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The manosphere goes to school: Problematizing incel surveillance through affective boyhood

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ABSTRACT

Educators continue to struggle with how masculinities are performed and regulated in spaces of learning. In a time of rapid social change, there is a renewed impetus for gender justice reform in schooling, though these approaches themselves remain a shifting picture. Adding a new layer of complexity, we are now witness to educational policy recommendations around surveillance which are designed to counteract boys' and young men's vulnerabilities to be radicalised into the misogynies of the 'manosphere'. These recommendations exist despite limited research and significant gaps in our understanding regarding both the manosphere as well as the emotional lives of young men. The article intentionally shifts the conversation from reactive surveillance in schools to educative gender justice approaches. We focus, in particular, on the significance of 'pedagogic discomfort' in terms of fostering gender transformative dialogue which is critical of ideas associated with the manosphere. We consider how a constructive dialogue might be fostered with a particular focus on pedagogies that recognise the emotional intensities of gender justice work.

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'I've not personally seen anyone coming through who was explicitly driven to violence by the incel community but we have seen an increase in people engaging with those subcultures. It may be because we are better at recognising it, it may be because of an increase, or both'. —William Baldét, a Prevent coordinator and CVE practitioner (Adams et al., 2021)

Introduction

In our current era, discourses of 'toxic' masculinity have gained traction to describe the problematic masculine ideals of aggression, oppression and stoicism that many boys and men remain drawn towards. These public discourses have, arguably, added to the uncertainty and contention of current-day gender politics, identities, performativities and relations. While most forms of toxic masculinity appear outlandish, especially to those on the political left, other more mainstream rhetoric, like that of Jordan Peterson and his followers, signal a rise in men who are frustrated with changing expectations around gender. In adopting the persona of public intellectual and defender of men's rights, Peterson's message is one of men being left behind and,

furthermore, persecuted by a world they perceive to be dominated by politically correct feminists (Crociani-Windland & Yates, 2020). This rhetoric also has an undercurrent of nostalgia for a time when men's patriarchal dominance went unquestioned.

Moral panics regarding boyhood and discussions of 'lost boys' existed long before toxic masculinity (see Salter, 2019 for a brief overview of the term's origins in the men's movement) became common parlance. As Eate et al. (2017) astutely note, the so-called 'boys crisis' is both long-term and wide-ranging, fuelled largely by media stoking and public backlash. Our point here is that while attention to 'incels' and what is called 'the manosphere' is new, aspects of the media panic around it have significant overlaps with existing concerns about the identity development and practices of boys and men. Drawing attention to what has been called a 'crisis of masculinity' (Faludi, 1999), scholars like Kimmel and Davis (2011)¹ contend that young men 'are coming to age in an era with no road maps, no blueprints, and no primers to tell them what a man is or how to become one' (p. 13). Certainly, young men growing up in an era of 'toxic masculinity', incel violence, high suicide rates, radicalization, and fake news are exposed to a powerful conflation of anger, frustration and masculinity. Within this climate, there are often conflicting expectations concerning what constitutes acceptable forms of manhood which has significant implications for educators.

The provocation for this article rests on increased fascination regarding the 'incel' movement and what this means for young men (Ging, 2019; Cottee, 2021; Sharkey, 2021). It has recently been proposed that teachers in the United Kingdom should be trained to assist in counteracting the rise of the incel movement and the dangers of misogyny through conducting school lessons on respect for women and healthy relationships (Adams et al., 2021). Teachers have also been encouraged to actively surveil students they perceive as at risk of incel behaviour (Adams et al., 2021). Linked with the UK government's established counter-terrorism Prevent duty in education, this focus on surveillance of what is assumed to be an increasing incel threat was spurred by the worst mass shooting in over a decade, in which a 22-year-old male took the lives of five people—including his mother—and had, it emerged, been engaging with online incel culture prior to his crimes. The Prevent Strategy, a multi-faceted program, came into effect in the UK in 2015 and places a legal responsibility on educators to implement anti-terrorist legislation and prevent young people from being drawn into extremism or radicalisation (Jerome et al., 2019). This strategy has faced extensive critique (Abbas, 2019; Skoczylis & Andrews, 2020). At present, incels are not technically classified as terrorists or violent extremists (with governments reluctant to deem them a direct threat to the state—see Tomkinson et al., 2020); thus, their existence occupies a murky middle ground.

We situate our work within a broader policy focus on issues of gender equality and the expectations that schools should be improving pedagogic opportunities for young people—specifically young men—to reflect on masculine norms, respectful relationships and sexual consent. Given various recent investigations into gender-based violence in the private and public spheres in Australia (e.g. Australian Government, 2021; Victorian Government, 2021), the policy space now is more focused on gender equality reform because of the broader rise in (or at least concern about) misogyny, sexism and its association with violence against women—of which the incel movement and manosphere are a part. There exist excellent curriculum resources for teachers to engage with gender justice pedagogies. Most recently, in Australia for example, the Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) Program is currently being rolled out in all schools in Victoria. RRE is a whole school approach to gender justice with a focus on six key areas: school culture and environment; school leadership and commitment; professional learning; teaching and learning; support for staff and students; and community partnerships (Kearney et al., 2016). While it includes curriculum materials specifically focused on issues of gender and power including gender-based violence and (in the secondary curriculum) topics such as sexual consent and the gendered dimensions of sexual harassment (Ollis, 2014), teachers remain feeling ill-equipped to do this work. Part of their reluctance is that teaching about these topics in

critical ways is discomfoting, especially for boys and young men, because it necessarily involves inviting them to consider their gender privilege and potential complicity in reproducing gender injustices. It also requires that teachers reflect on their own discomforts about gender inequalities. Pedagogic discomfort, however, is integral to this work, as one of the young men in Keddie's (2021a, p. 179) work commented: 'you are talking about personal violation; you are talking about how you identify as a person... I don't think students ... need to feel comfortable during these discussions'.

What needs to be recognised here are the difficulties teachers and students face navigating this discomfort in ways that open up rather than 'close down...conversations about gender justice' (Keddie, 2021b, p. 2). Discomforting emotions such as anger, hostility and resistance that circulate and rise in intensity during difficult conversations about gender justice can alienate and shame boys and men (Keddie, 2021a; Zembylas, 2014). However, as recent masculinities research is finding (de Boise & Hearn, 2017; Keddie & Bartel, 2020) these emotions can also open up spaces in ways that support boys and young men to be connected and vulnerable (Reeser & Gottzén, 2018). These safe spaces are conducive to supporting boys' and men's critical self-reflection. As many scholars in this space have argued, emotional engagement with the injustices experienced by others can lead to greater self-reflection and critique regarding our complicity in the oppression of others and our responsibility to challenge and transform it (Pease, 2012). This paper argues that educators must engage with 'pedagogic discomfort' if they are to foster gender transformative dialogue with boys and young men so they can be critical of manosphere and incel ideas.

Building on scholarship which addresses how masculinities are realized, maintained and regulated in spaces of learning, we are interested not in 'incels' per se but how educators *can* and *do* work with the emotional lifeworlds of young men to counteract behaviours associated with incels. Building on scholarship which engages with affect theory to explore incels (Sharkey, 2021), we contend that for educators today to construct (safe) spaces where masculinities are inclusive, involves understanding current and rapidly changing affective economies of gender both face-to-face and online. Our work is informed by research in transformative gender justice (Flood, 2019; Stahl & Keddie, 2020) and the work of educators which seeks to problematize their understanding of societal gender norms and expectations (Kaufman & Kimmel, 2015). Our research on the school-based contexts of young men, as well as the discourses and power relations they are exposed to, compels us to focus on the ways in which educators can be progressive. Deciphering how social practices, behaviours and rituals contribute to boys' identity construction, as well as the role educators can play, seems now more pertinent than ever.

Overview of the 'incel' community

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the 'incel' subculture specifically outlining what Cottee (2021) has called 'the constellation of beliefs, values and emotions that animate it' (p. 93). Incels are part of the 'manosphere', the origins of which are found in Ian Ironwood's self-published *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity*. The manosphere is mainly composed of anti-feminist online groups such as Pick Up Artists (PUAs), Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), among others (for full listing, see Tomkinson et al., 2020). While originally a term coined by feminists, 'incel' (or 'involuntarily celibate') has come to be claimed by men 'who promulgate the belief that, plagued by the spectre of feminism and political correctness, modern society has placed awkward, unattractive, heterosexual men like them at the bottom of the social ladder' (Chang, 2020, p. 2). A key currency within incel communities is misogyny and many would consider an incel online space (e.g. 4chan, Reddit, incels.is, lookism.net and looksmx.me) to be one of hate-speech.

At the heart of the incel movement, a form of 'beta' masculinity, is the withdrawal of men and boys from a society perceived as unaccepting (Ging, 2019; Cottee, 2021). Incels, as part of

their wider ideology, believe in feminist brainwashing and see the world as fundamentally hostile against them, which serves to 'rationalize the sexual deficit of incels and justify hostility against women and sexually active men' (Cottee, 2021, p. 94). Furthermore, they also vehemently hate the alpha male, what they refer to as Chads, a figure in incel communities which is considered to be an epitome of masculine privilege. As Menzies (2022) notes, 'incels are envious of the sexual access and social status' of Chads though they also feel he is a 'victim in social conditions that allow women to exploit men (financially or emotionally) for sex' (p. 4–5). Furthermore, while incels may be prone to acts of violence against both women (who they see as unattainable) and men (who are alphas), they are also violent against themselves, where a significant percentage of their online community posts concern suicide (Daly & Laskovtsov, 2021).

Very little is known about who incels actually are. Arguably, they are simply part of a broader public rise in gender polarizing identity politics. Cottee (2021) indicates that the majority of incels 'are young middle-class white males who live with their parents and have never had sex or true intimacy with a woman' (p. 95). More recent research has sought to problematise whiteness as a defining characteristic, as some incels do identify as being of South and East Asian descent, 'ethnic groups that have historically been rendered less masculine than the white norm' (for more detail, Sharkey, 2021, p. 8). The March incels.co (Incels.co, 2020) survey indicated that 24 percent of respondents (N=670) reported that they do not work and/or study suggesting a high degree of marginalisation. For scholars such as Bates (2020) (see also Kimmel, 2013), it is important to understand and critically examine the complexity of the misogynist views expressed by groups such as the incels or 'angry white men' as a product of not only a shift in gender politics but also the politics of class, with shifting labour markets intersecting with histories of racial polarisation to compound [white] men's feelings of disenfranchisement (Pease, 2020a)

Despite the violent rhetoric online, actual examples of incel-inspired violence remain rare and to date there is no research that documents incel behaviour with school-aged young men. This is important as it remains unclear how much of an incel lifestyle remains online and how much occurs offline. What is clear is that innate to the 'incel' movement is a perception of themselves as subordinated by the perceived gender norms of society which, in their opinion, marginalize and exclude them. Therefore, using the recent policy remit in the United Kingdom as a provocation (Adams et al., 2021), we want to shift the conversation away from the proposition of surveillance, toward a consideration of what gender justice pedagogies offer educators to guard against a vulnerability to incel ideology. As already noted, gender justice pedagogies are discomfiting and can be emotionally intense, especially for boys and young men—thus they require educators to work sensitively with the emotional lifeworlds of participants (Keddie & Bartel, 2020). How young men negotiate feelings associated with the pleasures and pain of attempting to live up to the 'hegemonic' masculinities revered and reviled in the manosphere—specifically feelings of shame, anxiety and isolation—remains highly important, as educators seek to empower young men to develop strategies to counteract misogyny and violence against women. Before we discuss the role gender justice pedagogies can play, we provide a brief overview of recent developments in affect theory and critical studies of men and masculinities; we feel this is foundational to how we understand the affective intensities such pedagogies are required to engage with.

Affect theory and masculinities

The 'affective turn' (Clough, 2007) has influenced recent scholarship in critical studies of men and masculinities (de Boise, 2018; Allan, 2018; Reeser & Gottzén, 2018) which has focused on how men's emotions—whether it be desire, envy, anger, happiness or fear—arise out of powerful investments in particular ideologies, conceptions of gender normativity and P/politics. Research

on affect resonates particularly with feminist new materialism, relationality, and the interweaving and overlapping of the material, the social, the biological and the cultural (Zembylas & Schutz, 2016). While studies of affective and gendered practices are diverse, there is extensive research focused on men engaged in anger, misogyny, and othering. Building on longstanding scholarship concerning masculinities as unrealized and unattainable (Connell, 2000; Kimmel & Davis, 2011), Allan (2018) writes of 'paranoid masculinity' where men 'are always fearful of being outed as not masculine enough' (p. 181). Drawing on Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism', Allan (2018) contends that 'masculinity itself is seldom achievable' and that 'we always seem to fail at masculinity' (p. 175). In this failure, boys and men often experience prolonged feelings of unworthiness and shame which play out in varied ways in their school lives, often through hyper-heterosexuality (Swain, 2000; Renold, 2007).

However, interrelated with how men struggle to fully realise their masculine identities, masculinities themselves are evolving in relation to social change. In terms of expressions of weakness and vulnerability, a growing body of research has sought to explore how men talk about their emotions, the so-called 'softening' of masculinities (de Boise, 2018, p. 159), which contrasts with the pervasive notion that men are always emotionally distant and equate being emotionally open with weakness (Reeser & Gottzén, 2018). We are interested in the relationship between affect, masculinities and weakness, and understanding what role this plays in the *economies of feeling* for boys today (Stahl & Keddie, 2020). Research on masculinities and vulnerabilities promote the open discussion of emotions in relation to men's personal and social well-being; the discussion of vulnerabilities and dropping the macho façade is nearly always portrayed as productive. As some men perform masculinity in ways that could be described as softer, founded on notions of more 'inclusive' forms of masculinity grounded in liberal notions of acceptance (Anderson, 2009), it is clear that the figure of the sensitive 'nice guy' has become prominent (Allen, 2007; de Boise, 2018).

Signs, symbols and discourses are fundamental to how we understand affective boyhood. Drawing on Butler's scholarship, Zembylas (2007) writes that emotions are 'performative in the sense that they are fabrications...manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means' (p. 64). Masculinities are constituted through everyday practices. As Allan (2018) writes, 'To study masculinity is not just to study the bigger topics of toxicity, violence, and sexuality, but also to recognize the ways that these bigger topics affect and inform the daily practices, the quotidian, and the seemingly meaningless, which are, in many ways, meaningful' (p. 185). In social research, affect is intertwined with attention to embodiments, entanglements, assemblages, performativity, discourses aligned with a continual process of meaning-making. Embodied emotions, whether they be conscious or unconscious, are embedded throughout social practices where they contribute to the structuring of subjectivities and subject positions. This is critical when we consider what we know regarding the societal influences on boyhood as well as how boys engage with their schooling.

Affective intensities and boyhood

The study of the emotional lives of young men has played a consistent role in understanding how masculine subjectivities are formed in schooling where researchers have addressed how masculinities are realized, maintained and regulated in spaces of learning (Connell, 2000; Hickey & Keddie, 2004; Keddie, 2006; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996). There is often an institutionalized, narrow conception of acceptable forms of masculinity which constrains emotional expression, and the relationships young men form.² Furthermore, research suggests that boys are over-disciplined in formal educational contexts especially if they are from marginalised backgrounds (Entwistle et al., 2007). We are interested in how theories of affect (embodied, performed, regulated) allow us to engage with how boys respond to pressures

concerning practices of normalizing certain (hegemonic) conceptions of what it means to be a boy (Connell, 1989; Swain, 2000; Renold, 2007). Ahmed (2004a) writes:

In such affective economies, emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily spaces with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments. Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective. (p. 117)

As educational researchers exploring the identity work of boys, we are interested in what affective economies could contribute to how we address gender, subjectivity and emotions in our work (Stahl & Keddle, 2020). Focusing on masculinities and vulnerabilities, Pease (2020b) describes 'ontological vulnerability' as being about challenging deeply internalised habits of invulnerability and privilege, calling attention to how these are aligned with harmful or hegemonic versions of masculinity (e.g. power/control, domination and competition).

We view boyhood through an affective lens; specifically, we are interested in how feelings of shame, anxiety and dislocation inform how masculinities are performed in wider society and in formal schooling. Traditionally, the norms associated with masculinity are aligned with the restriction of emotions where the public demonstration of emotions from boys and men, particularly emotions associated with weakness and vulnerability, have been closely aligned with notions of femininity. Constructions of masculinity as 'emotionally inarticulate restricts [men's and boys'] ability to express emotions (particularly distress) and constrains them in seeking help as doing so implies weakness' (Pearson, 2021, p. 4; Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2012). The significance of moving beyond these harmful norms has long been a concern for researchers as articulated in the *Boy Code* of Pollack, (1999), Kimmel's *Guyland* (2008), and Way's (2011) *Deep Secrets*. While certainly not a remedy for toxic masculinity, a key part of strategies to challenge problematic conceptions of masculinity has been getting men to verbalize their emotions and counteract conventional notions of stoicism (Hearn, 1987) where mutual vulnerability is foregrounded (Keddle, 2021a; Pease, 2020b). Acknowledging the false binary, de Boise (2018) describes this movement as founded on the 'presumption of men's emotional impoverishment, in contrast to women's more highly developed attunement to their emotions' (p. 160).

Stahl and Keddle (2020) call attention to the emotional labour of boyhood and the importance of considering how boys manage feelings, performances and regulation of expressions which we associate with the expectations around adolescent masculinities. Furthermore, within studies which consider the emotional labour of doing 'boy work' (Keddle, 2006) we need to consider the emotional climate of the school (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003), as an affective economy where emotions are *doing* (Ahmed, 2004b). Emotions have a 'rippling' effect which, as noted earlier (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 120), brings bodies and subjectivities together, where 'affective economies of boyhood are realized collectively in a particular emotional moment in time' (Stahl & Keddle, 2020, p. 885). Acknowledging developments in psychology or the psycho-social around boyhood, Stahl and Keddle (2020) draw on affect theory to downplay a psychological/individual/interior interpretation of emotions with the aim of illustrating how emotions highlight how masculinities can never be fully realized and how they ultimately remain sites of continual labour (Allan, 2018). This theorising is helpful in conceptualising and understanding the discomfort of gender-justice pedagogies.

Pedagogies of discomfort and gender justice

In researching emotions in education, Zembylas (2007) describes three broad perspectives to theorizing emotions: private (psychodynamic), sociocultural (a social constructionist approach) and emotions as interactionist, 'transcending the dichotomies (e.g. mind/body, individual/social)' (p. 58). A sociocultural approach to thinking critically about emotions in educational research

emphasizes the importance of relationships and how emotions are grounded in a particular social context where the *sociality of emotions* is paramount (Zembylas, 2007, p. 63). Furthermore, in subsequent work Zembylas (2013) foregrounds ‘troubled knowledge’ which can bring about ‘profound feelings of loss, shame, resentment, or defeat that one carries from his or her participation in a traumatized community’ (p. 177). With this in mind, research and practice in the area of masculinity and gender justice pedagogies has ‘consistently highlighted the imperative of supporting boys and men to engage with their emotions’ (Keddie, 2021a). Important here is supporting boys and men to ‘evaluate the ends to which their emotions are put, what and who they are directed toward, how intensely [are they felt] and how [they] circulate between bodies to sustain as well as challenge men’s privileges’ (de Boise & Hearn, 2017, p. 2). This is a difficult and challenging process for educators to facilitate. It begins with (as much research in this space has highlighted) fostering boys’ and men’s understandings of masculinity as socially constructed—as a performance that is multiple, fluid and contextual (Connell, 2005; Butler, 1990). Furthermore, it involves fostering boys’ and men’s ability to challenge negative and restrictive masculinities, along with broadening their understanding and take up of alternative, non-dominant and inclusive masculinities (Keddie & Mills, 2007; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Activities to foster this critical reflection are familiar and include critically examining—and offering more equitable alternatives to—the dominant messages and values imbued in different representations of gender, masculinity and hetero/sexuality in texts (e.g. the media/social media) and contexts (e.g. familial, peer and sports).

Such critical pedagogies have not tended to focus on the emotional intensities of gender justice work. More recently, scholarship in affect studies provides insight into how such intensities might be critically unpacked with boys and men. In considering movement towards a critical affective pedagogy, the work of Anwaruddin (2016) is useful for encouraging (as noted in the previous paragraph) an interrogation of the gendered and gendering of emotions in relation to how and who they are directed toward and how intensely they are felt including when and why they circulate to sustain masculine privilege (de Boise & Hearn, 2017). He proposes a set of questions that seek to interrogate why we feel how we feel, what our emotions do, how we might empathise with others, how emotions circulate and attach themselves to people, objects and ideas and how we can transform what we say into what we do (see an expansion of how this questioning supports gender transformation in Keddie & Bartel (2020). In the gender justice pedagogical space, there is also increasing recognition of the significance of creative pedagogies in addressing the dimensions and intensities of affect. As Ringrose et al. (2020) argue, ‘all pedagogical processes are affective and [thus it is imperative to] consider how these affective forces can be engaged to move education toward new forms of politicized public pedagogies, socialization and consciousness’ (p. 4; see also Hickey-Moody, 2013). Creative pedagogies that utilize craft, visual art, music, drama and dance can offer ways to:

open up spaces to feel, think, question, embody and share often sensitive or difficult personal issues ... this can be achieved through inviting [students] to create scenarios that connect to the personal but provide opportunities for collective thought, understanding, debate and action for change. (Agenda, no year, p. 57)

These sorts of critical affective pedagogies offer potential to support boys and men to better understand the power of emotions that shape the development of their identities and lifeworlds. They can foster an understanding of emotions as relational, performative and sometimes fabricated, as differentiated in particular individual and collective experiences and contexts and felt deeply and viscerally in the body. Such critical engagements can reveal boys’ and men’s emotional investments and disinvestments in the privileges of dominant or hegemonic masculinities and the ways in which these investments and disinvestments play out—how they are embodied (physically felt and enacted), how they are entangled (with other ways of feeling, knowing and being) and how they are assembled and performed for particular people in particular places and spaces (online and offline).

As noted earlier, we recognize that fostering this sort of deep self-reflection on issues of masculinity and emotion and, more explicitly, the sexism and misogyny of the manosphere is far from simple. Here we seek to make a connection to a foundational aspect of the manosphere, the concept of the Red/Blue Pill, an analogy which derives from the 1999 film *The Matrix*, in which the protagonist is given the choice of taking one of the two pills. As Ging (2019) states:

Taking the blue pill means switching off and living a life of delusion; taking the red pill means becoming enlightened to life's ugly truths. The Red Pill philosophy purports to awaken men to feminism's misandry and brainwashing.... (p. 640).

However, we ponder how pedagogies focused on 'pedagogic discomfort' might draw on the red pill/blue pill ideology—in particular, by flipping this logic so that 'taking the red pill' could be reframed as opening boys' and men's lives to being critical of the narrow views of the manosphere, especially misogyny, and their own role in its promotion.

In thinking critically about what role affect can play in understanding school practices and pedagogy, Watkins (2016) writes how affect 'can manifest in various ways, intensities and scales' (p. 81) where there is a 'pedagogic affect' (Watkins, 2006) which shapes the relationship between teaching and learning, teacher and student. Such thinking brings to light the significance of teachers creating safe and respectful relations and spaces that can bear the weight and intensities of difficult conversations and knowledge (Zembylas, 2014). Scholarship in the area of gender just pedagogy has articulated what such relations and spaces look like. For the educators in Keddle and Mills's (2007) work for example (chapter 5), respectful and critical pedagogies when working with boys for gender justice require that teachers:

- Model and teach the skills and relations of respect, negotiation and compromise rather than deploying the 'deadly habits' of 'punishing, threatening, complaining, criticising or nagging'
- Seek to understand where boys are coming from and what is important to them
- Listen to and acknowledge boys' pictures of themselves and explore with them why they are thinking, acting and feeling in particular ways
- Explore the emotional pleasures and costs associated with different ideas and expectations of masculinity in different contexts and different relations/relationships
- Identify and challenge harmful and restrictive masculinities
- Explore and promote acceptance about diverse ways of being male especially those that are peaceful, inclusive and non-violent (adapted from Keddle & Mills, 2007)

These focus areas can be explored through a range of interactive and dynamic learning activities (akin to the creative pedagogies mentioned earlier) where boys can critically analyse different expectations and representations of masculinity in different contexts (e.g. the media, the family, school, workplace, politics, business, sports contexts and so on). These respectful and critical pedagogies can bear the weight and intensities of the difficult conversations that will arise when problematising the harmful masculinities that lead to gender inequality.

Part of affect theory has focused on the situatedness of the activity and what this means for emotional expression. Drawing on work in femininities and affect, Goodwin (2006) describes 'situated activities' characteristic of 'encounters' as orchestrated moments of embodied interaction. Bodies and talk are tied to organizational spaces (in this case, sites of learning) as well as physical objects which are tied to existing histories of organization. We believe it is important for educators to increase their awareness concerning how boys' emotions are realized within situated activity, for example the sports field as a site of heightened emotions where expressions of affection and physical touch are considered acceptable for boys and men (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). In considering emotional displays and their acceptability, we can see that

particular emotions that are accepted in one context (i.e. the sports field) might not be accepted in other contexts (e.g. within schools or classrooms). For example, MacArthur and Shields (2015) in their discussion of men's crying and other counter normative emotional expressions within competitive sports, argue that 'the interconnected nature of sport and masculinity make it a powerful site for emotional involvement and expression' (p. 43). That is, particular contexts may allow for greater emotional vulnerability and expression by men precisely because they have long been constructed as especially important domains for male identity formation. As sociology of masculinities research has long argued, masculinities are located, multiple, complex, relational and contingent—as such, the affective intensities of masculinity are differently configured by boys and men within these processes (Connell 1995; Messerschmidt, 2018; Stahl & Keddle, 2020). In highlighting the situated nature of where boys can express their vulnerability, we link back to how the incel community is largely private and online. Furthermore, these online incel communities are highly charged affective spaces where participants vacillate between a hatred of societal norms, the hatred of men they perceive to be superior, a hatred of women and a self-hatred/violence against the self (Ging, 2019; Sharkey, 2021).

Furthermore, these strong emotions circulating within incel spaces contribute to the community bond. While research is limited, what appears present in these online spaces is an affective solidarity (Sharkey, 2021) where the digital comes to represent a place where they can be vulnerable in contrast to the non-digital spaces they inhabit (Daly & Reed, 2021). The anger and frustration channelled into the digital space suggests boys who are struggling with their sense of masculinity and their relationship with women do require constructive outlets for their anger. Again, boys' and men's access to safe and respectful (offline and online) spaces where they can express strong emotions, feel listened to and move towards expressing non-violent and non-destructive masculinities are significant in working through this anger (Atkinson, 2002).

Concluding discussion

In terms of educational policy which promotes incel surveillance, we note two key aspects absent from these debates: first, many aspects of the incel movement are still unknown and there exists limited research regarding how the manosphere is experienced by school-age young men. Cottee (2021) describes research on incels as 'still in its infancy' (p. 93) where there is ambiguity regarding how to frame these young men (e.g. as bigots engaging in rhetorical and potentially physical violence, or as victims of toxic gender norms). Second, it is unclear at this stage the role progressive gender justice pedagogies will play in educative practices aimed at guarding against a vulnerability to misogynistic ideologies that could lead to violence against women (VAW). We are interested in how gender justice pedagogies, as a form of primary prevention, may have the capacity to effectively guard against a propensity toward strong identification with incel communities and, as a form of 'reversed' red pill, promote criticality around the manosphere.

It is clear that schools struggle with the complexities associated with implementing gender justice pedagogies. Research suggests that many educators and parents 'may not perceive young men as gendered persons or understand the negative effects of learned gender role stereotypes' (O'Neil & Crapser, 2011, p. 19) or fully understand the identity resources and masculine ideologies boys draw upon as they progress through their schooling. In their lack of understanding, they may pathologise young men rather than recognizing the pressures associated with masculinity (Allan, 2018) and the emotional work of being a boy today (Stahl & Keddle, 2020). As previously noted, the fear of 'losing masculinity' where 'one can never be masculine enough' manifests in institutions, where conceptualizations of masculinity are very carefully governed and enforced (Allan, 2018, p. 186). Therefore schools, as a system of gender regimes, must be inclusive spaces where a diversity of acceptable forms of masculinities exist

and are validated and celebrated through positive relationships between staff and students (Keddie, 2021b; Lingard et al., 2009).

In reflecting on our research on masculinities and the interplay between social and learner identities, we recognize education—as a site of learning and work—often brings emotions into conflict, where emotions become both ‘charged’ and ‘shaped’ over time as gender emerges and re-emerges in spaces of learning. In exploring what the ‘affective turn’ can contribute to investigations of young men in their schooling, we consider how theories of affect can open up new spaces that might be termed critical affective pedagogies that recognise and support boys and young men to navigate their emotional lifeworlds and potential subjection to toxic masculinities. Subjectivities, discourses and power relations shape what is thinkable and knowable about subject positions. Watkins (2016) writes about considering the importance of how ‘affect guides and is guided by practice and the valuable insights that are gleaned when one is attuned to its impact’ (p. 71). We argue this involves careful consideration of the changing affective economies of gender and see the work of educators as interwoven with the complex interrelationship between boyhood and the social world.

We now return to the provocation for this article, where educators may be potentially required to engage in surveillance tactics regarding incel behaviours. This would not be the first time in history that an educational policy was made without careful consideration or a sophisticated evidence base. Surveying our own research exploring boys’ identity work in schooling, we reflect upon how masculine subjectivities are constructed *and felt* through relationships, values and meanings and what this means for subject positions. While there has been increased attention to the manosphere, there has been limited connection between the manosphere, the incel community and experiences with boyhood. We are not seeking to make causal links, but we are interested in how schools could be productive spaces to address those young males who may be vulnerable to such ideologies.

Notes

1. It is acknowledged that the use of Kimmel’s work in current gender justice research is contentious following the allegations of sexism and transphobia directed at him in the post #MeToo period.
2. Arguably, as a society, we condemn the results of extreme/toxic masculinities and, as a result, they manifest online in places like the incel communities.

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