



Working Papers in

Urban Language & Literacies

Paper **303**

**Circulation in the manosphere:
Mobile matrices of reactionary
masculinity**

Scott Burnett (*University of Gothenburg*)

2022

This is the draft of a chapter due to appear in Del Percio, A. and Wei, L. (Eds.) *Language and Mobilities*.
Handbooks in Applied Linguistics. Berlin: DeGruyter.

Circulation in the manosphere: Mobile matrices of reactionary masculinity

Scott Burnett
University of Gothenburg

Abstract

Understanding how extremist ideas spread in stylized and enregistered forms is a matter of some urgency for feminist and critical scholarship, and this paper investigates the global spread of anti-feminist and right-wing discourses in the constellation of websites, blogs, and social media profiles collectively referred to as the “manosphere”, constructing and promoting reactionary and antifeminist masculinities. In the first section of the paper, I discuss theories of circulation, and present H. Samy Alim’s (2009) notion of the “translocal style community” as a suitable model for discursive formations that are dispersed, multimodal, networked, and in competition with each other. I then lay out the current state of research on the manosphere, and identify a need for a sociolinguistic approach to this phenomenon. In analysis of five Twitter accounts that promote NoFap I identify five distinct styles which work to present high-status masculine subject positions. In the concluding section I argue that register and style are intimately involved in the circulation of far-right and masculinist discourses, which undergird recruitment and radicalization strategies that appeal to anxieties about status and group belonging.

Keywords: enregisterment; translocal style; manosphere; nofap; anti-Semitism; antifeminism.

This paper investigates the global spread of anti-feminist and right-wing discourses in the constellation of websites, blogs, and social media profiles collectively referred to as the “manosphere”. I mobilise Alim’s (2009) theorisation of how translocal style communities form around mobile matrices of style, ideology, and knowledge, which ‘travel’ when taken up, remixed and remodelled by diverse social actors around the world. Understanding how extremist ideas spread in stylized and enregistered forms is a matter of some urgency for feminist and critical scholarship as the scale of online harassment and real-world terror associated with the manosphere becomes increasingly apparent. Discourse analysts have catalogued the novel vocabulary of these groups and their identity projects (see for example Heritage and Koller 2020 on ‘incels’). This paper advances the scholarly conversation beyond a focus on lexical items and their ideological articulation to study instead how diverse semiotic processes are organised into styles, or aesthetic systems of distinction (Irvine 2001) in a reflexive relationship with established registers that index figures of personhood (Agha 2003) related to masculinist and racist conceptions of the ideal man. As Gal (2018) argues, the seeming ‘movement’ of semiotic material arises not from a spatial displacement, but “from a perceived repetition and hence a seeming linkage (across encounters) of forms that are framed, reflexively, as being the “same thing, again,” or as yet another instantiation of a recognized type in some cultural framework” (2018, 2).

The manosphere is linguistically diverse and ideologically heterogeneous, with extensive discursive struggle around nodal points (Burnett 2022). Its key distinguishing characteristic is anti-feminism, which regularly appears in conjunction with far-right rhetoric. Though the dynamics of this overlap are under-researched, scholars have noted the “increasing convergence” of violent misogyny and racism (Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro 2020). From Utøya to Santa Barbara, and Toronto to Christchurch, a “politics of resentment” (Brown 2019) seeks to violently avenge perceived injuries suffered by men at the hands of feminists, multiculturalists, and the left. While not all denizens of the manosphere commit terrorist

acts, all to some extent find the figure of the aggrieved man rediscovering his pride in being masculine (and/or white) an attractive one. For this figure to be available for local instantiation, as token of a recognized type, its constituent semiotic elements – manly styles of dress, virile ways of speaking – must be discursively available for organization around “locally relevant principles of value” (Irvine 2001, 23). And, as I will show in the analysis below, it is through attempts to attract attention in the competitive world of online influence that masculinist indexicalities are made publicly available for repetition, recombination and stylization in diverse contexts around the world.

This paper presents a sociolinguistic account of five different ways in which a specific register of masturbation abstinence – NoFap – is adopted and stylized by manosphere influencers. While the conceptual distinction between style and register is not a firm one, Eckert’s (2016, 76) observation that registers are “styles with broad recognition” usefully suggests a continuum between semiotic stylistic innovation at the individual or local level, and established registers over more extensive social domains on the other. The official website nofap.com thus establishes a distinctive register – young men are encouraged, for example, to ‘reboot’ their brains to prevent ‘PIED’ (porn-induced erectile dysfunction) which is caused by ‘PMO’ (pornography-masturbation-orgasm; see Burnett 2022) – which social actors creatively stylize in ways specific to their ‘local’ values and cultural frames. Put differently, practitioners *adopt* semiotic features from an official NoFap source, creatively *circulate* them in their own linguistic production on- and offline, resulting in the further *diffusion* of these fragments, often with social meanings distinct from those of their original coinage (see Squires 2014). In the first section of the paper, I discuss theories of circulation, and present H. Samy Alim’s (2009) notion of the “translocal style community” as a suitable model for discursive formations that are dispersed, multimodal, and multilingual. I then lay out the current state of research on the manosphere, and identify a need for a sociolinguistic approach to this phenomenon, which I then describe. In analysis of five Twitter accounts that promote NoFap I identify five distinct styles. In the concluding section I argue that register and style are intimately involved in the circulation of far-right and masculinist discourses, which undergird recruitment and radicalization strategies that appeal to anxieties about status and group belonging.

Circulation and translocal style communities

In a networked world characterised by multilingualism, globalisation, and rapid technological change, a stable association between a bounded language or dialect and a geographically distinct “local speech community” has long been recognised as outdated. Spitulnik’s (1996) observation that the mass media provide communities common linguistic reference points, or “public words” shared across often great distances helped to theorise the reflexive relationship between the media and speech communities. Public words “locate and populate a shared world” (1996, 180) providing “fibers [sic] of connection across various social situations and contexts” (1996, 181). The Internet has enabled a great proliferation of these fibres. What Jacquemet (2005, 274) refers to as a “linguistics of xenoglossic becoming, of transidiomatic mixing, and communication recombination” is applicable to these expanding networks. Sociolinguistic analysis of variation has shown that what ‘moves’ across and between scales “is not an abstract Language, but specific speech forms, genres, styles, and forms of literacy practice” (Blommaert 2003, 608). In an

exemplary case study of a dance craze that spread through the global Ghanaian diaspora, Shipley (2013) observed that the structure of the 'Azonto' dance allowed young people to express their cosmopolitanism through incorporating idiosyncratic aesthetics and local styles. The 'Azonto' dance thus became "a multimodal and multireferential sign built on the inversion and revaluation of the figure that gives it its name" (Shipley 2013, 363). A more extensive community has been theorised as organised around style: the Global Hip Hop Nation (Alim 2009; Williams 2017). Alim (2009) shows how national, local and individual hip hop styles emerge from a dialectic relationship with an idealized version of "Black American Hip Hop Nation Language" (2009, 110). Hip hop in any given context can take up one of the "mobile matrices" of the translocal community: "sets of styles, aesthetics, knowledges, and ideologies that move in and out of localities and cross-cut modalities" (2009, 123). Working within and around these matrices, hip hoppers from Japan to Nigeria signal their belonging to a Global Nation, while negotiating their status and position within it, connected to the fundamental ideological imperative of performing "marginalized voice" (Williams 2017).

These processes are not unique to hip hop or the Azonto dance; language itself is the "product of repeated stylizations and sedimentations rather than a predetermined object of analysis" (Alim 2009, 105; see Pennycook 2007). Following Judith Irvine's (2001) definition of style as a motivated aesthetic system of distinction, Alim describes hip hop artists who develop their own styles in conversation with a global style community as engaged in establishing "*glocal distinctiveness*" (Alim 2009, 109 original emphasis). Participation in the global style is here premised on local innovation and adaptation. The development of a distinctive style is an opportunity for status formation in an alternative realm for young people whose traditional routes to status attainment are limited (Rose 1994). Displays of virtuosity, aesthetic innovation, recombination and remixing of available enregistered materials are the basis for this process (Williams 2017). Hip hop artists articulate style as establishing "honor and position" where they vie with/against each other "to be the best" by developing "a new style nobody can deal with" (Rose 1994, 38). The artist's unique voice emerges in a dialectic relationship with existing "voices" of recognizable figures of personhood (ready-to-hand social types, see Gal 2016). While stylizations are idiosyncratic and creative, they thus rely on the existence of registers with established social meanings that are (relatively) stable within a specific social domain. It is this competition to make something new and distinctive from available semiotic material that is the engine of interdiscursivity, creating the effect of movement.

In the attention economy of the Internet, the semiotic presentation and performance of identity (whether 'authentic' or fictional) is a paradigm case of mediatization (Agha 2011) as the self is a marketable commodity both for the individual actors building their audience, and for the magnates of platform capitalism whose business models depend on users creating content for each other. This "mediatization of the self" (Marshall 2021, 172) is a driving force of stylistic distinction. Whether participating in the Global Hip Hop Nation or the altogether murkier depths of the manosphere, online actors use the affordances of digital platforms to vie for status, build followings, and make money. I will argue below that anti-feminist and racist ideological entrepreneurs are also part of a translocal style community, where status is attached to developing a style "nobody can deal with".

Researching the ‘manosphere’

The term ‘manosphere’ picks out the network of blogs, websites, and other online forums that construct and promote reactionary and antifeminist masculinities (Ging 2019; Van Valkenburgh 2021). The range of masculine identities associated with these online spaces – such as pick-up artists (PUAs), men’s rights activists (MRAs), alpha males, or incels – in many cases have their origins in offline spaces. MRAs for example have been around since the 1970s and the advent of the Internet provided new avenues and opportunities for MRAs to organise themselves into a “virtual backlash” (Menzies 2007) against women’s rights. Various pre-existing misogynist cells, trends, and sub-cultures have gradually become more intimately networked with one another (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016).

Using various methods of textual analysis, scholars have argued that the borders of the online space where these diverse but aggrieved and aggressive masculine subject positions are produced can be defined by the “common language” that connects misogynists to each other, distinguishing in- from out-groups (Marwick and Caplan 2018). Within the broader speech community, sub-groups can be distinguished by their own specific lexicons and discursive strategies. A number of studies have thus sought to track novel lexical items in manosphere spaces. Computational and corpus linguistic methods have for example been used to analyse huge tranches of manosphere data, identifying thousands of neologisms (Farrell et al. 2020). These lexicons have been tracked over time in large data sets, suggesting increases in the volume and frequency of online misogynist hate speech (Farrell et al. 2019; see also Ribeiro et al. 2020). Heritage and Koller (2020) used keyword analysis and appraisal analysis to track the language of incels across a number of Reddit forums, concluding that in these spaces men are typically represented as incapacitated by *external* forces, while the immorality and dishonesty of women is constructed as being *intrinsic* to feminine nature. Krendel (2020) found a similar pattern across 70,000 words of Reddit’s The Red Pill forum, where women and girls were not only routinely dehumanised and objectified, but judged as desirous of hostile behaviour from men, who in turn tended to be constructed as victimized by women and society.

While work on the lexical and semantic profile of online anti-feminism offers important insights into the “shared world” created by these “public words”, sociolinguistic study of how these items connect with broader social processes is still nascent. A number of scholars of the manosphere have pointed to the salience of style. Jane (2018, 671) identifies styles of misogynist harassment, while Mary Lilly (2016, 7–8) deploys Susan Herring’s (2003) notion of “gendered style” to analyse the politics of online misogyny. Adrienne Massanari (2017, 333) has described an “argumentation style” specific to geek masculinity. Manosphere style has however yet to receive thoroughgoing critical analytical attention.

Stylizing NoFap masculinity

NoFap discourse, which is broadly organised around the debilitating effects of pornography usage on heterosexual relationships and the strength of men’s erections, valorises reactionary masculinity and the achievement of “real” heterosexual sex (Burnett 2022; Hartmann 2020; Taylor and Jackson 2018). While promoted on a number of platforms, for this study I focus on highly engaged, highly influential NoFappers on Twitter, which is a

publicly accessible (and thus not “secluded,” see Hartmann 2020) social media platform where users engage across lines of sociopolitical difference to seek and effect affiliation (Zappavigna 2012). Twitter users often behave as “micro-celebrities” (Page 2012) which is a “self-presentation technique in which people view themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others, use strategic intimacy to appeal to followers, and regard their audience as fans” (Marwick 2015). Using the data set I created for another study (Burnett 2022) I identified five high-profile Twitter accounts with relatively high followings. I analysed their typical style of writing tweets, and the multimodal resources they employed both on Twitter and on other platforms linked to their Twitter accounts, which I account for in the five sections below. Following Jane’s (2014, 558) injunction not to obscure the “distinct characteristics and social, political, and ethical upshots” (2014, 558) of online extremism, I have decided to reproduce in the analysis below fragments of misogynist and racist speech.

Incel Playa Style: Egg White

Egg White or Eggy, a.k.a. Tobias (Toby) Reynolds, is a moderately prominent U.S. micro-celebrity who presents himself as a gamer, rapper, cultural commentator, and incel through an interlinked system of social media accounts. Eggy has thousands of followers on Instagram, (where he presents himself as an “ice cold playa from the Himalayas”) just under 10,000 YouTube subscribers, and 3,000 followers on SoundCloud. He regularly shares links to content from these platforms to Twitter, where he has over 20,000 followers. Eggy publishes recorded gaming streams, memes, and rap performances, including one lauding the perpetrator of the April 2018 Toronto van attack, eponymously titled “Alek Minassian”, which has totalled over 104,000 listens on SoundCloud (see also Regehr 2020). Set against a thumping backing track, the chorus is:

Runnin’ through these hoes like I’m Alek Minassian

Hoppin’ in the whip and I’m motherfuckin’ crashin’ it

Up over the curb like I’m Alek Minassian

Hoes suck my dick while I run over pedestrians

The g-dropping, clever rhymes (where the prosodic similarities of “Minassian”, “crashin’ it” and “pedestrians” also link the crucial elements of the narrative) and the uncensored vocabulary are typical of hip-hop style, as is the performance of cisheteropatriarchal sexual *success* (see Alim et al. 2018). The figure of Minassian, however, whose incel status is built on *failure*, creates a juxtaposition with this stereotypical rap persona. Eggy thus creates his style from a bricolage of social patterns (Eckert 2016, 76). Kendall (2011) argues that “nerd” style in the U.S. borrows from hip hop in order to mark a distinction between a supposedly aggressive, physical Black masculinity and a white masculinity with technological and economic hegemony. In this case, however, Eggy’s use of hip hop rhyme and the rap form works to graft (Gal 2018) the marginality and rage of Minassian onto the alpha status of the rapper, from which the “sap” of a more powerful masculinity flows. In a similar stylistic move, Eggy’s SoundCloud banner grafts his face onto the body of Al Pacino as Tony Montana in a famous scene from Brian de Palma’s 1983 film *Scarface*. Eggy the incel is thus refigured as hypermasculine and marginal, antisocial and admired: an incel who is alpha.

In numerous modes across platforms Eggy self-presents as dishevelled, overweight, and sexually undesirable. On his YouTube videos he refers to himself for example as a “decrepit fat piece of shit”¹ and he performs some of his raps shirtless, showing off his large, pale belly. His non-normative body is placed at the centre of female attention, even as he articulates incel “black pill” ideology, which fixates on the hopelessness of meaningful sexual relationships with shallow women who only want ideal male bodies (Regehr 2020). His Twitter banner and profile picture also draw on distinct culture repertoires, in parallel stylistic strategies (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Eggy White’s Twitter Profile (accessed 21 December, 2020)



The banner image substitutes Eggy for Keima Katsuragi, the “God of Conquests” shown surrounded by adoring women, in a still from the anime series “The World Only God Knows”². Katsuragi’s (and by implication Eggy’s) character is able to “conquer” any pretty girl in the context of “gal games” – but (significantly) can barely speak to them in everyday life. This contrast of great success in fictional contexts with real-world difficulty is taken up again in his profile pic, an early portrait of Richard Wagner³ looking uncannily similar to egg-headed Eggy. The blurring of fictional and real worlds, where a man’s status in the

¹ “Eggy White “Alek Minassian” Official Lyrics & Meaning | Verified” posted by Eggy White on 26 April 2019, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzBskPQ6cic> accessed 6 January 2021

² See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_World_God_Only_Knows (accessed 23 December 2020). Source identified through Google Image reverse search.

³ See https://www.europeana.eu/en/item/2048413/item_5FNOOHG4WMFGHXBSC4R36QMXU5333BBR (accessed 23 December 2020). Source identified through Google Image reverse search.

community is linked to the legend he is able to weave for himself in cultural contexts, is repeated consistently in Eggy's content, including in his promotion of NoFap (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Tweet by @1eggwhite, 04/11/2017



“BTFO” is an initialism for “Blown The Fuck Out” from the language of online gaming, to index when one’s opponents have been soundly beaten. NoFap is thus constructed as an arena for struggle between opposing sides and the deciding factor being their pooled and targeted “sexual energy” which is so powerful (in a fantastical sense) that the earth is sprouting erections. In another tweet, Eggy recommends NoFap because he has better sex dreams; he “banged tons of hot chicks last night” (03/04/2018) because he is sticking to NoFap. This bricolage of elements from a confident, macho register, the registers of gaming, fantasy, and anime, coheres into the figure of Eggy as an “incel playa” – where high value is attached to sexual prowess in a fantasy world, as the real world is filled only with degenerate women. The incel can thus be reclaimed as a cultural hero, as opposed to tragic and self-pitying, precisely because hypermasculine figures of personhood can be recombined into a new style from fictional sources.

Proud Boy Style: Gavin McInnes

Gavin McInnes, the alternative media figure who founded hate group the Proud Boys in 2016 (Southern Poverty Law Center n.d.) was banned from YouTube and Twitter in 2018 for service violations related to extremist content, shortly after the first version of the NoFap corpus was downloaded. McInnes has built a new following on alternative media channels Telegram and Parler, where he punts Censored.TV, a media channel with a sensationalist, reality TV-cum-MTV aesthetic that publishes Donald Trump and white nationalist propaganda, hosting content by former Daily Mail columnist Katie Hopkins and other far-right figures. The Proud Boys, as originally conceptualised by McInnes, are associated with the figure of the “hipster” who is urban, grows his facial hair, is into mod style, steam punk, and vintage clothing. Prominent within McInnes’s specific stylization of the hipster is a black and yellow polo shirt that was sold by the clothing brand of the English 1952 Wimbledon

champion Fred Perry, and was also popular with British skinheads in the 1970s and 1980s (Elan 2020). McInnes's deployment of an idiosyncratically English clothing style is also mirrored in his particular version of NoFap, which he calls "#NoWanks" – where "wank" corresponds in British English to "fap" in North American English (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Tweet by @Gavin_McInnes, 02/09/2016



In this specific tweet, McInnes links not masturbating to the increased fertility of one of his Proud Boys, who signs off with the code "POYB" ("Proud Of Your Boy"). Though McInnes speaks in his online videos with a Canadian accent, he frequently affects an English accent, and was born in the U.K. He answers the message from his Proud Boy with the word "NOICE!" – imitating a nonstandard U.K. dialectal form of "nice". This adoption of British semiotic features is significant. McInnes has said that Muslim immigration to England specifically makes it the "canary in the coalmine" (Southern Poverty Law Center n.d.) for the rest of the world. McInnes and his fellow travellers make much of the supposed decline of the West in the face of the influx and fecundity of threatening racial Others. Being proud of each other as "boys" is central to the movement's affirmation of masculinity, whiteness, and "the West" – for which "England" is metonymic. It is this demographic argument that is the context for McInnes's Anglophilia. Pornography and masturbation are constructed as obstacles to fertility, and fertility, styled as English in the context of a demographic battle, is enregistered to the figure of the Western man seeking to defend civilization. That this man is styled as a hipster, with the positive masculine associations of British 'mod' style through the link to Fred Perry, makes him an attractive figure of personhood for McInnes's audience.

Telegraphic Gentleman Style: “Masculine Future”

The account @MasculineFuture has over 2,800 followers on Twitter, and is constructed around the figure of the gentleman. The account’s profile picture features a suave Cary Grant from the 1933 film “I’m No Angel,” while the banner portrays fashion photography of two figures in classically tailored suits (Figure 4). The black-and-white banner maintains the theme of Golden Age Hollywood.

Figure 4: Profile of @MasculineFuture (accessed 8 January 2021)



The place information (United Kingdom) and British flag suggest that while Hollywood is certainly salient, it is the transatlantic, Anglophilic style of Cary Grant (who was born in England) that anchors this particular version of masculinity. The “Victory” named in the profile is explained in the tweets, which construct men as in competition with each other and themselves in a specific (though not always clearly articulated) sociopolitical context. These discursive links are made in a typical tweet from this account (Figure 5) which combines an archaic English formulation of gendered sartorial presentation – “Clothes maketh the man” – with the gnomic assertion that there is some hidden mystery to be uncovered behind this cliché (“Few talk about this and those that do, know why”). A third line problematizes present day “style”. The reference to “soy” that is “wrapped in cotton” uses the standard mansphere term for weak or “blue-pilled” men, who have supposedly been feminized by the oestrogen-related hormones in soya-based nutritional supplements (Gambert and Linné 2018). The third line of the tweet is thus both epigrammatic and a good in-joke, in that knowledge of its terminology delimits the in-group in two ways: those who understand it, and those who find it funny.

Figure 5: @MasculineFuture tweet (28/03/2018)



Masculine Future's epigrams aim for a telegraphic, taciturn style reminiscent of Ernest Hemingway. An economic style of speaking is culturally coded as masculine, in opposition to supposed feminine garrulity (see Cameron 2007). For Masculine Future, the practice of NoFap is an important feature of gentlemanly reserve. In a thread on the topic of "questioning your daily habits" @MasculineFuture claims that "Auto pilot is a dangerous ally especially if you haven't achieved optimum efficiency" (08/11/2017) and then he tweets a list of "optimum efficiency habits" (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Masculine Future tweet (08/11/2017)

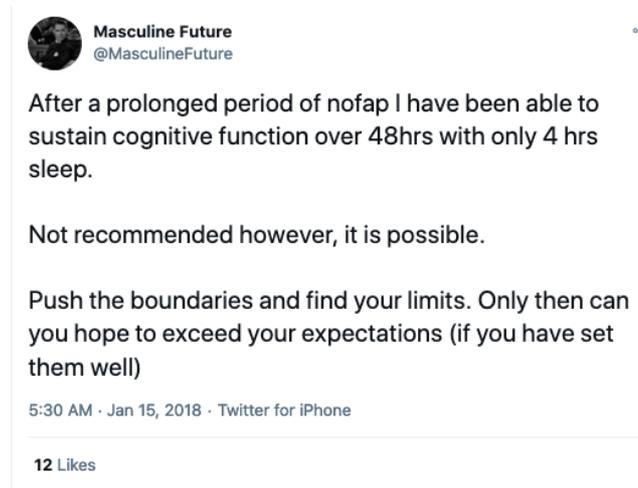


Lists are a favourite tweet format for a variety of masculine self-help accounts; in contrast to many of these, however, MasculineFuture has a more serious tone, and more text-heavy style, idiosyncratically eschewing the use of memes, images or videos to make points. He adopts the tone of the strict father, sharing axioms for life with other young men, and persistently insisting on their need for "efficiency" and "victory" and "success". "For those who haven't experienced it yet, I guarantee that nofap will change your life for the better. Take control" he tweets (09/08/2017). His "formula for wins" is "Gym, sleep, nofap, nutrition and lots of water" (11/09/2017). He typically avoids the use of modal verbs which might hedge the universal applicability of his advice.

In a later tweet (Figure 7) he claims that while on NoFap he has been able to "sustain cognitive function" despite being sleep deprived. The "relay" (Gal 2018) effect of a technical

register invokes an authoritative academic voice. The next line is laconic, omitting the demonstrative pronouns that would link it to the previous line, before he then moves into a more flowing, but imperative voice: “Push the boundaries and find your limits”. These recombinations of technical, telegraphic, and motivational styles align NoFap as a practice within the authoritative, masculine, and rational figure of the “gentleman”.

Figure 7: @MasculineFuture tweet (15/01/2018)



Paranoid Biblical Style: Ken Oath

It is unsurprising that @KennethOath (“Ken Oath”) was permanently suspended by Twitter soon after the screengrab of his profile banner was made in July 2019 (Figure 8) as his tweets consist mostly of paranoid anti-Semitism. Interesting as a contrast to Gavin McInnes’s invocation of England as a “canary in the coalmine” for Muslim immigration, Kenneth Oath’s location is set to “Behind enemy lines, Melbourne”. Whereas ethnic Others are often constructed in white nationalist discourses as invading the nation from the outside, Jews are the “enemy within” that haunts the “white” nation, in this case Australia. The WordPress site linked in his bio⁴ contains a number of posts uploaded between 2016 and 2017 articulating Holocaust denial and other conspiracy theories. The Christian cross in his profile creates a visual echo of the text in his banner – with words such as “salvation,” “blessing,” “glory,” and “Jesus” – and with his bio statement where he writes that “If you think that, as a Christian, I need to be a doormat to others, I’m going to cause you some confusion. Matthew 10:34”. The Bible verse he refers to is well-known: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (New International Version).

⁴ Active; last accessed 8 January 2021

Figure 8: @KennethOath Twitter Profile Banner - screengrab made 21 July 2019



While Ken Oath's stance borrows heavily from a grandiose biblical register, his tweeting style is at times reminiscent of the conspiratorial, admonitory, and over-familiar language used in forms of marketing targeting behaviour change, such as public service or health communication (Figure 9).

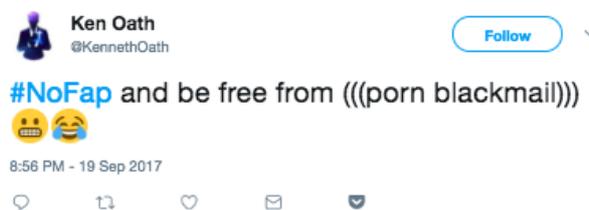
Figure 9: @KennethOath tweet, 14/02/2018



With the salutation "Hey Goyim!" Ken Oath assumes the "voice" of the pornography site Pornhub, which according to the news article he shares is offering free access to singles for Valentine's Day. As "goyim" refers in Hebrew and Yiddish to non-Jewish "nations," Oath's usage here works, in a way common to a broad range of anti-Semitic articulations, to construct Pornhub as controlled by Jews who are preventing him and his followers from becoming "the man you know you can be". They supposedly do this through profiting from a culture of degeneracy that ensures (Christian) men will become addicted to pornography, and thus do "emotional, psychological, and social ability damage" to themselves, and therefore not be able to resist the Jewish takeover of the nation. The call to action being advocated is to "Go #NoFap" – i.e. to stop masturbating to porn and therefore to beat the Jewish conspiracy behind your pornography addiction.

These anti-Semitic PSAs are addressed directly to his followers, whom he routinely admonishes in the voice of a paranoid drill sergeant on what they must do to be real men, and real Christians. After a standard manosphere explanation for how a porn viewer is “cuckolding” himself because he watches other men have sex with women he finds attractive, Oath barks “Stop being a shitty man. Stop watching Porn. #NoFap” (15/12/2017). If you masturbate to porn, “you are nothing more than a junkie chasing the next fix. Stop banging one out. Stop watching porn. Start #NoFap” (15/03/2018). These stern admonitions are combined with the promise of redemption: only if you stop masturbating can you be free from the pornography-mediated mind control of shadowy Jews, indexed in triple brackets which typographically imitate the echoing sound used by Nazi propagandists to indicate Jewishness in audio clips (Figure 10).

Figure 10: @KennethOath tweet (19/09/2017)



The elements of Oath’s style work together to build an indexical bricolage of a religious and aggressive man embodied in the verse from Matthew, where Jesus comes not to the earth to bring peace “but a sword”. The use of expletives, the parody of the PSA, and the use of the laughing emoji together index his belonging to a transgressive, online, and young community of men, situating his persona not in some outdated religious dogma but in the contemporary world, where paranoid anti-Semitism is presented as truth-telling.

Crypto Pepebro Style: Pepillionaire

With over 4,000 followers, Pepillionaire is one of the more influential of the NoFap-promoting accounts. His username is a blend word which indexes a wealthy “Pepe the Frog,” a cartoon character “colonised” by the alt-right (Pelletier-Gagnon and Pérez Trujillo Diniz 2021). Pepillionaire tweets primarily to advocate for investment in BitCoin and other cryptocurrencies, in the context of ironic memery and right-wing sociopolitical commentary. On the occasion of Donald Trump’s suspension from Twitter, for example, @Pepillionaire tweeted “Slippery slope in communist censorship is not a fallacy” and then concluded the tweet with the hashtag “#BuyBitcoin” (08/01/2021). In Pepillionaire’s way of looking at the world, monetary wealth and success are the ultimate goals. His style is all about self-measurement, and he states that the Twitter account is a way to “track” his progress. He adopts, much like MasculineFuture, bullet-point lists as a preferred meme format. But Pepillionaire tends to be far less formal in tone, more profane, adopting a familiar style of speech similar to that one would expect between young men in the U.S. (see Kiesling 2001). He tells a follower that “you should try NOFAP for a few months and ice cold showers man it’s like you’re reborn” (15/08/2017). The frequent use of “man” as a form of address that is also an interjection sets the tone for other NoFap tweets, such as “I’m on NOFAP right now but with these portfolio gains man I dunno man a man’s got needs you know” (04/01/2018). Here the word “man” is repeated three times, each time with a slightly different

interactional effects, serving as a typical colloquial interjection, as a gendered form of address to his addressees, and as a gendered reference to himself as the author of the tweet. He thus voices the typical American “bro” through the right-wing figure of Pepe the Frog. Although Pepillionaire appears to advocate strict NoFap as an essential element of a successful lifestyle, he also uses humour as a strategy to build rapport with his followers: “how am I not supposed to masturbate to these profits? Holy shit” (28/09/2017).

In this way, Pepillionaire is less doctrinaire than other programmatic, success-oriented manosphere accounts, though he still provides lists for success, and then ticks off (with percentage numbers, large green tickboxes, or red crosses) what he has or has not achieved against his annual plan. For example, we learn that his “Tan” has progressed 20% since the beginning of the year, and that his “Attack plan” for May 2018 includes getting a “2nd regular girl” and lifting “HEAVY FUCKING WEIGHTS” (27/04/2018). His expletive-laden and colloquial tone confirms the image of a persona trying and failing, and sometimes succeeding, just like other hot-blooded white men, lending him credibility as a role model and peer leader. Visually, Pepillionaire makes use of a number of memes linked to the conceptual universe of Pepe (including Pepe’s foil “Wojack” and some other characters). In one NoFap-promoting tweet (Figure 11) Pepe is combined with the crying man face typical of online “ugly style” (Douglas 2014) which attaches high cultural value to low aesthetic value, indexing minimal effort. The crying man is however included in an elaborately constructed image with higher production value, all of which works to draw attention to Pepe’s success as a NoFap adherent: not only is he receiving oral sex from the blonde, white girl, but he is very well built and looking healthy and smug. The crying face is however in a Pornhub shirt and hat, devastated that Pepe “fell for” the NoFap “meme”. The construction of the porn industry in ugly style, and as wanting men to be sexually unsuccessful, picks up on similar themes to those that concern Gavin McInnes and Ken Oath.

Figure 11: @Pepillionaire tweet (20/11/2018)



Conclusion

These overlapping misogynist and racist discourses draw on recognised registers and their associated characterological figures in order to create new personae linked to innovative styles. These styles are what distinguishes one micro-celebrity from another in online attention economies. The five accounts incorporate unique sets of semiotic elements into the mobile matrices provided by manospheric anti-feminism and the official doctrine of NoFap. In the moment that these semiotic resources are taken by individual accounts seeking influence online, they create the “effect” of travel: a moment of interdiscursivity where elements are circulated in novel combinations in order to construct a novel style that attracts followers and confirms or augments status in online publics. The followers of these accounts see their own status reflected back to them in the virtuosic performances of masculine personae. Thus, neither the lexicon nor the propositional content of these discourses alone account for their diffusion and circulation online. It is in the availability of sets of styles, aesthetics, and ideologies that they can be repeated/replicated/remixed from discourse to discourse. Stylization carves out a special status for denizens of the manosphere, as originators of discourse able to attract large followings and the associated retweets, likes, views, listens, and subscriptions. In certain cases (e.g. Eggy, Gavin McInnes, and Pepillionaire) it is clear that their ability to attract and hold the attention of thousands of other young men in the context of an online attention economy serves as the basis of their livelihoods. While it is misleading to attribute influence solely to follower numbers, it is suggestive that Ken Oath’s angrily barking drill sergeant had the lowest follower numbers, while Eggy’s highly stylized ironic rapping incel has over 20,000. Successfully attracting followers to manospheric ideologies involves some ability to present ideological elements in aesthetically sophisticated ways that index the status of participants in these various style communities.

The promotion of NoFap by these five accounts differs in subtle ways not only in their presentation in individual tweets, but in its appearance alongside other resources, and as an articulation of consistency that gives masturbation abstinence the semantic “flavour” of the surrounding style. So NoFap becomes a path to sexual potency in a fantasy world (Eggy), a tactic in a war for demographic Western dominance (McInnes), a mark of gentlemanly conduct (MasculineFuture), a way to break Jewish mind control (Ken Oath), or a “self-hack” for financial success (Pepillionaire), depending on how it is stylized. That NoFap is a behaviour attached to distinct characterological figures is an important dynamic of its success in the online attention economy. Manosphere men are interpellated as aggrieved victims and underdogs, as outsiders who are losing out in a rapidly changing, degenerate world. To recognise themselves in this picture in a way that is attractive, the outside figure must be resignified in some way as the real hero. The stylisation of the manosphere man does exactly that. Eggy borrows from hip-hop and gangster movie styles to create a persona that is at once high status, and at the fringes of society, like Tupac Shakur or Tony Montana. McInnes updates the sartorial language of a subculture connected to English mod and punk styles. MasculineFuture mobilizes the status of the Hollywood star, Ken Oath the authority and grandiloquence of the Bible, and Pepillionaire presents a cartoon frog in the guise of financial advisor. All are involved in bricolage and recombination, which has the effect of resignifying the outsider figure as the true hero, and facilitating enthusiastic identification with him. This “beta” masculinity that is resignified as “alpha” has been identified by other scholars; Ging argues that they represent “hybrid masculinities” (2019, 651; see Bridges and

Pascoe 2014) which, while disaligned from a hegemonic subject position in inhabiting the status of victim, uphold the patriarchal social order.

The mobile matrices of the manosphere are different from those of the Global Hip Hop Nation in that instead of identification with a marginalised Black American subject position that facilitates translocal stylistic flow, it is the mobilisation of an aggrieved white masculinity, which relies for its energy on a plethora of sexist, racist, and entitled ideologies. Its translocality closely follows the flows of global Anglophone whiteness, where English, Canadian, United States, and Australian national cultural scripts provide the broader cultural context for these specific stylizations. The “glocality” of the stylization does not (in this corpus at least) involve a move across linguistic barriers (as in Alim’s (2009) data) but in their articulation with ideological formations present in online spaces within a global English-speaking community, whether specific to Christianity, fitness discourse, finance, inceldom, anti-Semitism or fascism. Using a “motivated system of aesthetic distinction” (Irvine 2001) these manosphere influencers style themselves in ways that warrant future and in-depth sociolinguistic attention, especially if the clear and present threat of ongoing racist and misogynist violence associated with them is to be adequately studied.

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