

**A Proposal for the Extinction of Gentlemen**  
**- Looking at Biological Determinism on Instagram**

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## ABSTRACT

The idea of a natural hierarchy at which men sit at the top is prevalent on a large online community known as the 'manosphere'. The growing popularity of this community which promotes male dominance and a natural order prompted a study to dissect their tactics on Instagram as well as highlight the weak scientific basis which is used to justify racism, sexism and classism. This study addressed these needs by analysing the content of a section of the manosphere located using the search term 'Gentlemen' on Instagram channels. Data was collected from a selection of these channels and strong recurring themes were identified. Six of the channels identified with the highest follower count were selected for further study. Due to the high number of images and strong theme across the channels animal images were then chosen for further analysis. Aside from predominantly images of men and women predatory cats, often lions were one of the most popular images across the channels. The research went on to comparatively analyse the lion images with the images of men depicted to understand the relationship between them and the role of the lion image on the channels. The study highlighted tactics such as; mirroring male behaviour with lion behaviour in sequential posts, heterosexual couples shown next to lion 'couples' nuzzling and digitally manipulated images intended to anthropomorphise the lion. The analysis revealed a strong correlation between the images of white, straight, cis men and the images of the lion and concluded that the tactics identified were used to align male behaviour with predatory cats behaviour. The study concluded that the aggressive, dominant male behaviour is depicted alongside lions to support an idea that biology is destiny and to align a white, cis, male power fantasy with a natural world order. The study adds to the feminist argument that biology is not destiny and introduces Instagram as a powerful player in the creation of gender and promotion of hierarchal thinking rampant on the manosphere.

## INTRODUCTION

Some scientific ideas remain popular even though they have been long been discounted by the larger scientific community. By comparison, some scientific ideas have to work hard to be accepted by the larger population and never ‘stick’ in the same way. There is a visible pattern of false scientific explanations being used to support sexist, racist and classist ideologies on the internet, which prompts a need for studies to look at the tactics and rhetoric behind such scientific assertions. This essay will look at the biological determinist content and framing devices on ‘Gentlemen’ Instagram channels.

Chapter one will look at the definition of a biological determinist and use the example of gender and sex to demonstrate how biology is used to account for a hierarchy based on sex. Using examples of scientific explanations from Jordan Peterson and Charles Darwin it will examine how biology has been used to justify the unequal social position between men and women throughout history and up to present day. The second chapter introduces feminist theories such as ‘gender performativity’ and the social and cultural construction of gender. With reference to Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir, it concludes that observed gendered behaviour has less to do with scientific ‘fact’ and more to do with an ideological belief in the natural right for one group to rule over another – which is, in reality, a male power fantasy aligned with nature. The third chapter will introduce a group of Instagram channels from which data was collected to capture a snapshot of biological determinist content over the past twelve months. The study of these ‘gentlemen’ Instagram channels revealed subtle ways in which hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity are aligned with their ‘lion’ counterparts in the animal kingdom. This alignment of gender norms across species reproduces ideas about the ‘naturalness’ of behaviour and male dominance. The mirroring of animal and human behaviour displayed alongside the rest of the channel content provided a natural justification for its sexist, racist and

classist ideology. These channels promote an idea of a natural right to rule, dominate, sex. In this way biological determinist ideas are aligned with sexist and white supremacist ideologies which promote the idea of a naturally superior or dominant sex or race. There are hundreds of thousands of subscribers to these channels with the result that either consciously or subconsciously huge numbers are being fed a daily diet of false scientific justification for biological determinism. Furthermore, there is clear evidence that these false scientific ideas which support the concept of ‘a natural hierarchy’ have practical and harmful impacts in real life outside of the internet. This essay hopes to contribute to the ongoing discussion about the uniquely powerful role of social media platforms in normalising and naturalising sexist ideas.

## CHAPTER ONE : ‘YOU CAN’T MISTAKE MY BIOLOGY’

### 1.1 Biological Determinism

Sex is a category which divides a species depending on their biological function (de Beauvoir, 1949, p.3). The human population is divided into male and female categories according to: anatomical accuracy, quantity of hormones, and primary and secondary sexual characteristics (de Beauvoir, 1949, p.3). Gender is the set of habits, behaviours, and the role in society associated with being male or female (Butler, 1990, p.8). In these definitions, biology is assumed to be fixed and unchanging and gender is defined as a learned behaviour (Hustvedt, 2016, p.161). Sex and gender often appear to correspond – those who are biologically male exhibit masculine behaviours and those who are biologically female exhibit feminine behaviours. Individuals whose sex and gender do not align, for example a biological male identifying with the female gender are sometimes referred to as gender non-conforming,

transgender or non – binary individuals (Newman, 2018). These definitions of sex and gender are often evolving and subject to some debate (Mikkola, 2019).

Biological determinism is the idea that human behaviour can be traced back entirely to an individual's DNA (Allen, 1984). A biological determinist sees gender as a natural expression of an individual's sex (Allen, 1984). They dispute the effect of environmental factors such as cultural and societal influences on the expression of gender (Peterson, 2019). Biological determinism is used to argue that the observed social inequalities and inferior position held by some groups of people in society are the result of biological differences (Murphy, 1998). For example women are passive due to their lower metabolic rate or women are unreliable to operate planes or machinery because of their monthly fluctuations in hormones (Mikkola, 2019). Biological determinism gives a scientific façade to racist, sexist and classist ideas (Murphy, 1998). Through using examples of animals living in hierarchal groupings, to animals which exhibit strong masculine or feminine characteristics, biological determinists construct an argument that grounds the existence of a white supremacist patriarchy in biological differences (Mikkola, 2019).

## 1.2 Jordan Peterson

Biological determinism is considered an extreme viewpoint because of the huge amounts of evidence of gender socialization and the effect of culture on gender expression today (Mikkola, 2019). Most people acknowledge some effect of social and cultural influences on gender however the extent to which they acknowledge biological versus cultural influences varies largely (Mikkola, 2019). Jordan Peterson is a psychology professor and media personality/culture warrior and in the debate on nature versus nurture he represents a viewpoint which is

closely aligned to biological determinism (Myers, 2019). Although he accounts for some minimal cultural influences on behaviour he places the bulk of behaviour determination on biological influences (Peterson, 2019). He engages in identity politics debates using biological determinist arguments to dispute the constructed nature of gender (Peterson, 2019). Although he is not a natural biologist, his biological responses to issues of sex and gender are hailed as 'hard truths' and scientific rebuttals to political correctness (Lynskey, 2018). Peterson is playing to the current political anti-academia climate by playing the part of both the anti-academic and academic by treating theorists with suspicion but using his own platform as an academic to promote his 'academic' ideas (Lynskey, 2018). He is critical of the culture of re-examining and dismantling the old power structures of society because he argues they are reflective of biological differences and by this logic, unfixed and unchangeable (Peterson, 2019). In this view, the supposed naturalness of hierarchy is what justifies it.

Jordan Peterson's belief in a biological gender, which places females and males as behavioural opposites is aligned with animal examples which appear to support it. It is these biological differences which he accounts for our hierarchal society (Peterson, 2017). In Peterson's lecture on what humans can learn from lobsters, the pseudo-science he uses to promote his ideas results in his audience, consciously or not, understanding there to be an intellectual justification for biological determinism. He explains in his lecture, "Lobsters are creatures that engage in dominance disputes...when he wins, he flexes and gets bigger. He looks bigger because he's a winner. It's like he's advertising that" (Peterson, 2017). Peterson uses the natural world example of lobsters because they share an evolutionary ancestor with humans and the way in which they are both sensitive to quantities of serotonin. Considering that scientists today are looking at the possibility that all life on earth originated from a single-celled organism, the

sharing of an evolutionary ancestor is not a solid foundation from which behavioural expectations could be drawn (Than, 2010).

The neurochemical system that makes him flex is serotonergic...it's the same chemical that's affected by antidepressants in human beings. If you're depressed, you're a defeated lobster. You're like, I'm small, things are dangerous. I don't want to fight. You give someone an antidepressant, up they stretch, and then they're ready to take on the world again. Well, if you give lobsters who just got defeated in a fight serotonin, then they stretch out and they'll fight again.

In this explanation of serotonin receptors in humans and lobsters, the chemical interaction is simplified to the point that undermines its usefulness as a comparison (Gonçalves, 2018).

Humans are far more complex organisms than lobsters and the nervous system of lobsters could be compared to the early generation mobile game quality of 'snake' to an augmented reality experience (Gonçalves, 2018). The fact that the drug works on a molecule in humans in the same way to lobsters is not unsurprising as the drug is expected to interact with a particular molecule (Gonçalves, 2018). Peterson explains:

I read about it, and I talked to my graduate students about it. They were always trying to one-up each other, and they were quite witty...every time one of them one-upped the other, they'd stretch themselves out and snap their hands...so you see this in lobsters, and that's pretty amazing.

Therefore the conclusion he draws here about human behaviour from the neurochemistry of the lobster and observed behaviours is scientifically inaccurate and misleading. It demonstrates Peterson's own bias more so than the behavioural explanations for humans (Hustvedt, 2016, p.196). Jordan Peterson's lobster example appears to have been chosen less because of its relevance to studying human behaviour and more because it replicates ideas around gender and hierarchies that Peterson already holds. The lobster examples reproduces his ideas that modern culture and the social structures of society are "natural," and that they have evolved over millennia to meet our basic human needs (Sanneh, 2018).



### 1.3 Charles Darwin

Jordan Peterson does not say outright that he is an advocate for gender roles instead he uses biological reasoning to imply that they are natural. He relies on old Darwinian ideas which were grounded on the observed differences between men and women in an evolutionary mating strategy (Roughgarden, 2007). The same evolutionary science which has historically has been used by Darwin to explain why ‘man is more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman and has more inventive genius’ (1859, cited in Rose, 2009). Darwin’s theories of evolution contributed to the view of woman as the inferior sex (Roughgarden, 2007). Charles Darwin invented the theory of evolution by natural selection. He was one of the first scientists to include humans in the same categories as other animals in the evolutionary process and in this way he is a cornerstone thinker for biological determinists who continue to look to the natural world (Roughgarden, 2007). His theory of evolution stated that all animals originated from a common ancestor and a subsequent competition for resources drove the evolution of different species (Darwin, 1859). The survival of the fittest is the phrase given to describe how those individuals with some natural advantage outcompeted the others and were able to successfully pass on their genetic information. In each case the natural advantage depends on the resource which is in limited supply (1859, cited in Rose, 2009).

The peacock’s tail can be used as an example of an evolutionary driver. In this case the limited resource is most likely to have been a mating partner and therefore, the peacock who was able to attract a mate, with the brightest and biggest plumage is the one with the natural advantage and the opportunity to pass on his genetic information (Gadagkar, 2003). Over time this means that the average peacock’s plumage became increasingly noticeable, only stopping growing when it became a limiting factor for the peacock’s movement. The natural selection by a female

mate for larger displays of feathers, over time results in a new species. In this particular mating strategy, a situation is created in which males are more likely to show variation in the species and it also demonstrates a male animal, which is competitive and perceived as promiscuous (Hustvedt, 2016, p.180). Darwin drew the conclusion from observing human behaviour and using statistics such as large variations in male IQ, demonstrating the variability of the human male, that men and women followed the same strategy (Mikkola, 2019). The same biological strategy that was used to link the mental inferiority of a women to evolution (Murphy, 1998). It is this mating strategy which produces competitive males and coy, choosy females and therefore links biological function to gender expression (Darwin, 1859).

Darwin's theory of evolution was first published 161 years ago and while the theory of evolution is still believed to accurately depict the process by which species evolved it is no longer useful for drawing large conclusions about human behaviour (Duzdevich, 2014). Social and cultural influences on human behaviour are considered important factors in human behaviour (de Beauvoir, 1949, p.38). The discovery of variations in mating strategies which demonstrate polygamous and dominant females, undermined the rule of behaviour which posited females as coy and choosy (Hustvedt, 2016, p.180). These discoveries undermined the assumption that biological sex is an accurate predictor of behaviour. Darwin's theories about human behaviour are more informative about the patriarchal ideals and Victorian society (Hustvedt, 2016, p.183). In the same way, Jordan Peterson's selection of the lobsters to use as comparison says more about his bias and the narrative of the time which showed men and women as polar opposites which shaped the understanding of the natural reality (Hustvedt, 2016, p. 335).

Nevertheless highly controversial ideas such as a natural hierarchy and a superior sex that have been scientifically discredited continually find their way back into debates under the guise of scientific fact (Hustvedt, 2016, p.158). The recurrence of these ideas has less to do with the biology and more to do with the power of the myth (de Beauvoir, 1949, p.288). These stories all function around a myth that women are a lesser version of a man - an idea which has been in circulation for a long time, from the biblical story of Adam and Eve or Darwin's theories of evolution or Freud's castration complex (Dumas, 1989). This idea of female inferiority props up the patriarchy and justifies its existence (de Beauvoir, 1949, p.288). Therefore gender and its relationship to sex becomes a matter of the hegemonic interest because the ideals of masculinity and femininity support the ruling class of men. It is 'through the myths this society imposed its laws, customs upon individuals in a picturesque effective manner' (de Beauvoir, 1949 p. 293). The problematic ideas around expectations of male and female behaviour stubbornly persist by hiding in metaphorical language, phrases, biases and percolating through every part of society at the same time escaping examination (Hustvedt, 2016, p. 149).

## CHAPTER TWO : 'YOU MISTOOK MY BIOLOGY'

### 2.1 Gender

The idea that gender identity was influenced by cultural and social factors took off in the 1970s (Mikkola, 2019). The women's liberation movement supported the separation of sex and gender, because biological difference had historically been used to keep women in a position of subordination (Mikkola, 2019). Feminine and masculine attributes were now thought to be the effect of strong environmental forces rather than the result of hormonal or bodily differences (de Beauvoir, 1949). Feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir argued that

women had been socialized to perform femininity while being reared in a society in which feminine qualities were devalued in the patriarchal society (Synder-Hall, 2010).

The socialization of femininity and masculinity happens from birth and it is this lifetime of learning which produces a 'woman'. Simone De Beauvoir encapsulates this idea perfectly with the often quoted phrase "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (De Beauvoir, 1949, P. 301). Parents show their boy children and girl children differential treatment like appropriate gender colour codes, pink for girls and blue for boys. (Perry, 2016, p.5). Parents influence children's behaviour saying things like; *boys will be boys* and with rhymes such as *girls are made of sugar and spice and all things nice* (Perry, 2016, p.73). Before children can learn to read or write they have been socialized into the cultural cliches of gender (de Beauvoir, 1949, p.301).

Children are therefore taught normative gender ideologies and at the same time they are taught to see these distinctions as natural (Garner and Grazian, 2016). A study by Garner and Grazian, *Naturalising gender through childhood socialization messages in a zoo* (2016) reported parents projecting highly gendered human characteristics onto the animals at the zoo that promoted 'gender stereotypes associated with the biological determinism of the natural living world'. The parents were communicating hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity as natural rather than learned behaviours. Gentle behaviour was aligned with 'motherly' animals, in comparison to displays of aggression which were linked to being protective and 'fatherly'. The study noticed that only animal behaviours which matched up to the expectations of the gender were commented upon and those that went against them tended to be ignored. The identification of self-sacrificing behaviour with mothers and aggression with males reflects patriarchal ideals and is transferred onto the animal behaviours, either consciously or

otherwise, by the parents and passed onto to children (Garner and Grazian, 2016). The result of this gender socialization and alignment with nature is that by the time children reach twelve years of age, although they are mentally and physically the same capacity, they already exhibit distinct behavioural differences as a result of learning cultural clichés and stereotypes of male and female behaviour (de Beauvoir, 1949, p.302).

Teenagers undergo additional gender socialization which polarizes the sexes even further (de Beauvoir, 1949, p.377). Boys are indoctrinated into violence and dominance largely during their teenage years. Being brought up on cartoon versions of masculinity which centered around a war – hero or James Bond type character young boys are taught ‘masculinity is to chase things, to fight things and to fuck’ (Perry, 2016, p.79). The lessons learned about masculinity is that it is a need for dominance which is less to do with physical strength and more to do with conditioning. Anger and violence are typically reinforced behaviours in boys and acknowledged as legitimate emotions so by the time they are teenagers they exhibit a much higher tendency to fight or assert force. This socialization of male violence has a huge impact on society with 45% of women reporting some experience of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking (Perry, 2016, p. 73). Men are also victims of male violence and are nearly ‘twice as likely to be the victims of violence and make up 80 per cent of victims of assaults by strangers’ (Perry, 2016, p.77). These outward behaviours are not the result of biology, they are the result of a lifetime of conditioning which happens largely at home in childhood (Perry, 2016, 76).

## 2.2 Gender Performativity

The reason gender appears so natural is, first, because it is continually aligned with nature (Garner and Grazian, 2016) and, second, due to what Judith Butler calls the ‘performativity’ of

gender (Butler, 1990). If gender is not an inherent biological given and it is a set of behaviours then one can be said to 'do' gender (Butler, 1990, p.26). The performativity of gender describes the doing of a gender which in turn renders the gender real. In the idea of a woman as put forward by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* there are assumptions about women and assumptions about men (1949). The assumptions are that women will display feminine behaviours and be attracted to men and men will display masculine behaviours and be attracted to women, Butler argues it is this expectation of a gendered behaviour which in turn creates the illusion of a natural gender (Butler, 1990). It is the qualities and attributes associated with a woman that creates the category of woman - a cycle of behaviour and assumptions.

The behavioural expectations produce gendered behaviours which are then falsely attributed to the biological or gendered core of an individual (Butler, 1990). This makes the gender core of an individual seem like a stable point of reference from which behaviours spontaneously and naturally evolve rather than illusionary and transitory. It is through the 'stylized repetition of acts' such as female hairstyles, 'masculine' clothing, and 'masculine' postures that gender is rendered natural (Butler, 1990). Judith Butler termed the gender performance which makes itself real – gender performativity. Doing one's gender is comparable to acting in a play, there is a script with limited room for interpretation, however, it is different in that it is rendered real by the performance. Gender is not constituted by biology but by a performative action (Butler, 1990). In this way, the masquerade of womanliness is the same as genuine womanliness (Riviere, 1929). Judith Butler's theory undermines the idea that there is any normal or 'natural' way to behave and in this way, both her and Simone de Beauvoir think again about the fundamental identity categories of the modern world and undermine what biological determinists deem 'natural' behaviour (Butler, 1990, p.40).

### 2.3 Technologies of Gender

If gender is both the product and process of representation and self-representation then technologies such as cinema and painting can be considered technologies of gender because gender is the outcome of such technologies (Caldeira, 2018). Historically, mainstream cinema and painting have produced and reproducing conventions like the woman 'to be looked at' and the man with power and agency - holder of the gaze (Mulvey, 1975). Painting and cinema each in their own particular way have created gender norms that did not exist before them and these gendered representations have become incorporated into individuals expectations and behaviours (Berger, 1972). In her book *Technologies of Gender*, Teresea de Lauretis (1987) describes the way in which gender is constructed through 'media forms, narratives and discourses' (Caldeira, 2018). These ideas around how gender is constructed can be stretched to include social media platforms today such as Instagram, as a technology of gender (Caldeira, 2018). The self-representations or 'selfies' on Instagram can be interpreted as 'performances of gender' that both display heteronormative ideals of masculinity and femininity and create gender differences in the process (Butler, 1990).

The stereotypical gender expressions on Instagram appear to come from a multitude of 'ordinary sources' which renders them spontaneous and natural (Caldeira, 2018). Rather than being spontaneous and natural, springing forth from stable gender core, the representations and self-representations on Instagram are reflecting the dominant ideology (Butler, 1990, p.40). This can be seen as a reflection of how society has taken up the ruling ideologies as 'natural' and replicated them as their own (Foucault, 1980, p.55). The multi-dimensional nature of power and the role of the hegemony is such that it makes its own value systems the value systems of the society (Sim, 2001). The reason the ruling class and their ideas are unchallenged is because

they have managed to convince the whole of society that their ideology is natural or normal and therefore there is no alternative (Butler, 1990, p.40). This idea is discussed by French social thinkers like Michel Foucault (1980):

In thinking of the mechanisms of power... its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.

Instagram represents hegemonic interests (Caldeira, 2018). Instagram is a platform which advertisers pay to use so that they can access and advertise to the users. It has commercial interests in keeping people on their website and they use algorithms to track what individuals look at and then show more of the same content. Over a period of time the algorithms subtly manipulate the users behaviour by suggesting content of a similar but of a more extreme nature to keep the people online. This can affect the understanding of gender by creating an echo chamber of views, images and opinions so that those who believe in poles of behaviour for men and women are repeatedly shown images which confirm their belief (Lanier, 2018). In this way social media differs from other technologies of gender in that it reacts to the viewer (Caldeira, 2018). The subtle behavioural modification over time could potentially create groups of people with more polarised views regarding gender.

## CHAPTER THREE : 'IT'S THERE IN OUR THOUGHTS'

### 3.1 Analysis of a Selection of Gentlemen Instagram Sites

Data was collected to capture a snapshot of biological determinist content on Instagram. Instagram was chosen as it is an a image sharing platform, making it straightforward to



comparatively analyse visual content. Furthermore, as biological determinism has been presented as a power fantasy for men that aligns with nature, biological determinist explanations for gender are often the messages delivered from Instagram channels which target white, heterosexual men explicitly. From looking at ‘men only’ spaces the search was narrowed to using the term ‘gentleman’ and ‘gentlemen’ as a keyword. Gentlemen was used because it is a term which recalls a period of time when significant social hierarchies in were established – also referred to as a time *when men were men and women were women*.

Through inputting ‘gentlemen’ into Instagram’s search bar, the first search turned up the ‘Classy Gentleman’ series, which had 483,000 followers. The interface snowball sampling method (using related channel feature on each channel to gather other popular channels) was then used to gather other popular channels with similar thematic content. To narrow down the number of channels for further examination, the study was focused on the top six channels - based on the highest subscriber count. The final channels which were to be analysed included:

1. *Classy Gentlemen*;
2. *Gentleman Territory*;
3. *Gentleman Channel*;
4. *Monsieur Alpha*;
5. *Gentlemen’s Choice*; and
6. *Man’s Channel*.

The images on the pages from the last 12 months were categorized and strong themes were identified. The themes were shared across the channels and due to the strong similarities in visual content across the channels, the almost identical way in which the images are used and the fact the pages cross reference each other with identical images, the images were all treated as if they came from the one source. The method of collecting channels and imagery to analyse

the themes was identified from *Mainstreaming hate: Analyzing White Supremacist content and framing devices on Youtube* (Charles, 2020).

The content of ‘gentlemen’ Instagram sites could be divided into several themes. These themes: animals, family, travel, luxury goods, actors, sports stars, celebrity couples, television and movie references, which can be seen in Figure 1 and 2 below. The themes work in such a way that a very carefully constructed image of a ‘gentleman’ is curated.



Figure 1: Screenshot taken on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2021 showing a selection of images from webpage Instagram channel Monsieur Alpha

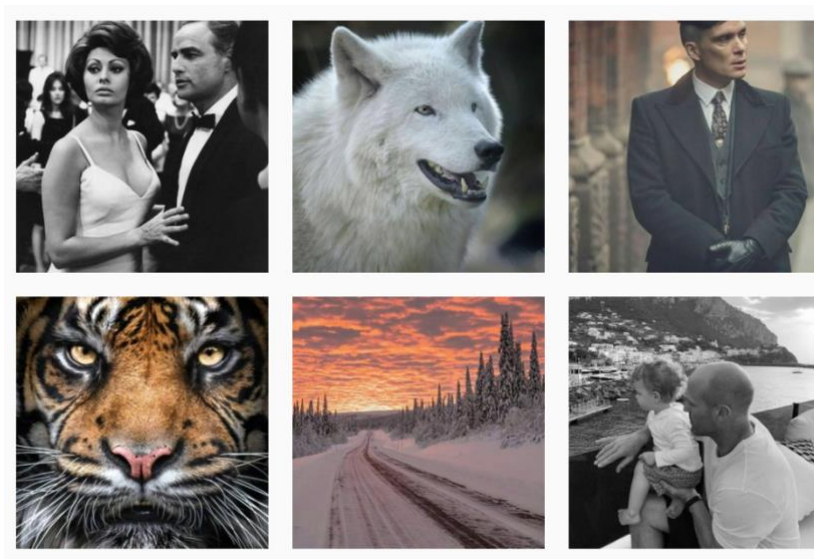


Figure 2: Screenshot taken on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2021 showing a selection of images from webpage Instagram channel Monsieur Alpha

This image of a gentleman reflects an idealised version of masculinity. It is the type of cartoon man which children are socialized to accept as 'natural' growing up (Perry, 2016, p.78). If someone with no prior understanding of the term gentleman, was to come across this page they would take away from it that a gentleman is: white, wealthy, powerful, dominant, strong, competitive and heterosexual from the images displayed. The same celebrity examples of polarised femininity and masculinity are used repeatedly on the channels. Tom Hardy, Christian Bale, and Leonardo di Caprio are boasted as the icons of masculinity and Margot Robbie, the pinnacle of femininity. The main qualities promoted on the 'gentlemen' channels are: protectiveness, aggressiveness, dominance, and competitiveness in males. The way in which the channels align themselves with the male gender in their channel name and then promote these qualities suggests that they see these traits as specific to men. It builds upon the idea shared by biological determinists that men are innately aggressive, dominant and protective as a by-product of their sex (Peterson, 2019).

The animal images on the channels can be largely categorized as predatory animals. There are some exceptions to this for example images of dogs. However, the predatory animals make up the largest group of animal images. Within the category of predatory animals, the lion represents a significantly higher proportion of the images and so it was selected to discuss in relation to the non-animal imagery on the channels. The images of lions can be subdivided into images of; family, aggression, pack, dominance and mate bonding. The lions are aligned with the images of 'gentlemen' in several ways. Firstly the images of lions are digitally manipulated to make them appear more human. The lion images are altered so that they adopt poses associated with human behaviour. The lion's image is rotated so that it is in the upright position of a human clasping its hand on its face in exasperation, as shown in figure 3. At the same time, the channels are highlighting the animalistic side to the man's behaviour by selecting images

of men in which they are crouched resembling a cat about to strike out at prey as shown in figure 4.



Figure 3: Screenshot taken on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 showing an altered image of a lion from webpage Instagram channel Gentlemen's Choice from 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019



Figure 3: Screenshot taken on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 showing a man crouching in 'playful' attack position from Instagram channel Monsieur Alpha from 26<sup>th</sup> October 2020

The technique of mirroring the lions behaviour with the males behaviour in adjacent posts happens frequently on the channels. Often the mirroring occurs within the next frame of the channel, so that images are read comparatively. This 'lion to human' behaviour comparison often happens in the form of affectionate couples whereby heterosexual couples are shown

alongside images of a male and female lion displaying affection as shown in Figure 4 and 5. Figure 4 shows a row of images in the same order as they appear on the Instagram webpage of: a man and female in an embrace, a man and female arms interlocked and a lion affectionately rubbing another lion. The underlying message is one of repetition of values and a sharing of certain deep biological drives. This direct comparison of human and lion couple is demonstrated again in Figure 5 with David and Victoria Beckham and once more a male and female lion rubbing off each other affectionately.



Figure 4: Screenshot taken on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 showing the layout of heteronormative and animal content on webpage of Instagram channel Monsieur alpha



Figure 5: Screenshot taken on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 showing adjacent images of lion and lioness and David and Victoria Beckham on webpage of Instagram channel Monsieur alpha

The human to lion comparison occurs also with groups of men shown comparatively with lions as seen in Figure 7 and 8. The title given to the image of the pack of lion males is ‘The Squad’ which is also a phrase used throughout the posts on the channel to describe a group of male friends. The careful selection of an image of young male lions shown next to an image of young

men sitting around a table encourages comparison. The overall effect of these images is the crossing of boundaries between nature and human and creating similarities between the values and lifestyle of the ‘gentleman’ and the lion.



Figure 6: Screenshot taken on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 showing the layout of images of lions and men from webpage Instagram channel Monsieur Alpha



Figure 7: Screenshot taken on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 showing a single image of young male lions, titled ‘The Squad’ from 26<sup>th</sup> April 2019 from Instagram channel Monsieur Alpha



Figure 8: Screenshot taken on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 showing a digitally altered image on a young women crouched opposite a larger than life lion, titled ‘Calming the beast’ from 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2020 from Instagram channel Monsieur Alpha

The predatory animal functions as a symbol of ‘natural masculinity’ which has not been subject to social or cultural influences. In this way the predatory animal is chosen as symbol of socially and culturally untouched expression of masculinity (Berger, 1980). The lion reflects back at the man traits which he feels himself to have: ‘power, strength, heterosexuality, risk-taking, dominance, leadership, control and repression of emotions’ (Master, 2017) In Figure 9. The image of a man opposite a woman as is typical of the Instagram channel is replaced by the image of a lion. This way of using nature to represent that which is ‘pure’ expression is explained by John Berger in ‘looking at animals’:

Nature thereby acquires the meaning of what has grown organically, what was not created by man, in contrast to the artificial structures of human civilization. At the same time it can be understood as that aspect of human inwardness which has remained natural or at least lends or longs to be natural once more. According to this view of nature, the life of a wild animal becomes an ideal, an ideal internalised as a feeling surrounding a repressed desire. The image of a wild animal becomes the starting point of a daydream: a point from which the day dreamer departs with his back turned (Berger, 1980, pg.17).

The lions are not chosen because of their genetic, evolutionary or biological similarities to humans but because their dominant, aggressive and protective characteristics align them with the male gender. In the same way Jordan Peterson aligned lobster hierarchies with human hierarchies in his lecture (2019), the behavioural association with another animal acts as a scientific façade which thinly veils notions of male dominance and superiority as a natural expression of being a man. However, the scientific logic behind comparing animal behaviour is flawed because you cannot separate the social and cultural influences from human behaviour (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 38).

The parts of the life cycle of the lions which are included are those which line up with conservative, hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity such as a male defending his territory, male with multiple mating partners, and family bonding. Maradona and Leonardo di

Caprio are shown alongside images of lions with a harem of females. From the selection of the lions lifecycle shown it seems they have been selected for the channel because they can portray a version of masculinity and femininity which supports an ideology based on male strength and superiority. Biological determinism often reflects a deep seated bias that women are one way and men are another and this is replicated and using the techniques described above aligns it with the natural world and normalises it on the gentlemen Instagram channels.

### 3.2 Discussion

These Instagram pages seek to portray a biological justification for a natural hierarchy. The message is subtle in some places and does not directly state that men are the superior sex - it is the 'equal but different' rhetoric which has historically supported men who fit within the prescribed categories of the patriarchy and hindered women and those men who do not (Freidan, 1963).

The idea of a natural hierarchy at which men sit at the top is prevalent on a large online community known as the 'manosphere', which includes the gentlemen Instagram pages (Bates, 2020). The tone on the manosphere is dominant, certain, aggressive and ranting at times (Perry, 2016, p.99). From the tone it would seem that the people operating from behind the manosphere are actually very insecure about the potential for mass extinction of the 'gentlemen' and the powerful ideas that go alongside it (Perry, 2016, p.99). For the rest of the population the identification of structural inequalities and the importance of these factors over biological factors is an important step in levelling the playing field (Solnit, 2020). Undoubtedly some of these manosphere actors would too benefit from a step away from a hierarchical approach towards a belief system and society which acknowledges the variety and complexity



of gender stereotypes and power structures (Master and Mitchell, 2017). Acknowledging the role we each individually play in structuring society is an important step in realising the potential for change (Synder-Hall, 2010).

There is subliminal messaging on the ‘Gentlemen’ Instagram channels which includes the idea that ‘gentlemen’ are very similar to the male lion. A lion is often called the King of the jungle and it is not by chance that the gentlemen page has selected it to represent masculinity. The idea promoted across the channels is that the target audience (white male) could be the King of the concrete jungle. This theory positions the gentleman above other groups or individuals in society (Peterson, 2019). The gentlemen is promoted as having a natural right to rule over others (Peterson, 2019). This is a philosophy that is having a revival in popularity at the moment in a backlash against the questioning of social structures which is going on around the world. In the time of the MeToo movement with figures such as Harvey Weinstein and Jefferey Epstein centre stage, the position of power held by white men in society is under scrutiny more than ever before (Donegan, 2018). Those who feel uncomfortable with the restructuring of society are looking back to an earlier time when the position of certain powerful men was unquestioned and are looking to poor scientific and skewed biological explanations to justify their position. The ‘biological’ explanation is given precedent over the structural inequalities of society.

The reality is that no one can live up to the gender roles and ideas which are promoted as natural on these Instagram channels (Butler, 1990). The fact that they use photoshop editing and filters makes it seem like even the creators of the content do not believe in the natural idea of the content which they are promoting but it is this failure to match up with the expectations of your gender role which generates money. Insecurity is big business and the Instagram pages are

linked to websites which sell luxurious goods such as watches and jewellery. Selling expensive merchandise and making money is the end goal of these channels. The people who subscribe to these channels are seeing the ideology which promotes a white male power fantasy instead of the real agenda which is advertising. The reason they have attached their products onto this ideology is because of its popularity. In a time when the spotlight of the world seems to be on men's behaviour and questioning the position they have held for so long, a power fantasy that aligns that power with nature as opposed to structural inequalities is very appealing.

## Conclusion

The research topic for this essay was to consider how animal imagery on Instagram is used to align hegemonic ideals of masculinity with nature. An examination of different theories of sex and gender and their relationship with each other demonstrated the complicated relationship these two themes share. On one side of the debate Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir's work argues that sex and gender share no inherent link to each other and any correlation between the two is the result of social and cultural influences. Judith Butler goes further to say that sex is a construction in the same way gender is. On the other side of the debate is the biological determinists who say that sex and gender are inextricably linked; the evidence of this link is to be found in the natural world, which is untouched by the social and cultural constructions of humans and still produces 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviours. Most popular thought around gender today finds itself somewhere between these two poles of opinion. Those that align themselves with the biological determinism are often people who have experienced some privilege in society on account of their biology for example the white cis-gendered straight male or if they have not experienced privilege first hand they have been sold a power fantasy that their biology entitles them to. The ultimate power fantasy is that a

white male has a biological reason for succeeding and representing the top positions of power in society. The gentlemen Instagram sites present the natural world and images of predators alongside images of hyper masculinized men and hyper feminized women to draw similarities between the apex predator behaviour and the rich, white, male. The case study of 'gentlemen' Instagram sites revealed large amounts of animal imagery content, used in a variety of interesting ways alongside the images of women, men and objects of wealth. While this essay focused on the lion imagery on the channels there was several other avenues of exploration which would be interesting for further research, for example the ways in which snakes and puppies are used to sexualise the image of the woman in different ways. This essay has dealt with gender as a stand-alone factor in a person's social and political identity however gender, race and class all combine to form different forms of discrimination. The importance of intersectionality requires further examination to consider the impact of race in relation to gender and how it is portrayed on Instagram and how images of non-white men and women are portrayed on 'gentlemen' sites. The gentlemen Instagram sites represent a white supremacist aesthetic which has been normalised by popular culture and would provide a point of further study, looking at how race intersects with gender on online representations.

Ultimately while heteronormative, conservative, and competitive males have a place in society, it is not the standard from which all value judgements should be made, and science which supports these ideas as singular should be contested.

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