustrated online community of young men to create and spread his content online voluntarily.

This article examines the construction of Tate’s discourse and the method of discourse dissemination through online social media platforms to understand its popularity. Building on extensive literature about the red pill movement, internet “manosphere,” PUA culture, incel culture, and related sub-cultures, the study recontextualises them as populist discourse, offering a Manichean view of society where women supplant men’s power. The first section, “Red-Pill Populism,” explores the theoretical foundations of populism and online misogyny, highlighting their shared exploitation of social tensions, disempowerment, and nostalgia for an idealised past. This simplification of complex issues into binary oppositions attracts those seeking clear answers and scapegoats for their grievances.

The second step is understanding that online misogynistic sub-cultures operate under a neoliberal ideological framework in which women are subject to commodity fetishisation (Van Valkenburgh 2018). In the second section, “Neoliberal Misogyny,” the study investigates the intersection of neoliberalism and misogyny in shaping gender dynamics within the red pill community. The analysis explores the ways in which neoliberal subjectivation, with its focus on entrepreneurship, expertise, and expectations, reinforces and perpetuates hegemonic masculinity, marginalising alternative masculinities and further entrenching gender stereotypes and power imbalances.

Lastly, “Discourse and Method Analysis” examines the content of Andrew Tate’s discourse throughout 2022, focusing on his social media output and other online materials. This section provides insights into the key themes and messages that characterise Tate’s ideology and the methods and techniques he employs to promote his worldview and garner a substantial following within the incel and red-pill communities.

**Methodology and article structure**

This study seeks to create a framework for understanding the ideology behind Andrew Tate’s discourse. It identifies the main channels of discursive output and defines the critical components of Tate’s ideological framing of the world. The primary approach to analysing the data is discourse analysis, focusing on 39 hours of audio-visual material of Andrew Tate (occasionally accompanied by his brother, Tristan Tate, who also shares his worldview), as well as a book which also reflects Tate’s perspective on life and is aptly titled “The Tate Bible”. The audio-visual material is split into three distinct formats: podcasts, interviews and online courses. These are long-format videos, ranging from half an hour to two and a half hours. The podcast is titled „Emergency Meeting” and features Andrew Tate and his brother Tristan. In the interviews, Andrew Tate is a guest on various other online shows. This allows him to expand his reach and audience beyond his own, and it is the principal vehicle that has allowed him to create viral soundbites which have been propagated throughout the internet. Last but not least, this study looks at the audio-visual content of Andrew Tate’s so-called “Hustlers University”, an online course in which he promises to teach would-be students the secrets to his lifestyle and how they can replicate his principles in order to achieve financial success. These three audio-visual formats were subjected to qualitative media analysis (Rogers, 2005), an inductive method where patterns, themes, and categories emerge from the data through a systematic and iterative process of observation, interpretation, and comparison.

**Red-Pill Populism**

Populism has always been charged with various meanings and interpretations, making it difficult to provide a single, universally accepted definition (Betz 1998; Mudde 2004; Abi-Hassan 2017). Despite this complexity, populism can generally be understood as a political approach or ideology that emphasises the distinction between “the people” and “the elite,” often proposing that the will of the people should be the primary driver of political decision-making.

Perhaps the most cited definition of the concept belongs to Mudde, who argues that populism is a Manichean ideology in which the corrupt elite and the pure people are at fundamental odds and that politics must represent the will of the people (Mudde 2004). However, Jan-Werner Müller goes beyond this definition, arguing that populists do not simply claim to represent the people, but they, in fact, claim monopoly to that representation (Müller 2016). This, in essence, translates to a fundamentally anti-pluralistic dimension that does not allow for other types of representation in society, except for the interests of ‘the people’.

Online misogyny, on the other hand, often revolves around the dichotomy between “real men” (i.e., straight, heteronormative men) and queer individuals, as well as women. This dichotomy frequently establishes a hierarchy that positions the “real men” as dominant and superior while denigrating and marginalising the others. Similar to populism, the „red-pill” relies on the construction of a common enemy, or “other”, to validate its ideologies and create a sense of belonging among its adherents.

The parallel between the two can be seen in the way both populism and online misogyny exploit social tensions, feelings of disempowerment or marginalisation, and the desire for a return to an idealised past or status quo. By simplifying complex social, economic, and cultural issues into binary oppositions, both phenomena can attract individuals seeking clear answers and scapegoats for their grievances.

Moreover, social media has significantly contributed to the spread of populist and misogynistic ideas by providing platforms for dissemination and fostering echo chambers. Feminist media studies depict online misogyny as attempts to dominate and control women. However, a sociological perspective links these acts to gender stratification and masculinities, positioning them as part of a broader system perpetuating hegemonic power structures. In this sense, online misogyny adheres to heterosexist, cisnormative frameworks governing social interactions, devaluing deviations from binary constructs of sex, gender, and compulsory heterosexuality. (Moloney, 2018).

**Neoliberal misogyny**

Neoliberalism often applies market-based logic to various aspects of life, including social relationships. In the context of the red pill movement, this manifests as viewing dating and relationships through the lens of economic transactions, with men and women engaging in a marketplace of potential partners. This perspective reinforces commodification and objectification and perpetuates gender stereotypes and power imbalances.

We can see the effects of neoliberalism within the red-pill community by focusing on its modes of subjectivation, which involve the ways in which postwar governance has shaped individual identities through various discourses, strategies, and techniques. Three dimensions of neoliberal subjectivation are relevant to this study: entrepreneurship, expertise, and expectations (Bratich & Weiser, 2019). Entrepreneurship emphasises self-driven, individualised, and self-managed approaches to life, while expertise denotes reliance on self-help discourses, training mechanisms, and pedagogic figures to guide one’s actions. Additionally, confidence emerges as a crucial value and goal at the intersection of these two dimensions in the process of neoliberal subjectivation (Gill & Orgad, 2017).

The third dimension, expectations, pertains to the gendered aspects of confidence-building, specifically the masculine expectations associated with social reproduction (including biological, care work, emotional support, and comfort) that underpin this individualism. In this context, neoliberal “individualism” is not solely about individual autonomy but also relies on interdependence – managing resources (including utilising others as instruments) and trusting experts as guides. This study argues that neoliberalism shapes individual identities in a way that fosters self-reliance and confidence while simultaneously relying on gendered expectations and expert guidance.

The third wave of post-World War II neoliberal cynicism is characterised by a pervasive pessimism regarding the possibility of an alternative global order. The emphasis on limited resources and the notion of the “selfish gene” serves as a stark reminder of the existential significance of human subjectivity and life experience, which is reduced to fulfilling desires in the present moment (Amadae 2016). Additionally, neoliberalism reinforces individualism and competition, aligning with traditionally masculine traits such as self-reliance and competitiveness. Consequently, this environment rewards and perpetuates hegemonic masculinity, as men adhering to these norms are more likely to succeed in a neoliberal society, thereby marginalising those who defy traditional gender roles, including women and non-conforming men.

**Discourse and method analysis**

Part of the success Tate’s discourse has had online is due to pre-existing conditions already embedded within both online and offline spaces. As Lise Gotell and Emily Dutton (2016) analysed back in 2016, sexual violence towards women was emerging as a new focus of the men’s rights movement. This sought to undermine the criticism that feminism was bringing to rape culture and paint it as simply moral panic. Even back in 2013, Canadian university campuses formed groups explicitly targeting young men that would criticise rape culture figures (Gotell & Dutton 2016). For over a decade, men’s rights movements have stoked young men’s anxieties towards consent standards and shifting gender and sexual norms.

Andrew Tate is a British-American businessman, former kickboxer, and social media personality who emerged in 2022 as a prominent figurehead of the red pill movement. Tate’s trajectory towards prominence started with his participation in the UK reality television series “Big Brother” in 2016, subsequently augmenting his public visibility and fostering the growth of his online persona. Seizing the opportunity presented by his increased notoriety, Tate disseminated content promulgating his contentious perspectives on masculinity, interpersonal relationships, and self-enhancement. His ideologies and way of life struck a chord within the incel and red-pill communities, facilitating the development of a substantial following. Advocating red pill philosophy, which posits that society is covertly female-dominated and endeavours to “enlighten” men to this purported reality, Tate has evolved into an influential figure within the movement. His entrepreneurial pursuits, self-improvement discourses, and his unabashed promotion of traditional-conservative ideals of masculinity have solidified his standing as a preeminent authority within the red pill milieu.

Tate’s following primarily consists of young men actively participating in online communities promoting misogyny, such as the manosphere and the incel community. The manosphere is an umbrella term for a collection of websites, forums, and social media spaces devoted to discussing men’s issues, often from a perspective that challenges or criticises feminist viewpoints. The incel community, or “involuntary celibates,” represents a subset of the manosphere, primarily composed of men who express frustration and resentment over their perceived inability to form romantic or sexual relationships with women.

In terms of how exactly Andrew Tate grew his online social media presence, he did so through the affiliate marketing program of his online academy, Hustler’s University. The program enabled his followers to earn commissions for signing up new members and encouraged them to post videos of him to maximise referrals. This strategy led to thousands of videos being posted on social media, generating numerous referrals and propelling Tate to viral fame. In essence, Tate created a Ponzi scheme by making his followers believe that they were pursuing their own financial freedom while, at the same time, they were contributing to his viralisation throughout social media.

An Observer investigation revealed that followers were explicitly encouraged to create “arguments” and “war” by posting deliberately controversial clips that would attract high engagement and views, generating more Hustler’s University signups (Shanti 2022). On TikTok, content tagged with Tate’s name has been watched more than 12 billion times as the platform’s algorithm pushed his videos to young users.

The discourse analysis of the content that Andrew Tate produced throughout the year 2022 reveals that his message can be broken down into two components: the first refers to a traditional perspective on the social role of men, while the second espouses the ideals of self-made hustle culture. These two categories can be labelled “social” and “economic”. The

Using the previously defined dimensions of neoliberal subjectivation we can conclude that Tate portrays himself as a figure of authority or expert by emphasising his accomplishments, self-confidence, relationship expertise, rejection of conventional wisdom, superiority over critics, and willingness to share his knowledge with others. Regarding entrepreneurship, Tate demonstrates self-driven, individualised, and self-managed approaches to life by focusing on his financial success and luxurious lifestyle. Furthermore, he emphasises his rise from humble beginnings, rejecting conventional norms, formal education, and traditional employment. Through this, Tate embodies the entrepreneurial spirit and projects confidence as a critical aspect of his persona.

Regarding expertise, Tate relies heavily on self-help discourses, sharing unique insights and experiences to guide others. He positions himself as a pedagogic figure with valuable knowledge, particularly in romantic relationships and personal development. His confidence in his abilities reinforces his image as an expert, with the promise of guiding others to similar success. Tate developed the concept of the so-called ‘Hustler’s University’ as part of his pedagogic persona. Most of Andrew Tate’s discourse is dedicated to exploring diverse approaches to generating income. Tate consistently emphasises using illicit means to accumulate wealth during these discussions, specifically by defrauding other individuals. In one example, he explains that all you need to do to start a business is to “make a website, put some pictures on there, pretend you’ve got a whole bunch of stuff you ain’t got, and start getting money in.[[2]](#footnote-2)”

Lastly, expectations encompass the gendered aspects of confidence-building and the masculine expectations associated with social reproduction. Tate’s portrayal of his experiences and expertise embraces these masculine expectations, emphasising his role in managing resources and utilising others as instruments for success. Neoliberal individualism in this context also highlights interdependence, with Tate showcasing his ability to trust and rely on experts as guides.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has established a comprehensive framework for understanding the ideology behind Andrew Tate’s discourse, focusing on how he disseminates his views on masculinity, relationships, and self-improvement. By employing discourse analysis, the study has dissected the key components of Tate’s ideological framing of the world and highlighted how his message resonates with the red pill community. The research has demonstrated that Tate’s message comprises two main components: traditional perspectives on men’s social roles and promoting self-made hustle culture. Moreover, the study has shown that the dimensions of neoliberal subjectivation—entrepreneurship, expertise, and expectations—play a critical role in shaping Tate’s persona and appeal to his audience.

Furthermore, the analysis has revealed the connections between Tate’s discourse and the broader socio-political context of neoliberalism, populism, and online misogyny. Both populism and online misogyny exploit social tensions and simplify complex issues into binary oppositions, attracting individuals who seek clear answers and scapegoats for their grievances. Additionally, neoliberalism’s influence on individual identities fosters self-reliance and confidence while simultaneously perpetuating gendered expectations and expert guidance. By examining the interplay between these factors, the study has shed light on the strategies and methods employed by Tate to create a sense of belonging among his followers and to maintain his position as an influential figure within the red pill movement.

Further potential avenues of research include investigating the role of social media platforms and their algorithms in disseminating and amplifying red pill ideology. This is crucial to understanding the dynamics of echo chambers and filter bubbles, as well as the potential implications for online discourse and public opinion. Alongside this, identifying and evaluating existing counter-narratives and interventions aimed at challenging or mitigating the impact of red pill ideologies and online misogyny will help develop more effective strategies for addressing these issues and fostering more inclusive and inclusive and equitable online spaces.

**Author bio:**

Vlad Bujdei-Tebeica was born in 1989, in Bucharest. He studied political science at the National University of Political Science and Public Administration (SNSPA) in Bucharest, where he earned his PhD with the title „THE POST-2008 IDEOLOGICAL CRISIS OF THE EUROPEAN LEFT: Decline, transformation and Crisis of the European Left in the neoliberal hegemonic context of post-communist Europe”, in 2022. He currently works as an associate teaching assistant at SNSPA. He also has experience working in the public administration sector and elaborating regional development strategies.

**Literature**

1. Abi-Hassan, Sahar (2017) *Populism and Gender*. In The Oxford Handbook of Populism, edited by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy, 426–44. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Amadae S.M. (2015): *Neoliberal Political Philosophy*. In Prisoners of Reason – Game Theory and Neoliberal Political Economy. New York: Cambridge University Press.
3. Băluță Oana (2023): *The Andrew Tate case shows woman-haters are growing stronger. Why are we failing to act?*. Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/2023/02/20/the-andrew-tate-case-shows-woman-haters-are-growing-stronger-why-are-we-failing-to-act?fbclid=IwAR1LZIN3Jwoew5lvlZeCZSkYIpcOXhlDlEI0zBWc-Un_QFDgn2h-9PRSyWI>
4. Betz, Hans-Georg. (1998): The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies. New York: St. Martin’s Press.
5. Bratich Jack & Banet-Weiser Sarah (2019): *From Pick-Up Artists to Incels: Con(fidence) Games, Networked Misogyny, and the Failure of Neoliberalism*. International Journal of Communication 13, Feature 5003–5027
6. Byerly Carolyn M. (2020): *Incels online reframing sexual violence*, The Communication Review, DOI: 10.1080/10714421.2020.1829305
7. Das Shanti (2022): Inside the violent, misogynistic world of TikTok’s new star, Andrew Tate. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/aug/06/andrew-tate-violent-misogynistic-world-of-tiktok-new-star>
8. David Thomas (2006): *A General Inductive Approach for Analysing Qualitative Evaluation Data*. American Journal of Evaluation. Vol. 27 No. 2, June 237-246. DOI: 10.1177/1098214005283748
9. Debbie Ging (2017): *Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorising the Masculinities of the Manosphere*. Men and Masculinities: 1-20. DOI: 10.1177/1097184X17706401
10. George Hawley (2017): *The Alt-Right’s Goals and Predecessors*. Making Sense of the Alt-Right. New York: Columbia University Press.
11. Gill R, Orgad S (2017) *Confidence culture and the remaking of feminism*. New Formations 91: 16–34.
12. Lise Gotell & Emily Dutton (2016): *Sexual violence in the ‘manosphere’: Antifeminist men’s rights discourses on rape*. International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy 5(2): 65‐80. DOI: 10.5204/ijcjsd.v5i2.310.
13. Marwick Alice E. & Caplan Robyn (2018): *Drinking male tears: language, the manosphere, networked harassment*, Feminist Media Studies, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2018.1450568
14. Moloney Mairead Eastin (2018): *Assessing online misogyny: Perspectives from sociology and feminist media studies*. Sociology Compass. 2018;e12577. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12577>
15. Mudde, Cas. (2004) *The Populist Zeitgeist*. Government and Opposition, 39(4): 541–63. doi: 10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x.
16. Müller, Jan-Werner (2016) What is Populism? Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
17. Van Valkenburgh Shawn (2021): *Digesting the Red Pill: Masculinity and Neoliberalism in the Manosphere*. Men and Masculinities, Vol. 24 (I), pp. 84-103. DOI: 10.1177/1097184X18816118

1. According to Google Trends, searched March 20th 2023, link: <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=andrew%20tate,red%20pill,manosphere,misogyny&hl=en-GB> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Citation taken from one of Andrew’s online courses. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)