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Men's Rights Online and the Parasocial Relationship

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Men's Rights Online and the Parasocial Relationship

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to those researching and helping to ease the effects of far-right hate online and offer this as a small contribution to what is the beginning of this study and exploration of work.

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I want to thank my advisor, Kwame Holmes, who has guided me in numerous ways.

Thank you for being my first advisor in this capacity.

Thank you to my amazing friends (family) I have made during my time here at Bard, you know who you are.

Lastly, I want to thank my loving and supportive parents. Although I am not a history major like you both, and you never wanted me to be, I would say Human Rights is close enough.

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Introduction

While studying Human Rights the past four years, I have always been most interested in women's issues. I was not sure if I would pursue a project that explored misogyny directed against women or women's community building and activism to oppose misogyny. I began to take an interest in studying the area of men's rights while taking Research in Human Rights the Spring of 2022, the semester before starting this project. However, as I continued with my project it developed into reflecting my interests in online community building. As a member of Gen Z, I am particularly concerned about how the emergence of the internet contributes to perpetrating violence against women. Throughout this project I have also been considering how longterm women's struggles against misogyny and sexism have transferred into the online space, and how online contributes and fosters these harmful belief systems. I realized that in order to understand modern forces that contribute to misogyny, I had to move away from studying the men's rights movement to studying communities online and how they specifically form.

At the beginning of this project I wanted to know more about incels, "involuntary celibates," which are an online extremist group in the manosphere. Incels blame women for their lack of sexual experience or activity, as they feel women do not find them attractive which is why they lack sexual experience and have never had sexual intercourse. (Townsend) Incels fear women, what is called "gynophobia" and their growing resentment against women, and also men who are able to have sex with them and are thus attractive to women. This results in hatred and further instills this fear. Incels are often the ones to make news media headlines, and thus can acquire more attention for their violent actions in the physical world that result in harm, injury, and even death. Examples of violent actions include infamous and idolized incel Elliot Rodger,

who killed six people in 2014 in California. (Lorenz) Incel Gabrielle Friel was found emasing weapons in Scotland in 2019 for a terrorist attack. Incel Jake Davison murdered five people in Plymouth in August, 2021, and there are many more examples. (Townsend)

The manosphere is an overarching term to describe numerous interconnected communities that are misogynistic online. “It encompasses multiple types and severities of misogyny—from broader male supremacist discourse to men’s rights activism (MRA) and ‘involuntary celibates’ (incels).” (*The ‘Manosphere’ - ISD*) In March of 2022, the U.S. Secret Service’s National Threat Assessment Center released a report which warned that anti-women violence is a growing terrorism threat. (Lorenz) Incels are not the only group in the manosphere that discuss and commit violence against women. As I continued with the project, I read numerous sources that have been published recently about studies of the forms of violence women experience online. Considering incels, and as I learned about these forms of violence, I realized something very important about the internet in general. The internet, lacking rules and regulations is a more free space for people to be, to find community, to express themselves and their beliefs. I recognized how marginalized communities have gathered online, so too have oppressors gathered online, and I wanted to explore what can contribute to people finding and feeling connection on the internet. What also interested me was the sheer number and prominence of men’s rights activists online. This to me seemed quite jarring, because despite the struggle against traditionalist, patriarchal frameworks, a lot of progress has been made in recent history for marginalized groups from these harmful frameworks. Despite progress, I have recognized how there is always a side that wants to combat this.

As this project progressed, I came across British-American social media influencer and controversial public figure Andrew Tate. Tate's influence affects younger generations of boys and men with his behavior, actions, and beliefs, to the point where British schools are taking measures to combat boy student's behaviors in general as they copy Tate's mannerisms and repeat his misogynistic messaging he spews online in the classroom. (Bubola and Kwai) Where I discovered my niche interest with the project came up in the past couple months, when I began reading about and reflecting on the parasocial (one sided) relationship with television star Oprah Winfrey, and her fans. I was able to recognize this relationship also with Tate and his followers, and realized this relationship is part of the makeup of community building for humans, and is transferable onto multiple media formats, on and off the internet. I felt it as a duty to explore this interesting yet disturbing and upsetting phenomenon with men's rights online as I thought more about my interests in online misogyny and community gatherings on the internet.

The parasocial relationship works for men's rights because although influencers in this area of the internet are showing themselves in their content, their followers do not have to show their identity in their online profiles. Also, the stigma of having far-right conservative views like following men's rights keeps certain men's rights activists mostly quiet about their views in-person, however online they can feel more free to express them. Lastly, the accessibility of finding men's rights content online makes it much easier to hone in and harness exactly where someone stands in their views. They can decide what content and influencers to follow in the vast array of them in this area of the internet. These men's rights influencers are models for many men to follow, and can further instill and validate these views.

We are in a world where the internet is like the wild west, rules and regulations are being made as we live in it. Humans have never experienced anything like this before. Here in the internet there are men's rights activists basing their harmful beliefs and action on concepts of traditional labels and roles of the sexes. The effects of men's rights are seen on the internet and in the physical world, however with this project I am interested in how the internet fosters connection and community gatherings, specifically tied to men's rights. The questions that drew me to this project are; What are men's rights? How have men's rights activists found each other online and gathered? What generally brings people together in a community?

As I developed this project and came across the parasocial relationship, I recognized this as an important element in developing large followings for modern influencers, specifically men's rights influencer's. There are countless elements that can be studied and focused on for an academic project of this capacity, however I found my overlapping interest with online community building and the prominence of men's rights online through this focus on the parasocial relationship.

The main points I wish to draw on and support in this project are how parasocial relationships are an important element in the dynamics of online communication and following a creator. Because of the accessibility of content on the internet and the prominence of content, as well as shared interests that bring people to certain creators, the parasocial relationship although similar to Oprah's influence, is uniquely altered and enhanced by taking form online and helping generate a large following for men's rights activist and influencer, Andrew Tate.

This project has five chapters, which I put in the order of "Context for Men's Rights", "Oprah and the Branding of Self", "Online Media, Community building and the Parasocial

Relationship”, “Andrew Tate’s Ideologies,” and lastly “Andrew Tate’s Parasocial Influence and Men’s Rights Online”. In “Context for Men’s Rights” I give context for general reasons men may follow men’s rights ideologies, with descriptions of shifting frameworks within the sex binary system of femininity and masculinity and the psychological conditioning of men in Western society. The second chapter, “Oprah and the Branding of Self”, is about television star and media personality, Oprah Winfrey. Oprah serves as a model in this project for media influencing and gives context for social media influencing and the parasocial (one-sided) relationship that occurs with followers and people of influence as followers look up to and feel connected to an influencer, feeling as if they actually know them. In “Online Media, Community building and the Parasocial Relationship”, I describe the shift of media formats from previous media before the internet to online media, how they are more accessible from these previous media in terms of communication between follower and influencer as well as in how content is made, what content, and who can make consistent content on the internet, enough to make this a job or career. In “Andrew Tate’s Ideologies”, I describe the social media influencer, Andrew Tate and how he supports his version of traditional masculinity which attempts to mask his outright misogynistic views. In “Andrew Tate’s Parasocial Influence and Men’s Rights Online”, I go into Andrew Tate’s media formats and social media, and how part of his success comes from the parasocial relationship between him and his followers, a specific, yet large group of men who share his beliefs and ideologies enough to form a community online.

Chapter One: Context for Men's Rights

With the emergence of the online world, discrimination like misogyny and sexism have transferred online. Cyber misogyny and cybersexism are influenced by antifeminist ideas and beliefs, along with the men's rights movement rhetoric being brought online, shared, and concentrated in certain areas on the internet. The "manosphere," a loose alliance of interest groups, has become the main space for the spreading and sharing of men's rights in Western culture. (Ging 638) The manosphere also "facilitates hostile and often illegal performances of masculinity, which would not go unchecked in face-to-face contexts but are effectively impossible to regulate online." (Ging 642) Men's rights activists "have established complex connections with a myriad of interconnected organizations, blogs, forums, communities, and subcultures, resulting in a much more extreme and ostensibly amorphous set of discourses and ideological positions." (Ging 639) In terms of men's rights, these gatherings demonstrate that this shift to online also produces radical change for the parameters of antifeminism from the physical to the online world, "which is not accounted for by current writing on men's rights politics." (Ging 639) Men's rights activists have been linked to physical attacks and extremist gestures made by announced incels. Toxic masculinity encompassed by the manosphere includes an array of explanations, from sexual rejection, unstable employment, video game violence, pornography, and the "erosion of white male privilege." (Ging 640) Claimed victimhood and loss of entitlement are pleas recognized by journalists and other professionals made by communities in the manosphere, who are largely "young, sexually disenfranchised white males." (Ging 640)

The Western World, which refers to a specific group of countries that share cultural origins, include the United States, many countries in the European Union, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The Western World has been classified into frameworks defining the sexes, their roles and frameworks to follow. Men in Western Society have been directed in how to act, work, lead, and conduct life as leaders, protectors, providers, and similar roles in order to appeal to this Western framework for men. The sex binary system, a system of classification in which everyone is either male or female, has stemmed into the division of labor, a divisive, clear allocation of what is “men’s work” and what is “women’s work.” A binary system suggests that the two sides never meet, as they are two complete sides on each that have their distinctive roles which differ from the other but are necessary for the work of one another. This is narrowing for both sides, boxing in both men and women. There are multiple changes that have developed from numerous social movements, also in tandem with the current gender-political juncture, “the institutionalization of professionalization of feminism, the emergence of a widespread post feminist cultural sensibility, and the development of a neoliberal economy.” (Ging 639) With the shifting sex binary, as well as labor binary there are adaptations being made by women and people who do not fit into the gender binary in terms of the family structure they create and labor they produce for the ever-changing economy. But numerous sources have identified how men are not adapting like others are to the shifting binary system. While many men hold on to the previous idea of the sex binary, it is important to keep this in mind while also considering men’s feelings of alienation. This will be expanded on in the next several pages.

Clinical psychologist and conservative public intellectual, Jordan Peterson, has recognized these young men as being disaffected and dissatisfied with the changing political and

societal understandings in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century. On Ben Shapiro's podcast, "The Ben Shapiro Show," Episode 1584 titled, "Why Men and Women are Unhappy." Shapiro expands on Peterson's statement regarding disaffected young men, "There's a dispensable portion of the population, determined by the left, by elite opinion makers, a huge portion of the media, which is young disaffected men, which is having a "radical impact on the way people live". (Shapiro) He speaks about how hard it is to be demoralized, and how many young men are in this category. "I thought the marginalized were supposed to have a voice." Jordan Peterson says emotionally. Hannah Rosin, the author of *The End of Men* share a similar point when stating;

The rise of women is associated with the slow erosion of marriage and even a growing cynicism about love. As the women in this second group slowly improve their lot, they raise the bar for what they want out of marriage...But the men of their class are failing to meet their standards. The men may cling to traditional ideals about themselves as providers, but they are further than ever from being able to embody those ideals. (Rosin 7)

Peterson sympathizes with men who do not know what other place to hold in society, who struggle how to make themselves attractive to women, who feel they have had decreased opportunities and rights during this current time. He says women should be picky, but now there are all these men that do not know what to do. ("FULL INTERVIEW: Dr Jordan Peterson Sits down with Piers Morgan.") "Good for them, be picky, that's your gift man. Demand high standards from your men, fair enough, but all these men who are alienated they're lonesome and

they don't know what to do and everyone piles abuse on them.” (“FULL INTERVIEW: Dr Jordan Peterson Sits down with Piers Morgan.”)

Due to societal expectations, men in the Western world are brought up being told that they should be tough, and in order to be tough and be a good provider and leader of the family they cannot be vulnerable or open about their emotions. This emotional conditioning creates a feeling of alienation and a wide range of problems, leading them to feel stuck, stagnant, unable or unwilling to adjust in life that can lead them to develop unhealthy coping mechanisms, being more likely to suffer psychologically. These factors contribute to a recent phenomenon where men are found to not be adjusting to cultural changes nearly as much as women are. These cultural changes arose from the social movements of the latter part of the twentieth century, where women and other marginalized groups began demanding change on a larger scale, away from the Western patriarchy, heteronormative, white-supremacist society of the United States. More women at this time started working outside of the home, balancing their work responsibilities and what felt like was still their responsibility, house work and child rearing. As women have expanded to the professional spaces they inhabit, as well as how much space they inhabit, men have culturally been experiencing a decline in the space they take up in the professional sphere. Israeli-American writer and editorial editor Hanna Rosin wrote in her book, *The End of Men and the Rise of Women*; “...by some measures men have been retreating into an ever-narrower space, backing away from what were traditionally feminine traits as women take over more masculine ones.” (Rosin 9) As obvious and traditional forms of masculinity began to fade in the twentieth century, men lost the “old architecture of manliness,” as they were not doing physically demanding work that previous decades and centuries had required of many

men. Since men lost this old architecture of manliness, they have not replaced it with a new or obvious one. (Rosin 9) This work gave men structure, purpose, and a way to earn enough money to support their families, specifically in the nuclear family structure where men are the sole earner that allows a family to be sustained on one salary, making it so the wife stays home. (Rosin 9)

Rosin identified two frameworks, the cardboard man and the plastic woman, both of which describe the inflexibility of men and the hyper-flexibility of women that has emerged from the end of the twentieth century. Rosin describes the cardboard man;

[The cardboard man] hardly changes at all. A century can go by and his lifestyle and ambitions remain largely the same...For most of the century men derived their sense of manliness from their work, or their role as head of the family. A 'coal miner' or 'rigger' used to be a complete identity, connecting a man to a long lineage of men. Implicit in the title was his role as anchor of a domestic existence. (Rosin 7-8)

In contrast, Rosin describes the plastic woman;

She has gone from barely working at all to working only until she got married to working while married and then working with children, even babies. If a space opens up for her to make more money than her husband, she grabs it. If she is no longer required to by ladylike standards to restrain her temper, she starts a brawl at the bar. If she can get away with staying unmarried and living as she pleases deep into her thirties, she will do that

too. And if the era calls for sexual adventurousness, she is game...They are the mutant creature our society rewards the most—the one who can simultaneously handle the old male and female responsibilities without missing a beat. (Rosin 7-8)

If the plastic woman can grow and expand her roles and positions in society, at work and at home, gaining knowledge, experience, rights, privileges, and gain status of boss at work, be a mother, and keep her involvement in the community, the cardboard man would experience the opposite where they have already been living under societal privilege, aware of this or not. The place men can expand to and gain experience is at home. Men's general tendency towards alienation comes from attachment to the traditional roles of men and women that is embedded in the patriarchy of Western culture. The patriarchy is a system or institution that is run by paternal figures practicing the power or supremacy over the family unit. This system of organizing permeated Western culture, its governments and institutions as well as organizing the family. The patriarchy gives men and women roles to follow, and as in the next several pages this will be described, women have been able to grow and expand as many move outside of working in the home. This has been a tough struggle, however it has given many women an important sense of fulfillment and purpose in their lives. Men do not have the same flexibility in Western cultural standards under the patriarchy to expand their work labor from outside to inside of the home. The patriarchy, as it has limited and harmed women and people of other genders, has done the same for men.

As the patriarchy still heavily influences Western culture, despite efforts to equalize the sexes and grant rights to those seen as lesser-than men. In the second half of the twentieth

century, men's standings and privilege have been maintained because of the patriarchy, however, along with this has been the increased rights recognized for marginalized groups, like women. Men have been given a full identity to aspire to and achieve, but now it is believed that is all being taken away. Robert Self, Associate Professor of History at Brown University and author of *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy*, describes this experience as often associated with the believed discrimination of men, "...this ploy is simply the logical extension of a cultural campaign to convince us that feminism has gone too far and that males are now the disadvantaged sex." (Self 387) Men's rights activists' claims of their mistreatment often stem from statistical evidence of men's declining participation in certain areas of life, for example in higher education, positions of leadership, the breadwinner family role, and many others.

Men's decreased opportunities and lack of acceleration in Western society has been referred to as the "male crisis" by academic scholars, for example Robert Self, as well as by clinical psychologists, for example William Pollack author of *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons From the Myths of Boyhood*, and conservative media personalities. Pollack describes what he sees as the cause of the current boy crisis, "I believe that an over-reliance on these norms of masculinity—and the suppression of a wider range of emotional expressions, behaviors and psychological traits in the name of masculinity—is the underlying cause of the current boy crisis." (Pollack 390) These different professional and political areas of thinking all recognize this phenomenon. Pollack's book calls for a change from these standards and limitations of masculinity as he claims from psychological evidence how these are harmful. However conservative media personalities say the opposite about traditional masculinity.

Conservative political commentator, Ben Shapiro, describes in his podcast Episode 1584 “Why Men and Women are Unhappy” how, “The stats on men right now are devastating in the United States”. (Shapiro) Shapiro continues by describing how women have been earning more since the 1970s, scoring higher grades from elementary to high school, and how no top law school in the United States has a male law review chief. All women’s progress in society is framed as disadvantageous to men. Shapiro, and other supporters of men’s rights often cite information like this, focusing on the stagnation or decline of men’s opportunities, instead of considering this information along with those that describe the increased opportunities for marginalized groups. They often go so far as to say everyone else is taking these jobs away from men. These declining advantages for men is what is causing the “male crisis” conservative commentators claim.

Martha McCaughey, author of *The Caveman Mystique*, describes this period of the late part of the twentieth century,

“An economic recession in the early 1980s and early 1990s, as well as the continued stagnation of real wages earned by men since the 1970s, left American male workers in a compromised position. Overall, women have seen increases in real incomes since 1973 while men have not. Broken down by educational level, men with college educations saw their incomes increase at the same rate as women’s regardless of educational level. Men without college education were doing worse economically after 1973, while women were doing better. (McCaughey 21-22)

Because these men are losing economic and other resources to support this ideal, they can often feel helpless, feel like they have no other option, and they can fall into harmful patterns and suffer in different areas of life. “Men are also struggling physically. Men account for close to 3 out of every 4 deaths relating to suicide and despair, drug overdoses.” (Shapiro) Whatever people call this phenomenon, this current period of time, they expand on the same information with different interpretations. The general commonalities in multiple author’s descriptions are the suppression of men’s emotions and the push for men to identify and act under traditional masculine roles and emotional suppression contribute to men’s declining opportunities and lack of adjustment to changing circumstances with the division of labor and gender roles in Western culture, both psychologically and culturally. When people suffer they find comfort in those who share similar beliefs and ideologies to them, and this comfort can be found online. Men’s rights activists and men’s rights influencers provide this comfort and support to each other. The next section will explain the position and methodology of what a person with influence does, and how they get to that point of fame through what is called the “branding of the Self,” with Oprah Winfrey as an example.

Chapter Two: Oprah and the Branding of Self

Before social media, “influencing” as it is called in modern times did not exist under this word, but the action did. The specific example of influencing in this section is with Oprah and her brand, which is a model of parasocial influencing in media prior to the internet.

Oprah Winfrey became a household name. From the launch of her television show, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, in the 1980s to its completion in 2011, Oprah touched many homes across the United States and the world. Many have read her magazine *O, The Oprah Magazine*, read books that are part of her book club, or interacted with other methods of her influence. “This is what started it all, spiraling quickly into brand compulsion: *The Oprah Winfrey Show* entered national syndication in 1986, becoming the highest-rated talk show in television history...” (Lofton 2) As of 2009, two years before her show concluded, it was seen by about forty-two million viewers a week in the United States alone, and was also broadcasted internationally in one hundred forty-seven countries. (Lofton 2) In April 2000, Oprah and Hearst Magazines introduced a monthly magazine, *O, The Oprah Magazine*, which has been recognized as the most successful magazine launch recently with a consistent circulation of 2.3 million readers per month. (Lofton 5) The list goes on, with her website, *Oprah.com*, composed of her multiple productions and averages ninety-six million page views, more than 6.7 million users every month and has more than 1.8 million subscribers to its newsletter. (Lofton 5) Oprah launched *Oprah and Friends* satellite radio channel in September 2006, which features a range of original daily programming and includes regular segments hosted by familiar personalities from *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *O, The Oprah Magazine* and her exclusive thirty-minute weekly radio

show, *Oprah's Soul Series*. (Lofton 5-6) Finally, Oprah and Discovery Communications announced plans to create OWN: The Oprah Winfrey Network, a media company founded in 2011 that was designed to entertain, inform, and inspire people to “live their best lives.” (Lofton 5-6) Oprah has become an idiom, no longer just a therapeutic one, but an insignia that supplies a ritualistic economy. This economy includes numerous print cultures (magazine, literary, cookbook, self-help, medical, and inspirational), multimedia programs (podcasts, weekly and daily electronic updates, weekly and daily television programs, radio shows, television networks, movies, stage productions, etc.) “Oprah was seemingly everywhere, exploding media formats that themselves exploded the bounds between text and image, studio and audience, world and stage.” (Lofton 5)

On these multiple media, Oprah has been and still is seemingly everywhere, permeating many aspects of people's lives. Those who have not interacted have definitely heard her name or seen her on some media. She has developed her large following of people that like her content and messaging, her brand, they feel they have a connection to her. Oprah is also so internationally known that as a celebrity, her brand reaches many and far in many aspects of life, when flipping through the television channels, radio stations, magazine aisles, and many more.

Oprah, the Oprah, is always telling you what to do, always telling you how to do it, always telling you to buy, and always telling you to save. Even if you want to avoid her, even if you have avoided her, you have not (you cannot). She looms. She haunts the supermarket (endorsing food, hawking magazines, bloated on tabloids), she helms national initiatives, and she endorses presidential candidates. So even if your consumption resists her recommendations, even if you have only

laughed at her caricature on late-night satire, you laugh on the premise of her cultural suffusion. (Lofton 9)

Oprah's influence has been compared to a modern religion, where humans idolize and model changes after a figure or what they are to do based on what they believe in and support. (Thompson 2). This is due to multiple factors, including how people have observed Oprah's willingness to "collapse the boundaries between the public and private." (Lofton 6) The collapsing of boundaries shows many aspects of Oprah's life and allows viewers to see representations they may resonate with. Oprah touches on educational philosophies, interpersonal counseling, international philanthropies, self-care workshops, and product recommendations. (Lofton 6) From speaking about her routines, workouts, what she's eating, her ongoing body weight struggle, her childhood and traumas, Oprah has spoken publicly about issues that are common to say to audiences but has touched on topics that were previously only mentioned privately. (Thompson 28) Her openness about certain issues resonates and inspires her viewers, furthering a sense of connection and sharing in commonalities." (Thompson 6) Oprah not only made her viewers into "friends," but she also constructed a relationship with them, transforming her audience into "loyal consumers." Since Oprah's launch as a public figure, her career has developed across different kinds of media, she talks about numerous subjects, has interviewed countless people to the point where her influence is not just presented as individual or cultural force, "she is also seen as representing a lifestyle, or a series of strategies, and, importantly, as a way of being." (Thompson 15) This way of being is one many strive for, have interest in, and see as a model for their own lives, even if her wealth, hobbies, or other elements of her life are not attainable for all, there are many who are entertained by her life and brand

where they continue consuming her content. Oprah even had an episode in 1991 where she interviewed five panelists from the men's movement, the whole audience was also made up of men, and what was discussed was communication between men and women and how many men lack examples in their lives, especially in their early lives that show them how to "be men." However, the main focus of the episode was describing the differences between the sexes, and how men do not need to change. As one audience member puts it, "Why do we have to apologize for being men?" The audience was also made up entirely of men. (*Oprah on Men - YouTube*)

Oprah has branded herself to viewers, displaying what she wants to share about herself and her life, which resonates, inspires, and brings people back to follow and interact with her. Viewers feel connected to Oprah, and there is a balance of her persona being idolized by viewers, while also being resonated with on a basic human level. Oprah is so successful that many people who follow her perceive her television persona as 'real,' "as unmediated by the very media forces that bring her to them: television, cinema, magazines, the Internet." (Thompson 3) Considering the patterns of Oprah's career and content, "Oprah hasn't just been consistent; she's been repetitive. This is not shocking since the nature of the corporate entity requires product control, and Oprah is the total incorporation of her totalized Self." (Lofton 15) When Oprah describes herself on these platforms she says, "When you get me, you are not getting an image, you are not getting a figurehead. You're not getting a theme song. You're getting all of me. And I bring all my stuff with me. My history, my past." (Lofton 7) Oprah's branding of herself made her persona on these media and platforms. She enhanced and marketed certain aspects of herself that appealed to her viewers and followers, where they could resonate with her, while also being entertained by the persona she constructed for these media. She claims she puts all of herself out

there for her followers, but how true is that? “Oprah is the product that sells a self in order to surpass its singularity and enter, repeatedly, the marketplace of products. Harpo, Inc., fills airspace with her body, with the sense of her sense, well beyond her time.” (Lofton 7)

Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon, explores Oprah, as a person, but also a product. (Lofton 1) “(The titles and imprints of media in Oprah’s brand) are not just trademarks. They are cultures of expression, a supply chain of self unmatched in the history of industry, celebrity, or charismatic authority.” (Lofton 2) By the middle of the 1990s, Oprah’s brand was changing, as it had to with the times. It was no longer 1986 and the start of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, but rather a decade of multiple media outlets, with television still holding heavy influence over the majority of the population of the United States. There were now more entertainers making a crowded population of celebrities and people with influence that had their own talk shows, or other media platforms that would make content about anything and everything. “Violence and mayhem seemed to be the visual intent, a blending of professional wrestling and soap opera, dressed as therapy in drag.” (Lofton 3) It was found that this first medium of Oprah’s, television, was not only crowded but exhibiting new extremes to entertain and show audiences about different ways of life, thus “...Winfrey found herself in the midst of multiple personal transitions.” (Lofton 3)

However, “She eschews branding [herself as a brand] even as she gathers in her presumptive pervasiveness a past and present that can be described only as ubiquitous, insistent, and universal.” (Lofton 7) Oprah rejects the idea of herself, her products, career, influence, etc. being a brand as she promotes solely authentic aspects of her life, so she and her network claim. This rejection is out of a claim that brands are inauthentic, because her “whole” self is in these media. Contradictory to this claim that she rejects herself as a brand Oprah has said, “ ‘People

would be stunned to know how little calculation has gone into the creation of my life,' she explains. 'My brand developed deliberately by accident...Just daily choosing to do what felt like the right thing to do.' ” (Lofton 11) By saying the word brand here, and claiming the career she has made and the influence that has come from that as being unplanned in its development, she still feeds into that claim that she is authentically herself on her numerous platforms, that her brand and career are authentic and this happened naturally. She agrees to her persona on these media to be a brand so long as that definition also includes a reminder of her authenticity. However, one's online self is not the entirety of someone.

But, “...we can never forget that Winfrey is also an entertainer.” (Thompson 6) Entertaining gives power to the person with influence, so too does having viewers that value their opinion and continue allowing themselves to be influenced. Oprah has let her audience, and much of the world into her life, her television studio, her book club, her shopping habits, and to a community that she promotes on air and in print.” (Thompson 13) Her audience values her opinion and therefore tunes in to one or more of her multiple platforms of influence, whether they are aware of her influence or not. (Thompson 8) Being an entertainer brings about that element of inauthenticity. Planning, creating, and producing content based on knowing what the audience likes and dislikes curates the existence of Oprah on television and her numerous platforms. If she were authentically herself, these platforms would lack curation of her image and brand, they would lack control over them too. Knowing what content to create gives control to Oprah and other creators over their followers. On the other hand, people generally like seeing put together, edited, clean content whether that be television programming or other media. This is because it keeps their attention, interest and entertains them enough to return repeatedly to this

content. The control Oprah and her team have over her brand is a key element of what it means to influence a group of people. Oprah may go back and forth between claiming her presence and influence as a brand or not, but she cannot deny the level of control her persona has had on people through the parasocial relationship on multiple media outlets.

The Man Show was a Comedy Central television series launched in 1999 with hosts Jimmy Kimmel and Adam Carolla. Kimmel and Carolla created, wrote, and acted in this satirical show where they react to recent social events of the 1990s, as well as less-recent events of the 20th century. The show portrays satirical messaging about men's and women's roles and their changing cultural shifts, and emphasizes the necessity for traditional "man" qualities, activities, practices, etc. to be protected.

Kimmel and Carolla introduce the first episode, titled "Oprahization," by talking about the building of the Hoover Dam, by men, who did so without "drinking water, toilets, or shelter." (*The Man Show - Oprahization*) Over a hundred men died for this dam, as its two million kilowatt capacity powers the "greatest city in the world, Las Vegas." (*The Man Show - Oprahization*)

Carolla and Kimmel; And just as these men built this dam more than sixty years ago, we are building a dam, a dam to hold the tidal wave of feminization that is flooding this country. A dam to stop the river of estrogen that is drowning us in political correctness. (Audience applause) A dam to urinate off of when we're really drunk. We call this dam, The Man Show.

This opening act of *The Man Show* expressed discontent with Oprah's influence in United States society because many women were drawn to her in different media. "In the early years of *The*

Oprah Winfrey Show, pundits used the word Oprahfication to describe a rhetorical idiom in which the interviewer restates what her subject has said in order to affirm its truth through association with a universal that she, Oprah, represents.” (Lofton 55) In the opening minutes of the first episode of *The Man Show*, Kimmel and Carolla share this dialogue:

Kimmel; We’re here because we have a serious problem in this country and her name is Oprah.

(Kimmel continues) That’s right, millions and millions of women are under Oprah’s spell. This woman has half of America brainwashed.

Carolla; She tells them what to read, what to eat, what to think, what to do.

Kimmel; We’re the ones who are supposed to be telling them what to do right?

(Audience applause)

(Kimmel continues) The Oprahization of America must be stopped.

Carolla; Oprah needs to do a little less brain washing and a little more sock washing.

(The Man Show - Oprahization)

In the 1990s, the term influencing with content creators on the internet and social media was not used as it is today. Although Oprah influenced a wide range of people, what she was doing was not described as “influencing.” In the above example, the word “brainwashing” used by Kimmel and Carolla points out how they see Oprah brainwashing women in the United States, telling them what to do and satirically making a joke at how men are losing their abilities to control women in their lives. This response, along with many more in *The Man Show*, a framework of ideas around men feeling a shift and break down of normativeness for the straight white man and

their believed loss of power in what has been called the “male crisis.” Personal, social and political movements in United States culture have erupted by groups that have long been marginalized and wish to claim equality in all areas of life. Men’s rights for the white, heterosexual, most privileged men in United States society have also erupted in response, with claims of losing their power and positions within traditional masculinity from shifting gender dynamics. *The Man Show* is one of the many responses and media portrayals of this phenomenon with men’s rights since the rise of social movements starting in the 1960s, to this perceived crisis of masculinity and the struggle to maintain long-lived dominance. (Thompson 81) Another element of this to focus on is the fact that there was a title for Oprah’s influence on her audience. “Oprahization” is the overarching term for how Oprah’s content influenced a lot of people, and as she gained popularity as a celebrity, many followers have developed a parasocial relationship with her.

Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon, is a book by Kathryn Lofton explores how Oprah Winfrey’s media influence and multiple business avenues “offer a description of religion in modern society.” (Lofton 2) “Within the religious pluralism of contemporary America, Oprah extols what she likes, what she needs, and what she believes.” (Lofton 2) Oprah’s influence, how she inspires and relates to people relates to scholarship on celebrities, which suggests that celebrities are replacement divinities, where, with the decline of Christian churches and their influence, “celebrity and spectacle fill the vacuum,” says Chris Rojek. (Lofton 65-66) Lofton elaborates on Rojek’s claim;

The cultural function of celebrity parallels that of religion, since both share certain relationships to communities of believers upon icons who dwell within the

realm of possible experience.” With celebrity examples, different social communities find modes of gossip, and parasocial interactions that source common activities of social change and individual life. (Lofton 65-66)

Gossip columns, celebrity news magazines, and other media outlets increased in cultural importance as they showcased and provided an outlet for telling celebrity lives. (Lofton, 66) In scholarship on modern media cultures, the celebrity is repeatedly described as a specialty or product, as a media effect that relies on the achievement and publicity of celebrities’ private lives. (Lofton 66) For example when they appear in news magazines with photos of them grocery shopping, walking their dogs, and doing other mundane activities. Celebrities and other people with influence are sought after, idealized and followed by many people. The general public finds celebrities, and now in addition, content creators as figures to idolize, follow, and let influence their lives. Followers want to relate to them, still keep interest in them, their lives, their work, but they still want to be able to idealize and glorify them, as something relatable but unattainable, as they work to attain lives adjacent to the celebrity or person with influence. This is now the same for modern-day influencers on the internet. They are still glorified, followed and sought-after but now they are able to create a wide range of content that is less-produced, more intimate and there is a wide range of types of creators that create different kinds of content. Anyone can find any content about what they are interested in.

The parasocial relationship that happens between many viewers and people with influence, “whereby viewers relate to the media personalities as if they actually know them,” (Thompson 3) is not specific to Oprah and her audience, but with countless other people, celebrities, and now influencers and content creators on the internet. A parasocial relationship is

defined by someone feeling they have a close, personal connection with someone, but that person they have never met but they follow by means of media. (*Parasocial Relationship*) Creators on the internet are similar to public figures like Oprah, where they post idyllic, perfected, edited content that draws viewers and followers in more, where they picture for themselves a similar life or aspects of life from what appeals to them. What brings people to watch and engage with content is that it is usually entertaining as well as relatable. When someone is drawn to content, it can be because it generally interests them. All of these different approaches to content make it so there is a wide variety to consume and people can find content pertaining to almost anything they could be interested in, and thereby be entertained and connected to the content. The internet, its platforms and social media have altered the parasocial relationship between the person with influence and followers, as the influx of content creators and influencers on the internet has grown since the early two thousands. The next section will explain shifts in types of media from before the internet to being on the internet, and how their formats, presence on the internet, and much more contribute to the parasocial relationship's transfer online.

Chapter Three: Online Media, Community Building and the Parasocial Relationship

With the new age of the internet, media has shifted from being limited to television, movies, music and music videos, magazines, and other printed media. These other forms of media have transferred to the internet, and now media spans much more broadly to encompass all those mediums, as well as newly created media on the internet. These new media, for example, social media have emerged and increased in usage and prevalence. Since the early twenty-first century, people have been posting on social media platforms where profiles gain followers, post content that can get likes and comments, and share others users' content. Many people use social media, but those who post content that people resonate with, and are entertained by, can, as a result of their interactions online, gain a large following of people that repeatedly like and interact with their content. Communities are formed when any number of people follow and interact with a user and the user's content online, and interact with each other. The creator thereby has influence over their community of followers, which "provides a place where they (followers) can be themselves and make friends with like-minded others." (Cunningham, Stuart and Craig 79) Parasocial relationships have a unique dynamic online, one that is altered from previous parasocial relationships with media prior to the internet.

The internet allows for an altered dynamic for parasocial relationships for a number of reasons. First, with the internet often being referred to as the "wild west," it is important to consider how the world online has been compared to the westward expansion of the United States back in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even early twentieth century. That is, there are fewer regulations and laws in place to control the vast areas of the internet, and the

ever-stretching and expanding territory online provides room for many people to explore and gather. Second, it is much easier to mask oneself or hide on the internet behind a profile. One's identity does not have to be shown as part of their user profile online. Third, the internet can be accessed at any time and anywhere, with limitations only to accessing a wireless network or cell phone service. One does not have to wait until after the work day, or late at night to catch up on an influencer and their content, or be limited to only seeing their content during air time on television. User's profiles often serve as a backlog of all or most of the content they have ever made, so someone can watch, or re-watch content whenever they want.

There have been new developing positions, sometimes careers on the internet for people who produce and post content. "Creator" is a general term used to describe anyone who consistently creates content and posts it on the internet, but usually they have more specific labels or titles for their positions. These labels depend on what content they produce and on what platform they concentrate their content. For example, some creators go by the general "content creator" or "influencer", especially if they produce content on multiple platforms. Creators can also call themselves a "YouTuber", "vlogger", (video blogger), "live streamer", "gameplayer", or other titles. All creators entertain their audience, from posting about food, beauty, lifestyle, camping, you name it and one can find content about any topic on the internet.

There are many ways content can be produced on the internet, as well as numerous platforms with varying kinds of content and duration. These factors, as well as others all determine what content appeals to people of different demographics, for example age. Social media platforms explained here include Twitter, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. Some creators also have made their own platforms, websites, etc. where they concentrate their content. Content

on these social media platforms entails text, image, audio, video, and livestreaming. Audio is one way content can be produced, through podcasts which are usually long-form content. Video is another way content can be produced, through watching long-form content or short-form content. Long-form content can be anything from a ten minute video to a two hour long podcast episode. Short-form content are videos that vary from a few seconds to ten minutes. (Google Support)

Long-form content requires an audience that has the interest and ability to listen or watch for a longer period of time. This content is easier to listen to when someone has a longer attention span, and is usually most accessible to people who perform tasks in their day that can be done while focusing on something else, for example they have time while commuting. Short-form content appeals to a wider range of people because it takes less time to watch and also requires less attention span. Younger audiences find short-form content more appealing as it is posted on social media platforms that are largely used by their generations.

There is a “global wave” of creators, who are social media users “harnessing multiple and global-scaling platforms to engage in media entrepreneurialism.” (Craig, 363) Social media entertainment is still an emerging industry based on amateur creators “professionalizing and engaging in content innovation and media entrepreneurship across social media platforms to aggregate global fan communities and incubate their own media brands.” (Cunningham, Stuart and (Craig, 71) Creating content can be a hobby or side job for a lot of creators, but for others it is their full-time job where they make money through advertisement cents, paid partnerships with brands and other companies to promote certain products or services, and a multitude of other ways. Creating content requires a great deal of creative energy, as creators constantly work with what is popular or trending online that will draw people in and keep their audiences’ interest in

their content. Entrepreneurialism is relating to an endeavor or business, with emphasis on taking extensive risk, as well as individual initiative. (*Entrepreneurial*) The act of constantly creating content and making a job for themselves are the aspects of entrepreneurialism for creators. Many creators from the early twenty-first century pioneered the way to make posting online a full-time career for themselves and others.

With any job or career comes the earning of money. Internet creators are freelance workers that do not have a set salary, and they make money based on the content they produce, and how often they produce it. Many creators make money through advertising, especially on YouTube, a video-streaming platform, advertisements play as different moments throughout a video, breaking it up in a similar way to television commercial advertisements. Every time someone interacts with a creator's video with advertisements, a portion of the money generated from the advertisements being watched goes to the creator. However this is only a small portion of their income, the greatest source of income coming from brand marketing deals. “The most lucrative strategy involves influencer marketing deals, also known as branded content deals, with direct payment of fees to promote an advertising brand, product or service.” (Craig 371) With the rise of creators came social media management companies who represent creators, public relations (PR) firms, and PR departments of brands and product companies. All of these work together within capitalism where creators promote products or services for their audience to buy. Creator gets a portion of money that is predetermined in a “brand deal” with a company, most often with a contract. The brand deal consists of specifying what type of content the creator will produce, i.e., a YouTube video, Instagram reel, TikTok video, posting multiple types of content, and other instances. The deal also specifies the rate for how much the creator will be

compensated for creating and posting this specified content, and how many people view and like the content also factors into the creator's compensation. Longer-form content generally means the creator earns more money. Creators also provide links to the website with the product or service when they post the content. When someone from their audience clicks a link to the product or service, or enters a discount code and then purchases what is being promoted, the creator gets a portion of the money. "And instead of discourses of authenticity tracking across a bilateral relationship between individuals and commodity culture, the relations are trilateral among the 'authentic' creator, the fan community, which validates all such claims to authenticity, and the brand which is seeking to buy into, and leverage, that primary relationship."

(Cunningham, Stuart and Craig 74-75) In this way, the creator, subsequent companies and followers are all engaging with a perpetual cycle of capitalism. A creator does not have to make all their content with brand deals, which gives them more freedom to post what they want. If content is made for a branded partnership, there are usually guidelines the creator has to follow, for example what they can and cannot include in the content, how they promote the product or service, what they say, and much more.

On the other side of earning money from these advertisements and brand partnerships, creators simultaneously create their own brand, as they produce content that appeals to their audience. Creators make content about their experiences, likes, dislikes, what they are doing, what they believe, how they spend their time, their personal relationships and other aspects of their personal lives. Like Oprah, they produce content that is the reason they have a following, because people like and interact with it. The kind of content they make is predictable, as followers generally know what to expect, yet new and exciting at the same time as no content

produced is exactly the same by a creator. "...contemporary brand culture is characterized by the blurring between the authentic self and the commodity self, and 'this blurring is more expected and tolerated.' It is also characterized by a relationship between individuals and commodity culture that is constructed as 'authentic'." (Cunningham, Stuart and Craig 73) The commodity self, and the authentic self work together as a creator makes their brand online. The first main reason they have a following is because viewers liked their content. The second is there is an element of authenticity with what they share, and people were initially drawn to their content because of interest in the topics they refer to. The third reason is that the creator makes consistent content, and they have the ability to see from the analytics and data from these platforms exactly what content they make performs the best, meaning is viewed the most, liked the most, etc. From there the creator can organize and make their content based on what they want to create content about, while also considering what type of content their followers like. This brings about an element of inauthenticity as the creator knows how to draw viewers to their content, similar to Oprah and her brand.

Across platforms, creators interact and engage with their followers, however small or big their community stretches. They also interact with other creators, whether they have similar content or not. Followers and creators interact online through commenting, liking, sending direct messages, and sharing. "Creators are practiced in algorithmic and search strategies of content management, like optimizing titles and hashtags." (Craig 370) Creators are also versed in knowing when to post for optimal viewing times, what times of day followers are most likely to like and what kind of content they are most likely going to click the "like" button for. (Craig 370) In these ways they steer their content to appeal more to their audience, while also working

with the goal of expanding their audience and gaining followers. More viewers of their content means earning more money, and gaining more followers often means more brands are likely to work with the creator, given the number of people they have influence over. Eventually, the creator usually develops a regular schedule to post their content, creating a sense of reliability with their audience.

A distinctive aspect of being a creator is the community management necessary to maintain and grow a following. Community management “reflects common user practices of social networking.” (Craig 372) Before social media and the internet, community management looked slightly different. Viewers could write a letter, find a phone number for their management office, respond to a newsletter, or other means. All of these modes require time and effort to communicate. Now, community management looks a lot different, with actions of liking, commenting, sharing content, sending direct messages to the creator, this all requires much less effort to reach out and communicate, and also requires much less time. Compared to all of a creator’s followers, they only get to meet or interact with a very small portion of their overall following, whether that be in person or online. A creator does not know everyone who follows them, but a follower knows a lot about the creator, not everything of course, but a great deal from their online content. Seeing someone share on the internet, seeing their actions, mannerisms, personality, and many different moments of their lives gives the perspective to a viewer that they know a lot about the creator. A one-sided relationship can form, specifically on the viewer’s or follower’s side. This is the parasocial relationship.

Online offers a unique platform for a changing dynamic of the parasocial relationship because although content is created, it is also in a lot of ways, seemingly more authentic in

comparison to media prior to the internet. “[Social media entertainment] is governed by quite strict norms that put the highest value on authenticity and community, and these governing ‘rules of the game’ have developed rapidly to shape and discipline creators and the commercial environment in which...creators work.” (Cunningham, Stuart and Craig 72) Creators will create content in their homes, in their bedrooms even, and since they often film and edit their content, it shows them on a much more personal level than a developed television talk show like Oprah had. Followers are seeing more intimate aspects of creators' lives now in comparison to people of influence being portrayed in media prior to the internet.

Television networks constantly tracked ratings, number of viewers, and other statistics to piece together what the audience was interacting with, what they liked, did not like, or otherwise thought about the media they were consuming. Because of the nature of television having specific contracts between a network who owns a show, and those who create the show, the influence of how an audience liked or disliked a show mattered more in the case of longevity, and this affected what was in each show episode and season. Now, on social media, followers can directly write in a comment, or talk in a video and post exactly what they feel about content. (Craig 372) They can “tag” a creator in the post, and although a lot of people interact with a creator online, there is still a chance the creator, or someone from their management team will see the post. But a creator’s content does not have to be influenced by how followers react to it, since the creator can post how much they want, for however long they want is not in a contract with any network. A creator also has flexibility with the content they make, for example if they start making different kinds of content about different subjects or on different platforms, it is likely that new viewers will begin to interact and follow them if previous ones do not. Interaction

between creator and follower can be described as “relational labor,” that is handling the economic and social relationship between creator and fans. “Depending on the nature of their content and demands placed by their fan community, creators may spend upwards of 50 percent of their time interacting directly with their community.” (Craig 372) The practices of creator management are ever-evolving in order to be sustainable and prioritize content creators and their shifting jobs and tasks, while online platforms evolve as well.

The following platforms and social media are described because of their use by men’s rights activist and social media influencer, Andrew Tate, who permeates these platforms, not just with his own self-made content but with repurposed, edited content made by followers. Reference to platforms common in the West, entails Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Twitter which are some of the most common platforms for not just younger audiences, but also older generations to follow creators, interact with their content, and make and post their own content. With content produced on one platform, it is very common to see that content shared on other platforms. Specifically short-form content from one platform is likely to fit the time duration on another platform, and so sharing is much easier. On Instagram for example, TikTok videos can be shared on Instagram Reels, sometimes the only indication for the video is a little icon from the platform it was originally posted on. Another common case is that clips from a long-form video, for example on YouTube, are made into a short-form video that could be posted on YouTube Shorts or another platform with short-form video content. In these ways, content is widely shared and can be found on numerous platforms in varying lengths, making it more appealing to different audiences. A creator can do this with their own content, or anyone viewing content can share to other platforms they have accounts with.

YouTube began in 2005, (*Google - YouTube*) and operates communally, as it has a streaming video player along with social networking capacities through its liking, commenting, and sharing features. (Craig 365) Social media entertainment started soon after this introduction of YouTube to the internet space. (Cunningham, Stuart and Craig 72) There were other platforms before YouTube with similar features, for example Vimeo which was launched in 2004 and Youku by China six months before YouTube. (Craig 365) As the platform has made numerous changes since its creation, with algorithms, content curation, user interface improvements, and the creation of a mobile application, YouTube has grown their platform to encompass many different kinds of content creation, i.e., YouTube Premium (subscriptions), YouTube Games, YouTube Live, and YouTube Music (streaming). (Craig 365) YouTube has short and long-form content. With the launch of YouTube Shorts in 2020, YouTube created a section of their platform for just this type of short-form content with videos that can have a duration up to sixty seconds. One way creators can keep track of their ratings, followers, and other engagement on their social media, specifically on YouTube is by using their software YouTube Studio. (*YouTube Studio*) Different social media launched these types of applications to help creators access helpful data to know what their followers engage with, with in turn helps the social media when creators start gain more followers, users of the social media, which increases interactions with advertisements, subscription services, and other elements of the social media and earns the creator, and social media more money.

Instagram is a social media networking platform started in 2010 that allows users to share photos and videos, owned by social media company, Meta. “The app allows users to upload media that can be edited with filters and organized by hashtags and geographical tagging.”

(*Google - Instagram*) On Instagram users could always post photos and videos, and over the years there have been updates where Instagram introduced Instagram Stories, which appear on a user's screen where regular posts are. These stories last for twenty-four hours and then disappear, unless pinned to the highlights section on a user's profile where the story then does not have a time limit. In 2020, Instagram launched Instagram Reels, which are short-form videos that can be up to ninety seconds in duration. (*Instagram Reels*)

TikTok is a short-form video service that has a range of videos from a few seconds to 10 minutes. Launched in 2016 it is the predecessor to the short-form video app, musical.ly. (*Google - TikTok*)

Of particular importance for this project is the focus on Twitter. Twitter is a social media platform started in 2006. (*Google - Twitter*) The company is back in private hands, owned by Elon Musk, the richest person in the world. (Vanian) Since Twitter's inception, it has become a crucial plate of debate, jokes, and gathering for specific circles on the internet that discuss a wide range of topics. "It's also served as a platform that gives voice to the voiceless, helping protesters organize and express themselves in repressed regimes around the world." A previous Twitter CEO has said, "...from a simple business perspective and to serve the public conversation, Twitter is incentivized to keep all voices on the platform." (Vanian) On the other side, Twitter and other social media, for example Facebook, have been controversial in their dissemination of fake news and misinformation, especially when previous United States president, Donald Trump was campaigning and in office he viciously and uncontrollably posted every day, often times multiple times a day. (Vanian) In 2009, Twitter grew exponentially in popularity after the appearance of the then CEO on Oprah Winfrey's talk show, and since then monumental tweets

have been made, for example NASA astronauts tweeting from space, previous United States president Barack Obama using the platform to first declare publicly his 2012 presidential win. (Vanian) Twitter went public in 2013, but throughout the years has struggled to make profit, in comparison to other social media because they struggled making money using advertisements. In response to Donald Trump prominently using Twitter and spreading misinformation, then CEO made this statement, “Having the president-elect on our service using it as a direct line of communication allows everyone to see what is on his mind in the moment... We’re definitely entering a new world where everything is on the surface and we can all see that in real time and we can have conversations about it.” (Vanian) It is no coincidence that as Trump continued in his tenure as president, also being the “most-tweeted-about global leader in the world,” Twitter looked to be on the up side, with improving finances and increasing stock value. (Vanian) As the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, Twitter was still a global tool in spreading misinformation. In 2021, Twitter banned Trump after he made explosive tweets during the January 6th U.S. Capitol riots which Twitter said lead to the “further incitement of violence.” (Vanian) In 2022 Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla started a deal in April of that year to buy Twitter and make it private. The deal ended in October of that same year and since then Musk, a self-described “free speech absolutist” has sought out to unban certain figures, for example Donald Trump, Jordan Peterson, and many more who he felt had been unfairly and unlawfully silenced. His goals were to “lift Twitter’s content moderation policies, eliminate spam, add new features and provide more transparency about the algorithms used to promote content.” (Conger, Hirsch) On Twitter’s “About” page on their website, the company states, “We serve the public conversation. That’s why it matters to us that people have a free and safe space to talk.” (*About.Twitter.Com/En*)

Now anyone can post on social media, gain followers, even earn money online and make themselves a full-time job. No television network needed to sign someone on, to keep track of ratings. There are no network contracts, no producers, directors, or other positions that are needed. A content creator can do all these tasks themselves, unless they have such a huge following that it makes sense to hire a team and develop content that way. For most creators, there are no limits to what they can post, how often, or how long their content is, whereas Oprah and media personalities like her were tied to a certain number of minutes for episodes of a show, which aired on specific days of the week, and content was constantly being assessed, developed, and reworked by networks to how they thought would appeal best to the audience. Because of the freedom and flexibility of the internet, the parasocial relationship between a follower and a creator is uniquely altered and enhanced. This can happen with any follower and any kind of creator. A specific description of a creator that is part of a specific group online, and has generated their own specific following can be seen in the next chapter. This will look at controversial social media influencer, Andrew Tate and how his branding and influence has created and sustained his following and contributed to his success on his online businesses.

Chapter Four: Andrew Tate's Ideologies

During this time when many men feel they are losing positioning and opportunities in society, they can find comfort and confirmation in their beliefs in online figures and influencers like Andrew Tate. When these men find an influencer to follow, they feel empowered and validated by this public figure, and can find comfort in the community who supports their ideas, which tells them what they do believe is right. Andrew Tate is British-American, a former professional lightweight kickboxer turned businessman and social media personality. He is the most googled person in the world, and a “self proclaimed misogynist,” who primarily posts on the social media platform Twitter and has his own business websites. (Radford) “To his fans he’s a misunderstood satirist and the victim of big tech censorship. To many others he’s a malicious misogynist.” (Andrew Tate vs Piers Morgan | The Full Interview) Misogyny is the aversion to, hatred of, or prejudice against women, (*Misogyny Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster*) and comments Tate has made such as “women should ‘bear responsibility’ for being sexually assaulted,” and many others eventually led to him being banned from social media and other online platforms in the summer of 2022. (Radford) Radford continues by citing an YouTube interview Tate had, “In an interview with another YouTuber, he said he was “absolutely a misogynist”, and added: “I’m a realist and when you’re a realist, you’re sexist. There’s no way you can be rooted in reality and not be sexist.” (Radford) Tate claims he was banned, “...because of his ‘traditional masculine values,’ he said on a Fox interview. “ ‘They banned me simply because I had large swathes of the population agreeing to very traditional masculine values,’ ” (Pagones) Tate has made millions as a pornographer and casino owner, however his online videos are what

generate the most income for him, and make him infamous around the world. He poses as a “Playboy with fast cars, cigars, weapons and cash.” (Andrew Tate vs Piers Morgan | The Full Interview) Tate, on his content, shares ideas about the importance of “upholding traditional masculinity.” In formal interviews he is more polished in his preaching of ideas, where he mentions his support for marriage, the traditional roles for husband and wife, the protector and provider, the protected and provided-for.

I believe in marriage more than anybody. I believe in marriage in the traditional sense. I believe a man has a duty to stand up and be a real man. I believe that the problem with the world today that we are facing is that not enough men are sticking to the age-old ways of masculinity. I believe that me standing up and saying a man must protect a woman and provide for her so he needs to make sure that she’s safe. (“Andrew Tate vs Piers Morgan | The Full Interview - YouTube.”)

As part of the veil of supporting traditional masculinity, or as Tate calls “age-old ways of masculinity,” Tate’s ideal regarding the importance of men’s and women’s “unique” responsibilities and components of their roles is displayed below. The following example is one of Tate’s “tenets” or beliefs he markets as “41 Tenets” which he claims he lives by and makes content for so his followers can too.



(41 Tenets)

The above example is not descriptive but rather vague and does not show the depth of Tate's misogynistic messaging. His emphasis is on men and women being different, and those differences is what he bases his misogynistic content and messaging around. It is also posted on the social media platform Twitter, the only popular and main-stream social media he is not banned on. Tate usually posts multiple times a day and shares numerous tweets that other users have tagged him in.

Tate has claimed that women cannot be promiscuous, but men can be. He believes women need to be pure, and part of their purity comes from not being touched by many men. ("Andrew Tate vs Piers Morgan | The Full Interview - YouTube.") However the below example

shows another vague message masking Tate’s ideologies around romantic and sexual relationships with women;



(41 Tenets)

Another traditionally masculine claim Tate makes is that men need to earn enough money to support and provide for a wife and family. Tate has said how he would support “his woman” if she wanted to work, but it will be an option, not something she has to do;

I think women should be free to work if they choose. I think it’s important that the family unit remains. I think, in my personal view the most important and respectful thing a woman can do is become a mother. I think that having children is a beautiful thing...I don’t know why anyone would assume I don’t want women

to work, or can't work, because I said that I should keep them safe sometimes.

(“Andrew Tate vs Piers Morgan | The Full Interview - YouTube.”)

This is an example of Tate mixing together four of his ideals about roles in the sex binary. First, that women should be free to work. Second, the importance of the family unit remaining. Third, the most important role a woman can have is to be a mother, and lastly, that he as a man should keep the women in his life safe. In formal interviews, the mixing of messages and the indirect answers is how Tate tries to mask being directly misogynistic.

Although Tate emphasizes the importance of the family and men's and women's roles in that as protector and being protected, he has also said he does not see anything wrong with other “traditional” elements of being masculine. A lot of his fans like Tate because he supports ideas about masculinity that they resonate with. “The reason I am so popular and I'm so famous is that there's a large contingent of men who...still want to make money, go to the gym, be strong, drive a fast car, be traditionally masculine and don't want to be shamed for that and they don't want to be called toxic for that.” (“Andrew Tate vs Piers Morgan | The Full Interview - YouTube.”)

Andrew Tate's area of men's rights, finding identity with luxury items is specific to certain men. Men who follow his content, who may not consider themselves men's rights activists but find they support Tate's ideas and general men's rights claims of needing to preserve men's roles and positions of power. Where Tate adds on to his claims of supporting traditional masculinity is blatant misogyny. His influence and content on the internet is so vast that a large part of the world knows about him. He is not the only influencer online, and he is not the only men's rights influencer. The next chapter will go more in depth with Tate's platforms and messaging as he

appeals to his followers, how his branding and influence has created and sustained his following and contributed to his success on his online businesses.

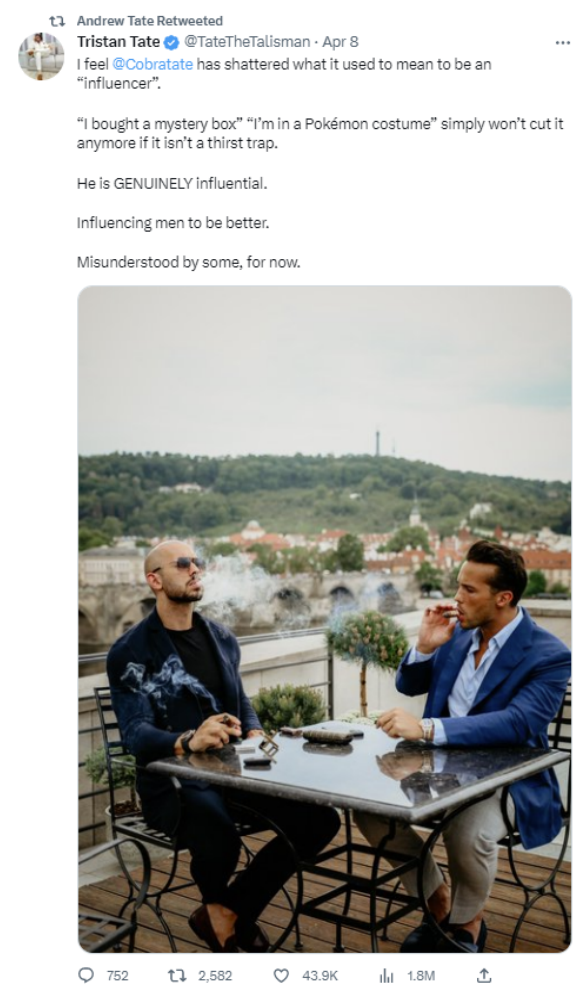
Chapter Five: Andrew Tate's Parasocial Influence and Men's Rights Online

Parasocial relationships are a crucial part of creating an online following, which can lead to large group or community influence, bringing people together. Andrew Tate is an example of a public figure in a portion of the manosphere who has great influence on a specific group of men's rights activists, largely in the Western World. The parasocial relationship has contributed to his large following, because of a number of men online feeling a loss of power and political correctness, they have found influencers like Andrew Tate on the internet that project these ideas of upholding masculinity and male power. These men that follow Tate have a mode to further instill their beliefs with men's rights because they follow or interact with this one influencer that says many ideas that they are already thinking, lives a life they strive for themselves, and shows followers that what they think and do, or want to do can be achieved, and is in fact alright or what they are supposed to believe. Tate's viewers, through the parasocial relationship, feel connected to him. They resonate with him while also idolizing him and perceive his persona and social media brand as "real" despite his generated content. Similar to Oprah, Tate's content gained popularity because people liked it, however over time he, like other influencers, learned how people interact with their content. By generating content for his followers, Tate entertains them which feeds the parasocial relationship. When a parasocial relationship between creator or influencer and follower takes place, the follower feels they relate to the creator so much so that they actually know them. With examples from different online media, the specific aspects of online platforms and social media that alter the parasocial relationship to work as a key element for online communication and gaining a following will become apparent. Specific connections to

Andrew Tate and men's rights activism online will be described, but many factors of the online parasocial relationship are similar for many other influencers and followers.

In our society it is very hard to not be influenced when on the internet, and many people find themselves following influencers. Similar to how Oprah's influence was everywhere, one could not avoid her, her face on a magazine, skipping past her show on television channels, and many other modes, because of algorithms it is nearly impossible to avoid certain content and creators when one begins to interact with them on the internet. Like any area or community of the internet, men's rights can become a large part of followers' online world as algorithms keep their social media in a perpetual cycle of this type of content. Because of algorithms, the content someone sees is the result of data tracking what they interact with and spend the most time engaging and watching. A person's social media becomes personalized to them, with recommended content shown on their accounts that is similar to what they interact with. With algorithms working to connect similar content, oftentimes with certain beliefs and ideologies, people can see more of what they want to see, and be connected with others who have similar belief systems. Online groups can form, spread their ideas quickly and with little fear of fight or repercussion. Posting on a forum is logistically easier than writing an article for a magazine or newspaper. In the case of men's rights, its followers and content creators have found commonality online and share with each other their traditionalist gender ideals, misogynistic, harmful views of women and how they feel men are losing rights. In terms of masculinity, Tate's followers inhabit Tate's advice about exercise, earning a lot of money, buying fancy cars and other luxury items. They feel happier, they see physical results in the gym, more money being earned, they feel they are changing their lives for the better, and if Tate was right, his advice did

work, then that must be what is right. Similar to Oprah, eventually a follower who consumes more and more of Tate’s content, likely also subscribes to his different media forms, and continues the cycle of interacting with his content. Tate has had immense influence in the area of men’s rights online, and below, Tate’s brother Tristan posted a tweet describing his brother’s influence on men to “be better.”



(Twitter- Tristan Tate)

Oprah had a day-time talk show, with content that was deemed appropriate for this time period and could be watched by general audiences including children, to a certain extent. Men’s rights

did not have a position on a day-time talk show, which is why those general beliefs were shared a little sporadically on shows like *The Man Show* and other shows late at night. Now with the internet, any content based on any groups' or individuals beliefs can be shared at any time of day, on any platform for anyone to find. There is much less regulation and no planning in the way television networks used to schedule shows. With the variety of content on the internet, people can find whatever interests them. With more harmful and less regulated beliefs making its way into internet content, more people are now finding this content on what they believe in that previously was not produced as openly as it is now. The result of this is the emergence of many people following this content online and forming collective groups and communities around their beliefs. Men's rights activists are only one example of a politically far-right community online.

Tate, because of the beliefs he puts into his content, he is a highly controversial public figure which many young boys and men look up to. His misogynistic views he slightly masks by advocating for traditional family values and gender dynamics. Tate has been described as violent and coercive by ex-girlfriends. (Mortimer and Coan) One example of his misogynistic content online is Tate making violent and explicit comments in a video about how he would attack a woman saying he has cheated on her, "It's bang out the machete, boom in her face and grip her by the neck. Shut up bitch." (Das) This is only one example, however Tate's views have been described as extreme misogyny by domestic abuse charities. It is important to note that his content has radicalized and influenced men and boys to commit harm on, and offline. (Das)

An element of Tate's influence is his "theme song" as he calls it that plays over a lot of his short-form content, and short-form content that others edit as compilations of his general messaging. It is a popular French song sung by a female artist that describes a man that no one

understands. (*Tourner Dans Le Vide (English Translation) – Indila | Genius Lyrics*) The song plays over video clips of him walking, in or getting out of his sports car, at parties, on boats and many more scenes from his podcasts, videos, other's podcasts, and other content. As I viewed these videos, I began recognizing the song as repeatedly being in a lot of his short-form content, and content made about Tate, and it made me associate those videos with him. Upon learning that this is his "theme song," it immediately made me recognize how any viewer can begin to associate that song, and the content with Tate. It is a deliberate decision to have a particular song in one's content in order to make people associate with it. This song has caused issues, where children play it out loud in class on their devices and immediately teachers know what it is and the controversial associations with it. (*Children Playing the Andrew Tate Song in Class*) A Los Angeles gym has recently banned the song and this story has caused a lot of backlash. (Sarkar)

Tate has been banned off mainstream social media, now except for Twitter which he was un-blocked from after Elon Musk bought the platform in October, 2022. One can find Tate's content, or content about him, on any platform or social media still despite his being banned. Once content is posted on one platform it is more than likely going to be posted by that creator on other platforms, or shared by followers numerous times on numerous platforms. A lot of his long-form content is edited to be short-form content, where young men and even children watch and find this more appealing on TikTok and Instagram, especially if they cannot buy or otherwise access Tate's other self-made platforms and subscription services.

In late December, 2022 Tate and his brother, Tristan were arrested at their house in Romania for allegations of rape, sex trafficking, and other crimes relating to violence against women. (Mortimer, Hayley, et al.) After their arrest, Tate took down what was left of his online

platforms, one of these platforms was his self-created, “Hustlers University.” In 2021, Tate founded Hustler University, a claimed educational platform which makes content on teaching members, who could subscribe for \$49.99 a month, and learn how to start earning exponentially more money through different entrepreneurial practices. In 2022, “Hustler’s University” was rebranded to “Real World.” (Dickson, EJ, et al.) “I am free in The Real World.” Tate has written and said in multiple messaging on his content, referring to this business and his others which are also about how to earn more money and provide resources and tips to subscribers. (*The Real World*) Other business websites of Tate’s include cobratate.com, titled with Tate’s nickname because of his cobra tattoo that spirals around his right arm and onto his chest. “Cobra,” he has used to refer to himself since his kickboxing days. (*Cobratate | Live What You Dream*)

Another business venture Tate founded is “The War Room,” where followers can pay a fee of more than \$5,000. This is a virtual, as well as physical community that Tate created. This is a social network by Tate and his brother, Tristan, where they made exclusive content about advice on masculinity, sex, and making money. All of these subscription fees add up to Tate earning around \$8 million a month. (Dickson, EJ, et al.) The brothers bring on guests to speak in “The War Room” as well, where their advice goes to a “highly supportive global networking group of men” who are striving to excel “In all areas of life.” (Dickson, EJ, et al.) Members of “The War Room,” @ReachTWR on Twitter, (*Twitter-The War Room*) have been seen to adopt a “hyper macho” stance where they psych each other up about women, conquests with them, money, cars, and other interests often labeled as “masculine.” (Dickson, EJ, et al.) However, on their website they claim to support traditional masculine values.

“The War Room” claims

Our ongoing Mission to ceaselessly empower Men like you,
To become the very best versions of themselves through
physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial development.

We hold that

**ALL Men should be strong, positive, law-abiding citizens who are reliable and
dependable** for their families, friends, and communities.

(The War Room)

“The War Room,” providing a community for men, states on their website how important brotherhood is for men, and claims this platform provides that brotherhood which many lack.

(The War Room)

The War Room

No Great Man in History became Exceptional Alone

99.9% of modern-day men will never experience the power of Brotherhood and
Community.

(The War Room)

The War Room website also includes a section, “What Our Members Have Achieved,” with photos of screenshots members have submitted, many with redacted content. But these screenshots often describe how much money they have earned, the Rolex watches they have bought, the vacations they have taken, fancy cars, private jets, other expensive purchases that

mark status and wealth, all of which was not possible with member's salaries before learning and applying money-earning tricks from the Tate brothers. "The War Room," which is officially verified on Twitter (with a blue check mark) just held *The War Room Dubai Summit*, which concluded on March 28, 2023. But "The War Room" has also promoted other services they are less inclined to include in their promotions and descriptions on the front page of their website. Rolling Stone, in their article "Andrew Tate Built an Empire on Bullshit. Here's the Real Story," notes from a source familiar with "The War Room" how the Tate brothers "encouraged members to get their wives and girlfriends to do online sex work and fork over their income to them." (Dickson, EJ, et al.) The article also mentions from this source, who said that "The War Room" teaches enrollers how to become a "pimping guy who looks down on women, uses them and abuses them, and manipulates them to get from them what he wants." (Dickson, EJ, et al.) Found illegal activities from screenshots on "The War Room's" website include sex trafficking, sexual manipulation, illegal obtainment of multiple legal documents such as driver's licenses and passports. One spokesperson for Tate has denied "The War Room's" encouragement of illegal activities, saying they "deny the legitimacy of the screenshots provided" on the website. "The spokesperson says "The War Room" is a 'legitimate online community that encourages people to better themselves physically, mentally, and financially.' " (Dickson, EJ, et al.) (*Twitter-The War Room*) Photos of the Dubai Summit can be found online, including "The War Room's" Twitter account with group pictures, all of the men's faces are blurred out;



(War Plans)

This photo is one of many on “The War Room’s” website, where members form in a group, either standing or sitting with arms crossed, shoulders back, or other stances that give off power and strength. Members are not seen embracing each other, or otherwise touching to suggest closeness or a bond that would indicate the presence of any emotion.

A business that is part of Tate’s “The War Room” is “War Plans,” which has a website with information and resources also about earning money. Tate often refers to these societal changes away from traditional positions and values as “the Matrix.” The slogan for “War Plans” is on the front page of their website, stating;

The Matrix wants you (Tired, Poor, Weak, Alone)

You Must Fight It, Wage War Against It

Build Your War Plan

(War Plans)

This business, which works in tandem with his other business ventures, promotes the ideas of working hard, becoming rich, being a successful entrepreneur, a hardworking man, that is not controlled by society and being told what to do.

TateSpeech is Tate's own podcast, which he shut down in August, 2022 after being banned from social media. TateSpeech is now posted on rumble.com, an online video platform with 1.13 million followers. TateSpeech has a variety of content with different durations. There are hour plus long podcast episodes being posted again, as well as interviews with Tate by other podcast shows, for example "The Ahmad Mahmood Show," Samuel Leeds, "TheDeenShowTV," etc. and episodes with his brother Tristan or solo episodes with just Tristan. There are streams with Tate and influencer Adin Ross, there is short-form content where Tate talks about his praises for living in Dubai, for his new Bugatti, etc. (*TateSpeech by Andrew Tate*) Also on rumble.com is TateConfidential which has lifestyle videos with Andrew Tate. Some of these videos are also posted on the TateSpeech rumble.com page. In these lifestyle videos Tate is shown racing vehicles in the United Arab Emirates desert, buying new cars, partying on yachts, shooting guns, kickboxing, among many other activities and visuals of his daily routines, usually with his brother Tristan in the content as well. (*Tateconfidential*)

Andrew Tate does not have a YouTube channel after being banned in August, 2022. When typing in "Andrew Tate" in YouTube's search engine, many videos come up that have the same content as what he posts on rumble.com, meaning followers have carried over the content from one platform to another, by downloading, screen recording, or other modes. There are also many video compilations other people have made and posted, as well as videos of Tate being a guest on other's podcasts can be found. He is interviewed by many podcasters that post

long-form video content. A lot of this content gets cut down to fit short-form and gets posted on YouTube Shorts, TikTok, and other social media. Tate has been a guest on James English's show, FULL SEND's channel, STRIKE IT BIG's channel, and many other hosts. Those who follow any of these content creators, who may not call themselves men's rights activists are shown a long glimpse of Tate and his views which directly reflect a portion of the men's rights community online.

Twitter is an important platform when considering men's rights because of the people and accounts that are allowed back on Twitter, and is most emphasized here for the purpose of Twitter's dedication to "free speech" and unbanning certain user's profiles. Elon Musk, chief executive officer of Twitter, bought the platform in a forty-four billion dollar deal to buy Twitter, making it no longer a public funded platform but a privately owned one. Tate has over six million followers on Twitter, (*Twitter-Andrew Tate*) according to his verified account @Cobratate which was unbanned in October 2022. "The acquisition has been celebrated by some Republicans, who have argued that Twitter censored conservative viewpoints." (Conger and Hirsch) Twitter is now a private company, where Musk does not have to answer to stakeholders and can make any changes to the platform away from the general public's view. (Conger and Hirsh) Tate posts multiple tweets every day on his Twitter account, and shares tweets from his brother, Tristan Tate.

An example of the influence Tate has on followers can be shown with a dynamic between him and Adin Ross, an American live streamer creator known for collaboration with other creators and celebrities. Ross was once just another online follower of Tate's who was influenced by the parasocial relationship. Now the two have met in person, hung out, and created content

together. A common kind of content they have made together is live streaming for usually an hour or more. It is very common for creators and influencers to make videos and other content together, often called “collabing.” Although Tate has been banned from YouTube, these videos of him and Ross remain on the platform, each video attracting well over half a million views.

(Pagones) Ross is twenty-two years old and helps Tate appeal more to young audiences as that is common for his followers community. On YouTube, @AdinRoss he has 3.58 million subscribers. In the summer of 2022, Tate and Adin became acquainted online when Adin invited Tate on to one of his streams. (*Adin Ross X Andrew Tate Full Stream! - YouTube*) Since their first stream, they have made videos together. To give examples, Tate and Ross have made six long-form content streams together, some of Ross’s shorter videos with Tate are copied from these streams and given a title to highlight what the video is focused on. Some shorter videos they have made include the ten minute long video, “Andrew Tate Speaks on Onlyfans with Adin Ross”, as well as “Andrew Tate Answers Questions From Adin Ross,” and “Adin Ross puts Andrew Tate on an E-Date.” Other content has been made by Ross, for example where he reacts to Tate’s “theme song.” Ross has posted videos reacting to Tate’s arrest in Romania, as well as Tate’s recent release to house arrest. The two finally met in person December, 2022 just weeks before Tate was arrested in Romania and Ross made and posted a video of them meeting. Short form videos, for example Tate teaching Ross how to smoke a cigar, Ross giving Tate a gift, Ross setting up Tate on a virtual date, compilations of funny moments during their streams, the two of them arm wrestling in Tate’s living room, and much more can be found online.



(Twitter-Andrew Tate)

It is important to note how Tate has influenced Ross, his lifestyle, daily activities, which all seeps into Ross' content. Tate has influenced Ross to the point where Ross has started working out, dressing more like Tate, he even shaved his own head to match Tate's in solidarity with Tate's confinement to jail. In videos since their meet up in person, they have challenged each other physically. What started with Tate reacting to Ross doing thirty push ups, to Ross reacting to Tate doing one hundred fifty push ups, there's been a shift in Ross's own content in how he prioritizes physical fitness, along with other changes.

After this video, Ross posted another video titled, "Adin Ross Explains Why He Can Visit Andrew Tate in Jail," which was edited from one of his live streams. Ross says;

Chat, Tate knows I shave my head bald, and he and he knows that I'm like doing like I'm changing and he's proud and happy. And um I'm not gonna say from who [who told him this information] I'm not gonna do any of that but it's uh amazing right he knows yeah he knows that we've been working on ourselves in 20202023 and uh it made me happy bro and uh that's why he made this tweet and he uh and

he said uh four family members and the fifth is Adin Ross that's why he put me on there. (*Adin Ross Explains Why He Can Visit Andrew Tate in Jail - YouTube*)

Ross confirms that he is changing himself due to Tate's influence and also confirms that Tate knows he is changing because of this and further incentivizes him to put in the work and be a man like Tate describes online. Ross says in his "I'm Going to Visit Andrew Tate in Jail" video, "You I already told you guys, you know with Andrew, he took me in, and uh you know showed the uttermost love and respect to myself and my peers. He's never given me weird or creepy vibes and he's never you know give me like the shoulder in a way. He's just been open arms and loving." (*I'm Going to Visit Andrew Tate in Jail - YouTube*) Ross references Tate taking him in and turning around his life. It is also apparent how Tate is aware of his influence over Ross, is aware of the changes Ross is making and how this works to his advantage with his followers and Ross's. Tate showcases this when he tweets, like in the example above, about how Ross gets special treatment now like being one of a few people to visit him in jail.

In regards to his fitness, Ross says in the same video, "You know everyone's, everyone is uh expecting to see results and stuff and all that stuff and they want to see what's going on and I'm putting in work every day. All you know I'm in the gym and I'm working on my mind and everything, so I'm letting you all know I'm locked in." (*I'm Going to Visit Andrew Tate in Jail - YouTube*) He posted his first video relating to the gym titled, "My First Gym Vlog," also in January, 2023. Ross's comment on still being focused on going to the gym, that his lifestyle changes because of Tate have him "locked in" show the influence Tate has, not just on Ross but many young men who are implementing Tate's messaging about bettering one's life. "...Andrew Tate is still getting his views across to impressionable young minds through his devotee Adin

Ross...” (“Andrew Tate Still Reaching Young Audiences Through Devotee Adin Ross: Report.”)

Multiple news sources have described this change in Ross, noting how he went from a high school Twitch streamer to now Tate supporter. This shift was not over the course of years, however, it has been a very recent and dramatic shift, since Ross met Tate in the summer of 2022. (Pagones) This recent shift entails Ross’s content changing from streaming himself playing video games to deliberating about perspectives of the Western far-right, discussing how there are “only two genders,” to “ranting about cancel culture, and even giving airtime to an anonymous neo-Nazi, even though he himself is Jewish.” (Pagones) Ross started out streaming on the side Twitch, and was then banned from early in 2023 as a result of his far-right content, and “showing unmoderated hateful conduct in his chat.” (Pagones) Ross has now started streaming on the site Kick, which is known for being “less aggressive” at restraining messages and content. “...with Ross’ platform change, came an influx of hate-filled comments from users onto his videos.” (Pagones) In January, 2023 Ross even posted a video titled, “Adin Ross Acting Like Andrew Tate for 23 Minutes 57 Seconds,” which is the duration of the video. (*Adin Ross Acting Like Andrew Tate For 23 Minutes 57 Seconds - YouTube.*) In the video, Ross compiled a screen recording he made of himself streaming on the platform Twitch. While streaming there is a chat room where viewers, and Ross can send typed messages back and forth simultaneously while Ross is live. In this video where he acts like Tate, Ross talks about his experience starting to go to the gym, changing his diet to eat more nutritious foods. He preaches in a similar way to Tate, talking about the importance of pushing yourself to be better everyday, he mentions his recent take to celibacy and says he is done making content about meeting with girls from Only Fans, an online subscription service used mostly by pornographers. (*Adin Ross Acting Like Andrew Tate*

For 23 Minutes 57 Seconds - YouTube.) (*Google - Only Fans*) Ross talks about respecting his mother and sister and mentions the importance of traditional family values, all topics that were not previously a part of his content.

Tate is a specific example of a men's rights influencer that harnesses the parasocial relationship for his large number of followers. It is a typical dynamic between influencer and followers on the internet, however Tate appeals to a specific area of men's rights for a group of men who want to base their masculinity in luxury items and cars, earning a lot of money, working out, and other characteristics which Tate supports. Some of his content masquerades as supporting traditional masculinity, however he promotes his misogynistic views about harnessing male dominance and power over women. However, Tate appeals to his large audience and the internet allows him to grow his following and continue making harmful content.

Ross and Tate's dynamic is specific to them both being influencers online, however it is unique and important for this project as Ross is being influenced by Tate and also influencing his followers with Tate's content and messaging. Also, not all of Tate's followers have a social media following themselves, like Ross, or the means of meeting Tate in person and spending large sums of money on travel, jail visits, and much more. As stated before, Ross is a means by which younger generations can access Tate content and ideologies. As Ross makes his own content that relates to Tate's content or is directly about Tate, his followers create a parasocial relationship with Ross. The internet fosters this chain of influence and parasocial relationships, and this is a unique aspect of the internet and media online. Tate's influence, and his influence through Ross is especially important to consider because of the younger generations of boys and men both of them influence. They are both validating and harnessing misogynistic ideals about

men and their power over women while masking this content with support for traditional gender dynamics.

Conclusion

This project could only touch the surface of the parasocial relationship, its place online with influencers and followers, and its relevance to men's rights activists online, specifically Andrew Tate. Despite touching the surface, it connects multiple facets of men's rights activism online, an area of study that has only begun to be studied within the last decade, and this project contributes to these multiple discussions around online community building, men's rights content and discourse online and the arising movement. The process of narrowing down my interests with the wide topic of antifeminist discourse on the internet was no easy feat, and in terms of a year-long project there really is not too much detail one can go into. In the fall I was mainly researching traditional masculinity and femininity in the context of the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century, and looking at the shifting of the sex binary, keeping in mind how the emergence of the internet contributes to perpetrating violence against women. I gathered historical, as well as psychological context for general white, male, heterosexual frameworks of thinking around male power dynamics and feeling a loss of ability and rights. There are many more details, and much more to discover with everything I have brought up with this project, and there are many more facets to explore with men's rights online, as well as communication enhancement and community building on the internet.

With Oprah's influence being compared to a modern religion, this provides an example of how humans are likely to follow someone with influence that they share commonalities with and also agree with, the introduction of the internet has only slightly altered this practice. The parasocial relationship is only one aspect of online community building, yet it answers a key

question for this project, which is what brings people together in community on the internet? The one-sided dynamic, where people can find men's rights content, for example Andrew Tate's and if they resonate with it, or otherwise like it and are entertained they can continue following and interacting with his content without anyone else knowing. Having a social media account or an account on a platform does not require putting forth one's identity. There are plenty of users that do not mask their identity, but either works for online community gathering because users find like minded individuals that they would otherwise have difficulty finding community within the physical world. Radical, far-right beliefs were more censored on previous media, also in in-person interactions, people who have harmful, hateful beliefs cannot be as open in the physical world. The parasocial relationship and its role in creating community online applies to men's rights, as it is a large community on the internet.

The parasocial relationship also answers another question for this project, how has men's rights been enhanced by the internet? I attempt to answer this with descriptions of media formats, long and short-form content, as well as the ability to share content across platforms. Similar to the earlier description of how the internet allows for people to find many more topics of interest than were previously put on media like television, the accessibility of men's rights content in different formats, available at any time of day are only some of the enhancements that has allowed for the gathering and growing number of men's rights activists. There are multiple points emphasized and supported in this project. The first point looking at is how the parasocial relationship is an important element in the dynamics of online communication and following a creator. Because of the accessibility of content on the internet and the prominence of content, as well as shared interests that bring people to certain creators, the parasocial relationship is

uniquely altered and enhanced by taking form online and helping generate large followings for influencers.

Those who are curious as to, why men's rights? Why focus on them? When I discovered that this project was moving away from studying the men's rights movement and was instead moving towards online community building and the parasocial relationship, I realized the connection which is men's rights groups online are affected by the parasocial relationship. It was exhausting and upsetting to learn so much about men's rights and submerge myself in this for the past year. However, I did answer to my interests in antifeminism and internet communication. I am lucky I found a niche interest that overlaps the two areas of men's rights online and community building and enhancement on the internet for this project. I think it is incredibly important, in terms of supporting feminism and anti-sexism and misogyny, to look into and try and understand these hateful groups. As humans have shifted into a technologically-advanced, internet reliant society, it is also important to learn about the internet, its effects, how humans use it, why it appeals to many people, its advantages and disadvantages. In terms of Andrew Tate's influence, it is important to look into his presence online because of his following being largely younger men, even boys. He has immense influence on their behavior and actions, to the point where British schools are trying to combat the negative effects boys are displaying there.

The internet remains a mainly unregulated place. However much freedom people get online, even marginalized groups that are also more able to express their ideas and beliefs, and spread them, much more understanding of the internet has to take place in order to be able to properly regulate it, not censor, but help make it a more safe space. This project does not aim to answer how to make the internet a safer space, what allows for people with non harmful beliefs

to gather and communicate on the internet is also what allows hateful, far-right communities to communicate and gather as well. This is where cultural change must take place. The patriarchy limits both sexes and keeps the sex binary as an important structure for Western society, but there are ways to instill and educate people to not accept harmful beliefs about expectations of the sexes and perceived power structures. Only then will harmful beliefs like men's rights not survive and further dissipate from societal frameworks.

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