Self-help in the Manosphere: A Case Study of the Male Self-Improvement Podcast, *Good Bro Bad Bro*

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Abstract

The Manosphere is a heterogeneous collection of male antifeminist and misogynistic communities, across online sites and platforms. Its communities focus, variously, on men's legal and discursive rights, navigation of the "sexual marketplace", and a perceived estrangement from women and society. These perspectives are loosely unified by an adherence to the Red Pill philosophy, which alleges that men can be "awakened" to the "truth" of their subordination by women. Certain Manosphere communities endorse self-improvement as a means for assisting individual men to advance their status and success in the sexual marketplace. In this milieu, the podcast *Good Bro Bad Bro* (GBBB) is a niche, male self-improvement podcast which uses the Red Pill analogy. It claims to help men to improve themselves, without hating women.

This thesis considers the masculinist and neoliberal discourses of GBBB, in relation to the Manosphere and broader self-help genre. It employs critical feminist discourse analysis and keyword analysis to analyse seven episodes of GBBB. The patterns of language identified are set against the context of hegemonic patriarchy, neoliberalism, and the Manosphere. To inform this analysis, the thesis historically situates the Manosphere against the twentieth century's women's movement. From here, the de-radicalisation of the women's movement, antifeminist backlash, the spread of a therapeutic climate and the emergence of neoliberal self-help in Western societies are considered. In relation to GBBB, this research finds that the podcast and its host, Jack Denmo, reproduce a neoliberal *doxa* which overlaps with masculinist biological essentialism and sexism. In all, this objectifies, commodifies, and fetishises humans and heterosexual relationships, such that individuals are positioned as isolated, competitive units in a sexual marketplace driven by economic transactions and biological whims. These findings affirm that neoliberalism and masculinism are intertwined within male self-help discourses.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed   Date   30/11/2023

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In early March 2022, a snippet of a male podcast host enquiring whether women "actually" had hobbies went viral on the video-based social media platform TikTok. It was delivered as an offhanded, innocuous comment, but in an era of online feminist discourse, it did not go uncontested. Many women online parodied the statement, while others spoke seriously to the devaluation of women's interests. That same podcast host also claimed that women had an easier time at the gym than men because men, unlike women, had to resist the force of gravity in their training. This claim was also scrutinised. Thus, the men's self-improvement podcast *Good Bro Bad Bro* (GBBB) prompted a short-lived controversy about women being casually undermined. This occurred during the meteoric rise of the self-proclaimed misogynist Andrew Tate, who had been offering men his own advice about improving their success with women, finance, fitness, and life. He was associated with the Manosphere, a loose connection of men's online communities and groups concerned with male issues, typically from antifeminist and misogynistic standpoints.

The Manosphere has received much academic and media attention in recent years because of its vitriol towards women and the real-world violence associated with one of its communities. It embodies a networked and hostile reaction against feminism and women's political, economic, and social progress during a time when feminism is internationally pervasive and popular (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Feminism is popular in multiple senses: it is broadly liked or admired; its practices and discourses manifest in popular and commercial media; and it expresses a struggle for power and meaning (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Multiple feminisms circulate, connect, and compete for visibility, although feminisms aligned with celebrity promotion and corporate objectives receive more attention than those interested in dismantling the patriarchal gender structure (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

Despite the presence of feminism, and as the Manosphere illustrates, expressions of popular feminism are often accompanied by the hostile response of "popular misogyny" (Banet-Weiser, 2018). This dynamic is not new – the historian Susan Faludi (1992) coined the term "backlash"[1] to describe widespread antagonism towards feminism in the late twentieth century. However, popular feminism and popular misogyny are distinctive because of their digital and networked nature, and their incorporation of the neoliberal precepts of individual capability for economic advancement, work success, and confidence (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Neoliberalism is a structuring force behind popular feminism and popular misogyny, producing both ideology and violence (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Expressions of popular misogyny must be challenged, lest they be dismissed as an expression of digital culture or as "boys being boys" (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

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[1] Backlash is distinct from general resistance against feminism and women's political and social progress; it describes a hostility towards feminism couched in liberal and feminist terms (Faludi, 1992).

It is against this background of popular feminism, popular misogyny, and unfettered neoliberalism that the podcast *GBBB* emerges to help men improve their confidence, lifestyle, status, and success with women. The podcast prompted my interest for several reasons. For one, it received criticism alongside a smattering of Manosphere-associated male self-improvement podcasters[2], indicating it was part of a broader phenomenon of sexist or misogynistic male podcasting. Second, its viral claims alluded to the grievances of male hardship and female ease which scholars have identified as part of the Manosphere. Though the podcast did not locate itself within the Manosphere, episode titles indicated familiarity with its communities. I wanted to assess its relation to the latter. Third and last, the premise that men's dissatisfactions could be redressed through self-improvement endorsed neoliberal ideology about an individual's capacity for success and self-responsibility. I wanted to explore how the podcast advanced or challenged neoliberal discourse.

Thus, this thesis explores the interaction between masculinist discourse and neoliberal discourse in a male self-improvement podcast which references the Manosphere. I use the praxis of critical feminist discourse analysis to analyse seven episodes of *GBBB*. These episodes focus on "how" particular configurations of contemporary dating have emerged, their impact on men, and "how" men can address these alleged scenarios. Literature on the Manosphere identifies its origins in the men's liberation and men's rights movements which responded to feminism in the late twentieth century (Ribeiro et al., 2021), but lacks a detailed account of this connection. The secondary purpose of this thesis is to offer a historical account of mid-to late-twentieth century feminism, the consequent men's liberation and men's rights movements, and the Manosphere. The popular communities, figures, ideologies and discourses of the Manosphere complex are outlined to discuss how *GBBB* recalls, supports, or subverts them. To this end, this thesis relies on Lilly's (2016) taxonomy of the core Manosphere communities: Men's Rights Activists (MRA), Pick-up Artists, Involuntary Celibates (Incels), and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW).

I take a critical stance against self-help, arguing that the genre disingenuously positions systemic, institutional problems as individual ones (Rimke, 2000). I follow Susan Faludi's (1992) argument that neoliberalism and feminism induced a real and perceived "crisis" in men and masculinity. The former intensified men's social and economic precarity, while the latter was attributed blame. Thus, I problematise male self-help which individualises institutional issues, diffuses political activism, misidentifies the cause of male discontents, and advances an essentialist approach to gender. The concepts of ideology, power, and discourse, and their relation to the structures of gender, patriarchy, and capitalism, are elaborated on in the following pages.

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[2] Andrew Tate, and Walter Weekes and Myron Gaines from the podcast *Fresh & Fit*.

Ideology and Power in Relation to Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Neoliberalism

The term "ideology" emerged during the Enlightenment to refer to a secular "rational" science which studied ideas, knowledge, and how ideas were a social phenomenon (Eagleton, 1994). Over time, it shifted from meaning the science of reason to meaning a *coherent and relatively stable set of ideas and values*" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 8, emphasis in original). These ideas and values were from "the partisan perspective of a social group or class, which then mistakes itself as universal and eternal" (Eagleton, 1994, p. 3). Theoretical disciplines addressed this concept variously. Of particular importance to Critical Discourse Studies is the Marxist interpretation.

The Marxist tradition explored how ideas made material conditions appear universal, natural, and fixed. Ideas thus had "an active political force, rather than being grasped as mere reflections of their world" (Eagleton, 1994, p. 6). This idea was articulated in Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels' *The German Ideology* published in 1932, which also argued that consciousness held a practical use in distracting people from class oppression and exploitation. That is, the ruling class had to represent its ideas and interests as universally rational and valid to sustain its rule. Ideas were ideological if they were deceitful and functioned to conceal or naturalise notions of the ruling class (Eagleton, 1994). This definition had its tensions. For one, the term also described ideas oppositional to the dominant class[3] (Eagleton, 1994). For another, deeming ideologies illusory implied that they were also untrue, but in certain cases the "ideological" could be true[4] (Eagleton, 1994). Despite these tensions, the concept remains useful to represent the "points at which our cultural practices are interwoven with power" (Eagleton, 1994, p. 10). Gender is one such practice.

In *Masculinities* (1995), the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell proposes that gender is a structure through which social practice is arranged around the reproductive arena. The reproductive arena refers to sexual differences and similarities, sexual arousal and relations, birth and infant care. Notably, Connell (1995) avoids calling this a biological arena because she is not discussing biological determinants but the social process through which bodies are defined in relation to reproduction. In other words, "gender is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not a social practice reduced to the body" (Connell, 1995, p. 71). Power relations in gender authorised an overall dominance of men and the subordination of women, a structure known as patriarchy (Connell, 1995). The French historian Ivan Jablonka[5] (2023) traces the origins of patriarchy to the Upper Neolithic period. During this period, the development of agriculture, domestication of livestock, and

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[3] For example, "feminist ideology".
[4] For example, the feminist ideology that dismantling patriarchy will benefit men (Eagleton, 1994).
[5] Jablonka lacks a sustained consideration of labour relations under capitalism. He also overstates the protection that patriarchy offers some women, women's contemporary access to all professions, and the seriousness with which sexual assault against women is believed. His text is useful for a historical account of patriarchy, not its analysis.

animal husbandry enabled humans to transition from a nomadic lifestyle dependent on hunting and gathering and into settled societies. Men monopolised the building of habitation, the clearing of land for food production; women gathered wood, berries, mushrooms, made clothes and food, and watched the children (Jablonka, 2023). The rise in birth rates which accompanied less nomadism and raised food production also meant women spent more time pregnant and caring for children[6] (Jablonka, 2023). The sexual division of labour was not patriarchal in itself. Rather, male domination consolidated through: men's monopolisation of land; the development of weapons intended to kill other humans, and warfare becoming a masculine prerogative; the establishment of empires; and, the introduction of monotheism in which God was a man (Jablonka, 2023). Under patriarchal social relations, women's bodies are assigned a utilitarian function for male sexual pleasure, reproduction, and the caring of children (Jablonka, 2023). In contemporary societies, patriarchy is sustained through the discursive forces of sexism, structural forces of misogyny, and the capitalist economic system.

Kate Manne (2017) defines sexism as the naturalisation of differences between the sexes which justifies patriarchal relations. Sexist ideology encompasses the assumptions, beliefs, stereotypes, theories, and cultural narratives which express sex differences. If assumed true, they would make individuals likelier to support patriarchal arrangements (Manne, 2017). Sexist ideology often valorises such arrangements, obscuring its associated anxieties and discontents. In contrast to sexism, misogyny is a hostile, threatening, and disciplinary mechanism which coerces women to comply with patriarchal norms[7] (Manne, 2017). It is a *systematic* social phenomenon, which "*polices* and *enforces* its governing norms and expectations" (Manne, 2017, p. 20, emphasis in original). Where sexism discriminates between men and women, misogyny differentiates "between good women and bad ones, and punishes the latter" (Manne, 2017, p. 79). Where sexist discourse claims to be "scientific" and reasonable, and appeals to individuals' beliefs, values, and so on, misogyny is moralistic and vitriolic. Sexist ideology may attempt to facilitate misogynistic ends. This occurs when "some sexist justification is, in practice, used in an attempt to coerce behaviour and displays an air of hostility" (Richardson-self, 2018, p. 261). In this case, sexism becomes misogynistic. However, the achievement of misogynistic ends also depends on whether sexism constitutes hostility towards women, and whether women encounter it as a barrier. Indeed, a sexist artifact may "just be seen as ludicrously pseudo-scientific and kitsch-seeming nonsense" (Manne, 2017, p. 80). Manne's (2017) delineation between misogyny as the hostile, punitive, and policing function of patriarchy, and sexism as the attempt to rationalise patriarchy, is useful in analysing convoluted and ambiguous ideology.

Another perspective on sexism is offered by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske (1997), for whom

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[6] Jablonka implies that women were at the complete whim of reproductive forces, but women's experiential knowledge likely enabled some degree of influence over their bodies. For instance, women in hunter-gatherer societies are thought to have prolonged lactation to reduce ovulation to increase the time between pregnancies (Mies, 1986).
[7] Patriarchal norms and their enforcement mechanisms depend on the different social positions of girls and women across different contexts.

sexism is both hostile and benevolent, resulting in a theory of sexism as ambivalence towards women. For Glick and Fiske (1997), hostile sexism encompasses attitudes which reinforce men's dominative paternalism towards women, the denigration of women, and a heterosexual hostility which considers women as sexual objects, or fears that women gain power over men through their sexual attractiveness. In contrast, benevolent sexism is subjectively positive for its speaker, and proffers "kinder" justifications of patriarchal social arrangements. This includes protective paternalism, the notion that women's lesser power, authority and physical strength necessitate their needing male protection and provision. In addition, there may be benevolence towards women whose traits align with their traditional gender roles as wives and mothers. Such women are conferred with "favourable" qualities, such as purity, and considered to complement "male" characteristics, such as competitiveness (Glick and Fiske, 1997). Further, there occurs a romanticisation of women as sexual objects, in which "a female romantic partner [is] necessary for a man to be 'complete'" (Glick and Fiske, 1997, p. 122). Their account is useful for its identification of the dominating and protective paternalism, heterosexual hostility and idealisation, and gender differentiation, which rationalise patriarchal social relations.

Patriarchy is engaged in a dialectical, symbiotic relationship with capitalism (Eisenstein, 1979). The capitalist economic system is oriented towards private accumulation and profit maximisation. It is predicated on, and begets, economic and social inequalities (Watson, 2004). For example, women's unpaid domestic labour contributes to the reproduction of the labour force, but women are not compensated for their activities because patriarchal ideology claims they are naturally inclined to this labour (Comanne, 2020). For another, capitalism justifies the underpayment of women by invoking patriarchal discourses about women's lesser productivity than men, their weakness, absenteeism from work due to menstruation, pregnancies, maternity leave, and caring for relatives and children[8] (Comanne, 2020). Lastly, capitalism lessens state and institutions' responsibilities for the provision of social welfare, instead making families increasingly responsible for their care, which first impacts women, as the primary caregivers (Comanne, 2020). This last dynamic worsened upon the introduction of neoliberal capitalism.

In a struggle against the autocratic rule deepened by capitalism, liberalism developed to emphasise principles and values about individual rights, freedom, autonomy, and justice, as well as the role of a state in securing certain social and political outcomes from a view of universal humanism (Watson, 2004). It culminated in a class structured democracy which sustained the political and economic dominance of the state in society and capital in the economy (Watson, 2004). Though liberalism committed to individual autonomy and universal humanism, these were not realised through capitalism. Instead, liberal capitalism often rationalised and justified social inequalities by

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[8] Worldwide, women earn 77 cents per dollar earned by men (United Nations, n.d.).

framing them as a natural result of alleged human self-centeredness[9] (Watson, 2004). Neoliberal capitalism, a form of political and economic management which emerged in the 1970s, proposes that human interests and well-being are best-served by "liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutionalised framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2007, p. 2). It orients all political and social life to the domain of the market, creating new markets if required (e.g., healthcare and education) (Harvey, 2007; Schwarzmantel, 2005). Neoliberals believe the state should create and support the institutional framework required to strengthen markets, but should not intervene in their functioning (Harvey, 2007; Schwarzmantel, 2005). In effect, neoliberalism has consolidated economic power in the hands of a small elite[10] (Harvey, 2007). It has obscured its class project through ideological precepts about individual freedoms and the individual as an isolated, self-interested being.

Individual freedom, the ability to make decisions for oneself, is a value, political ideal, and often considered a prescriptive right. Neoliberalism proposes that "individual freedoms are guaranteed by the freedom of the market and of trade" (Harvey, 2007, p. 7). This positions government regulation as a source of unfreedoms, an outlook which discourages state regulation and facilitates grievous freedoms such as the freedom to exploit other individuals, to gain inordinate personal wealth without any measurable contribution to the community, and to privately benefit from public calamities (Polyani, 1944 as cited in Harvey, 2007). Free market economies also produce positive freedoms, such as the freedoms of association, speech, and choice around one's job (Polyani, 1944 as cited in Harvey, 2007). However, positive freedoms are conferred disproportionately to "those whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing, leaving a pittance for the rest" (Harvey, 2007, p. 38). Freedom of consumer choice is another precept of neoliberalism. It describes not only personal liberty in the consumption of products, but also "lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices" (Harvey, 2007, p. 42). It manifests in differentiated consumerism and an encouragement of a narcissistic exploration of the self and individual identity (Harvey, 2007).

In relation to the self, Jim McGuigan (2014) argues that an ideal neoliberal self has emerged in developed and developing capitalist societies. It lauds entrepreneurship, consumer choice, consumer influence over the production of goods, and believes that consumers are the best judge of their welfare. In addition, the neoliberal self is sceptical towards redistributive justice, and postures a "cool", disaffected nature in response to the uncertain circumstances facilitated by neoliberalism (McGuigan, 2014). As McGuigan writes, the ideal neoliberal self is a "competitive individual who is exceptionally self-reliant and rather indifferent to the fact that his or her predicament is shared with others […]" (2014, p. 236). They are resourceful under "social-Darwinian conditions" (McGuigan, 2014, p. 236). Of course, McGuigan's ideal self is not a categorical figure. However, his descriptive

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[9] Capitalist nations have created inequalities in order to advance capital accumulation. For example, racialising European and North American colonies to justify their exploitation of human labour and material resources.
[10] Ten percent of the global population now own 76 percent of the world's wealth, whereas the poorest 50 percent own two percent (World Inequality Report, 2022).

account of the individual characteristics that neoliberal ideology, language, and media construct as ideal are useful for analytical purposes. His analysis could benefit from a consideration of how the "ideal" differs between differently gendered, raced, and classed individuals. For example, Catherine Rottenberg describes that the new ideal for a feminist woman under neoliberal feminism[11] is one who accepts complete responsibility for her self-care and wellbeing. This involves finding the happiest balance between family life and work, with *balance* becoming a feminist value (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). Nonetheless, McGuigan's account is useful for its identification of the core neoliberal ethos: individualism, self-reliance, self-responsibility, competitiveness, and an affected "cool".

Neoliberalism has "become hegemonic as a mode of discourse" (Harvey, 2007, p. 3). It has become common-sense, and this has profound effects on how individuals interpret, understand, and live in the world (Harvey, 2007). Neoliberalism obscures the overall system of capitalism and its consolidation of wealth, such that individuals become atomic, isolated beings, responsible for their own selves. In relation to gender, neoliberal capitalism oppresses classes of people and sustains patriarchal relations to maximise capitalist accumulation. Consequently, and as Raewyn Connell (1995) describes it, men accrue a patriarchal dividend from being allocated "unequal shares in the products of social labour" (p. 74). This inequality necessitates challenging masculinist and neoliberal discourse.

In relation to power, the concept has been variously conceptualised in the social sciences. A common description is that power is "the chance that an individual in a social relationship can achieve his or her will even against the resistance of others" (Weber 1980 as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 10). Thus, power constitutes the social world in largely invisible ways, but it also stems from an individual's resources or access to resources (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). It can be overt through triumph over others, or it can be covert and have an influence on decision making, beliefs, and desires (Luke, 2005, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2016). It is at the nexus between power, ideology, and discourse that Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) emerges.

History of Critical Discourse Analysis

The discipline of Discourse Analysis owes its roots to the Greek and Roman classical period, during which the study of language, public speech, and the persuasiveness of speech was developed (van Dijk, 1985). Called rhetoric, this discipline had resurgences in the Middle Ages and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it was eclipsed by linguistics and structural analysis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (van Dijk, 1985). The emergence of structural analysis in the mid-1960s prompted disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics, semiotics, and mass communication to turn to discourse (van Dijk, 1985). Important developments included the French journal *Communications* (4, 1964), in which Roland Barthes' published his analysis of images and an

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[11] Neoliberal feminism acknowledges that gender inequalities persist but simultaneously denies (or obscures) the social, economic, and cultural structures which shape women's lives.

introduction to semiotics (van Dijk, 1985). Efforts at studying language use, conversation, communicative events, and texts consolidated under the broad discipline of Discourse Analysis during the early 1970s (van Dijk, 1985). The discipline took theoretical and methodological cues from paradigm shifts in language analysis, such as: the problematisation of context-free approaches, the homogenisation of speech groups, and the notion of ideal speakers; the consideration of the representation of knowledge; and a burgeoning interest in the "every day" (van Dijk, 1985). Discourse analysts had varied disciplinary backgrounds, objects of research and methods, but all shared an interest in discourse, natural language use, analytic perspectives beyond isolated words and sentences, and a consideration of the non-verbal (Wodak, 2008).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the European discourse scholars Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak developed Critical Discourse Studies (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The discipline was distinct from Discourse Analysis because it focused on "the way discourse (re)produces social domination, that is mainly understood as power abuse over one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively resist such abuse" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 9). In this configuration, discourse described "patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures" (Wodak, 2008, p. 6) and was both a result of power and the technology of its maintenance (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The "critical" aspect of CDS referred to its attitude of considered dissent (van Dijk, 2013, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2016). This orientation was informed by the Frankfurt School of social theory which scrutinised modern social and economic systems and embodied Max Horkheimer's suggestion that critical theorists should critically engage with changing societies as opposed to understanding them. Thus, CDS was envisaged as a political project which investigated all manners of discourse because discourse was socially constitutive (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 1992; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Discourse as a Social Process

The study of discourse was in-part popularised by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose earlier works concerned the social formation of knowledge through discursive practices. The critical discourse scholar Norman Fairclough (1992) advanced at least two notions from Foucault's abstract conception of discourse. The first was that he viewed discourse to constitute "the objects of knowledge, social subjects, and forms of 'self', social relationships, and conceptual frameworks" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 39). The second was that he considered the interdependency of discourse in the past and present. He termed this the "intertextual" dimension of discourse (Fairclough, 1992; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Intertextual connections could be explicit, as in recalling another social actor or event, or covert, such as with allusions and evocation. In addition, there was interdiscursivity to consider, which is how discourses relate to one another in terms of their hybridity, and their subtopics (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).

Fairclough (1992) then provided a three-dimensional approach to discourse. The first concerned the systematic analysis of linguistic features, such as grammar, vocabulary, and structure. The second considered its creation, dissemination, consumption, intertextuality and interdiscursivity, or the "aspects that link a text to its context" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449). The third considered the ideological impact of discourse and the hegemonic processes that the discourse was implicated in. In the latter, Fairclough (1992) argued that hegemony shifts, and that these can be reflected in discursive changes: "the way in which discourse is being represented, respoken, or rewritten sheds light on the emergence of new orders of discourse, struggles over normativity, attempts at control, and resistance against regimes of power" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449).

Fairclough and CDS at large have been criticised as unscientific and vague. The linguist Henry Widdowson (1995), for instance, argued that CDS was undefined, ambiguous, unobjective, and conceptually confused. He also argued that critical discourse scholars tended to conflate theory with political commitment, which raised the question of the distinction between scholarly analysis and interpretation. For Widdowson (1995), interpretation was the decision to privilege a particular meaning whereas analysis was the act of unmasking the factors that led to multiple possible meanings, all of which were conditionally valid. Widdowson (1995) argued that analysts could privilege a particular meaning themselves, but that they at least acknowledged their partiality. Though Widdowson's (1995) critique is useful for its reminder that critical discourse research must be reflexive and clearly defined in its scope and theoretical outlook, his standpoint can be challenged. For one, no research is purely objective because knowledge is "socially and historically constructed and valuationally based" (Lazar, 2007, p. 146). For a second, critical discourse researchers *do* address their partiality in a process called critical reflexivity. For a third, it is true that CDS does not define a particular method of analysis; CDS researchers formulate critical goals and outline a method which yields reliable, relevant, and satisfactory answers (van Dijk, 2013, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Reflexivity

Michelle Lazar (2007) articulates a praxis which she positions as the nexus of CDS, and feminist scholarship concerned with the discursive dimension of gender and its social hierarchisation. Feminists tend to position gender as an ideological structure which places individuals into the reductive and binary classes of women and men. This ordains certain traits and the division of labour based upon the notion of sexual difference. Individuals may digress from this structure, but their deviation nonetheless occurs within an institutionalised privileging of men as a social class (Connell, 1995; Lazar, 2007). The ideological nature of gender is often obscured as gendered assumptions are communicated as common sense. The point of feminist CDS, then, is to explore how "gender ideology and gendered relations of power get (re)produced, negotiated, and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people's social and

personal identities in text and talk" (Lazar, 2007, p. 150). Feminist CDS also tends to be critical of postfeminism, which embodies neoliberal individualisation and focuses on consumers (Lazar, 2007).

The practice of critical reflexivity is a part of feminist CDS, and there are at least two dimensions of this. The first is institutional reflexivity, in which institutions address feminist concerns, and, for instance, attempt to increase women's institutional access and participation (Lazar, 2007). The second is personal reflexivity, through which the feminist researcher turns critically inwards towards their perspective and practice, to avoid perpetuating gender hierarchies and the neglect of certain groups of women (Lazar, 2007). This thesis follows Connell's (1995) definition of gender as a structure of social practice, which is distinct from biological sexual characteristics, and upheld by ideology and discourse. I also draw upon Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *doxa*. Though he avoids the term ideology, *doxa* similarly refers to a commonly held belief which is articulated as an unequivocal truth (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1991). It can, though, be conceptualised as an ideological construct, especially when it is being called into question (Plantin, 2021).

Though there are a plethora of gender and sexual identities beyond the binary of women and men, in referring to women and men this thesis refers to cisgender individuals, as this is the binary language of men's movements, the Manosphere, and the podcast being analysed. The research does not analyse the unique experience and marginalisation of individuals beyond this binary. In addition to acknowledging one's theoretical position, feminist critical reflexivity requires the researcher to consider their relation to the communities, groups, and practices under investigation. This is to problematize the process whereby "expertise flows from traditionally privileged groups at the centre to subaltern groups" (Lazar, 2007, p. 155). I take the position that although men can be, and are, marginalized along the lines of race, class, and so on, men as a social group do not comprise the subaltern. In relation to the data being analysed, *GBBB* is a publicly available podcast.

Chapter One: Women and Men's Rights

The roots of the Manosphere reside in the offline men's liberation movement which emerged consequent to the women's movement in the United States (Ribiero et al., 2021; Sugiura, 2021). The women's movement, also known as the "second wave" of feminism, occurred between the mid-1960s to around 1980 in the US. This was a period of intense feminist activity, characterised by the emergence and evolution of different feminisms, feminist theories, organisations, grassroots initiatives, and activism. This chapter overviews the women's movement in the United States and mentions its international dimension.

Early History of the Women's Movement

In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment enshrined the right of women to vote in the US. In 1923, the National Women's Party (NWP) proposed an additional constitutional amendment to retract all legal discrimination against women. Their Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) read: "Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction" (Davis, 1992, p. 29). The ERA embodied a legalist and individualistic approach which sought to treat men and women as equals under the law – a position which threatened organised labour because it implied the removal of the protective labour laws which accommodated, albeit insufficiently, women's roles as wives and mothers (Barzilay, 2016; Davis, 1992). The ERA was criticised as insensitive to the needs of working-class women who experienced the double burden of employment and motherhood (Barzilay, 2016). The ERA debate continued as women's groups turned their attention to labour rights (Davis, 1992).

Through the 1930s, women's groups such as the Social Feminists and Working-Class Feminists advocated the improvement of women's working conditions. The groups supported causes such as union representation, the state-provision of childcare, improved housing, and consumer rights (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002; Barzilay, 2016). Women's participation in the labour force increased in the early 1940s due to urbanisation, the growth in women's education, and attitudinal changes which enabled middle-class women to conduct waged work without diminishing their class status (Weiner, 1985). The Second World War also temporarily heightened women's labour participation, and as the wartime allegorical icon "Rosie the Riveter" encouraged women to substitute the labour of enlisted men, the NWP again campaigned for the ERA. The Women's Bureau's Labour Advisory Committee was formed, and it introduced two unsuccessful bills to Congress: an Equal Pay Act mandating equal wages for comparable labour in 1945, and a Women's Status Bill calling for a President-ordained investigation into women's social and economic statuses (Barzilay, 2016).

Labour Feminists saw women's equality impeded by the market and its organisation (Barzilay, 2016). Labour Feminists argued that state protection was essential for women in non-unionised, low-waged positions, and therefore called for the state regulation in the market, affirmative action measures, and the restructuring of care labour (Barzilay, 2016). Further, they opposed the NWP's preoccupation with the market individual and connected the struggle for women's rights to the struggle of other marginalised communities and causes, such as civil rights (Barzilay, 2016). Local politics and the civil rights movement became the foci of much feminist efforts in the 1950s, due to the post-war push towards conservatism and traditionalism.

In 1960, the narrow election of John F. Kennedy as the President of the United States represented an advance for feminism (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). He appointed Esther Peterson the Assistant Secretary of Labour and the Director of the Women's Bureau, and she revived the Women's Status Bill (Davis, 1992). The resultant Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) was formed in 1961 (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002; Davis, 1992). Concurrent to the PCSW beginning its investigation, the Equal Pay Act was re-introduced to Congress by Edith Green. A weakened version[12] was ratified in 1963 (Barzilay, 2016). That same year, the PCSW published its report documenting the discrimination faced by women. It found that women were paid significantly less than men, Black women more underpaid than white women, and that pay disparity had worsened since 1945 (Davis, 1992). The report made twenty-four recommendations, including that childcare services be made accessible across all income levels and that marriage be appraised as an equal partnership, neither of which were implemented (Davis, 1992).

On the question of the ERA, the PCSW dismissed its validity by citing that equality was already discursively enshrined in the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments (Brauer, 1983). In retaliation, the NWP began a campaign to have sex discrimination included in the forthcoming Civil Rights Act [13] (Barzilay, 2016; Brauer, 1983). Despite protestations that white women were not its intended beneficiaries and that the addition would overburden the Bill, sex discrimination in employment was prohibited through Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was formed to enforce Title VII – but having perceived the prohibition of sex discrimination as a joke, it did not adequately address the four thousand claims lodged between 1965 and 1967 (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002).

Though the PCSW recommendations, ERA, and Title VII failed to be implemented, this

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[12] The original Act stipulated equal pay between women and men for "work of comparable character" because jobs were highly segregated by sex. ERA proponent Katherine St. George succeeded in replacing "comparable" work with "equal work" because she believed women's equal treatment predicated equality (Barzilay, 2016; Baxandall & Gordon, 2002).

[13] The Civil Rights Act sought to end discrimination based on race, colour, and national origin. It did not contain a clause for sex-based discrimination, despite Black women being long-exploited in the labour force. The NWP paired with Southern conservative and segregationist Howard W. Smith to introduce sex discrimination into the bill *not* because of its failure to redress Black women's specific marginalisation, but because the absence of sex allegedly discriminated against white, Christian women (see Angela Davis' *Women, Race, and Class* (1981)).

activity in the legal sphere[14] led to important developments. The Women's Commission built a network of women's organisations and prompted state-specific women's commissions (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). Enough women testified to Congress about their experiences in the workforce to make the term "sex discrimination" a part of the political and social vernacular (Barzilay, 2016). The inaction of the EEOC prompted the formation of the National Women's Organisation (NOW), which marked the beginning of the women's movement (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002; Brauer, 1983).

Expansion of the Women's Movement

Formed in 1966, NOW was based on the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People and involved significant leadership from working-class individuals and from people of colour (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). Its founders included labour union activists Dorothy Haener and Addie Wyatt, the lawyer and minister Pauli Murray, and union activist and author Betty Friedan (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). The organisation committed itself to the "new movement toward true equality for all women in America" (NOW, n.d. b). Its statement of purpose declared:

> We organise to support action, nationally, or in any part of this nation, by individuals or organisations, to break through the silken curtain of prejudice and discrimination against women in government, industry, the professions, the churches, the political parties, the judiciary, the labour unions, in education, science, medicine, law, religion, and every other field of importance in American society. (NOW, n.d.b, para 5)

The mission statement appealed to classical liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism and self-determination (Bevacqua, 2011). The first aim of NOW was to prompt the EEOC to enforce Title VII and to ban sex-segregated job advertisements (Baxandall & Gordon, 2022; NOW, n.d.a).

In 1967, NOW added the passage of the ERA, abortion law repeal, and publicly funded childcare to its list of aims. Its decision to support the ERA was interpreted by Barakso (2004) as an attempt to avoid incremental political strategies. Equality would be enacted through legislative changes to the existing political structure (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002; Wolff, 2007). Despite its ethos and original leadership, NOW was composed primarily of middle-class white women whose positions on issues did not always factor the experiences of non-white women (Beck, 2021). For instance, in their campaign to segment abortion as a reproductive right, NOW did not acknowledge the long history of medical experimentation and forced pregnancies experienced by Black women during slavery, nor the coerced or forced sterilisation of Black and Puerto Rican women during the 1970s (Davis, 1992; Wolff, 2007). Its inattention to the matters of race and class alienated certain groups of women (Davis, 1981). This narrow view was not unique to NOW, nor to liberal feminism, it was also evident more generally in the women's liberation facet of the movement.

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[14] Beyond the legal sphere, the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) had brought the widespread dissatisfaction of middle-class housewives into public consciousness.

In the 1960s, social and cultural movements of young people informed by social democratic ideals and the civil rights movement had become collectively known as the "Movement" (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). It quintessentially opposed hierarchical authorities, conventional wisdom, and conformity. It also disdained liberalism on account of its observed timidity towards Black civil rights, tacit support for the Vietnam War, and its co-option and suppression of dissent (Echols, 2019). Despite being against hierarchy and convention, men remained the Movement's most powerful and visible figures. Women record-kept, produced leaflets, organised social events, telephoned, cooked, and cleaned; men wrote manifestos, made public speeches, and negotiated with figures of authority (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). In 1967, clusters of radical women from the Movement began to organise women-only groups dedicated to both personal and institutional liberation (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002; Echols, 2019).

This liberation facet of the women's movement sought "not just to redistribute wealth and power in existing society, but to challenge the private as well as the public, the psychological as well as the economic, the cultural as well as the legal sources of male dominance" (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002, p. 417). It had two strands of thought: firstly, Politicos who viewed capitalism as the source of women's oppression and wanted women's groups to join the left against capitalism and imperialism; and secondly, radical feminists viewing capitalism and male supremacy as the causes of women's oppression who wanted an independent women's liberation group (Echols, 2019).

Radical feminism owed much of its ideological basis, language, and strategic orientation to leftism, and specifically to its idea that the structures of power permeated personal life (Echols, 2019; Rosenthal, 1984). The influential phrase "the personal is political" was written by the radical feminist Carol Hanisch (1969) to describe how the intimate problems of daily life were in fact political ones. Radical feminists developed her words to argue that women comprised a sex-class whose relations with men had to be re-articulated in political terms:

> Who cooks the meals, does the dishes, changes the diapers, and makes the bed, and whose orgasms matter most, is not wholly personal or "simply the way things are," […] but instead indissolubly connected to structures of inequality. (Willis, 2019, p. ix)

Radical feminists censured patriarchal heterosexuality and family structures, violence against women, and the male-oriented nature of medical practice. They established alternative, counter-institutions to address women's unmet institutional needs, such as: community courses on topics such as childbirth, karate, Marxism, and mechanics; domestic violence shelters and hotlines; and abortion referral services (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002; Echols, 2019). However, the primary contribution of radical feminism was the mechanism of consciousness raising (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002).

Developed by the radical feminist group the Redstockings, consciousness raising featured structured discussions in which women shared and dissected their individual experiences against

larger structures of oppression[15]. In doing so, they communicated that their problems were not the result of personal failings but of the patriarchal social order (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002; Echols, 2019; Hanisch, 1969, Rosenthal, 1984). Following the Marxist belief that class consciousness could culminate in revolution, radical women's consciousness raising aimed to inspire "self-sustaining revolutionary activity" (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002, p. 310). The mechanism was first introduced at the National Women's Liberation Conference in 1968, where the New Left denounced it as a "T-Group" capable of inspiring personal change but not political action (Rosenthal, 1984). Radical feminists responded that the personal could not be separated from the political, and that personal consciousness was a precondition for revolution (Rosenthal, 1984). The New Left would prove correct; after a period of heightened public interest in the broader women's movement in 1970, consciousness raising was co-opted by the emergent men's liberation movement.

In August 1970, an estimated fifty-thousand people participated in the NOW-organised National Women's Strike for Equality (Doherty, 2020). It commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the suffrage amendment and organisers encouraged women to disregard their domestic duties for the day. The largest women's rights demonstrations in the US since the suffrage protests, it was considered remarkable for the diversity of its participants. The *New York Times* reported:

> Every kind of woman you ever see in New York was there: limping octogenarians, bra less teenagers, Black Panther women, telephone operators, waitresses, Westchester matrons, fashion models, Puerto Rican factory workers, nurses in uniform. [Y]oung mothers carrying babies on their backs.

The march legitimised the women's movement and elevated its status. Media coverage of the movement proliferated, liberal feminists began to appear on television, and independent feminist publications emerged (Rosenthal, 1984). The topic of sexism became mainstream, and more women sought to join women's groups (Kravetz, 1978; Rosenthal, 1984). Following years, 1975 to 1985, were declared by the United Nations as the "Decade for Women".

The Decade for Women energised women's activism outside of the US and made feminism a global phenomenon (Antrobus, 2004). To be clear, international feminism, though not called such, had long occurred in the form of indigenous and regional efforts within national struggles against imperialism, for citizenship and rights (Basu, 2000). Take, for instance, the women's protest in the eastern provinces of British-colonised Nigeria which occurred between November 1929 to January 1930 (Obienusi, 2019). The anticolonial movement and the retreat of imperial rule from colonised nations during the mid-twentieth century further facilitated discussions around social advancement, including the redress of gendered oppression (Agnihotri & Mazumdar, 1995). But the UN Decade of Women and subsequent international women's conferences advanced transnational feminist organisation and thus provided a historical marker for the global expansion of feminist activism, theory, and practice (Antrobus, 2004). This "first" phase of transnational feminism, however, was

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[15] The roots of consciousness raising have been linked to the rapport and support sessions of the Black Power movement, and to the "speaking bitterness" sessions conducted for serfs liberated from feudalism during the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China.

marked by fierce contestations about the meaning and significance of feminism (Basu, 2000), mirrored in the splintering of the US women's movement.

Splintering and Decline of the Women's Movement

Following the Women's Strike for Equality, entrants into the women's movement tended to interact with NOW. It had a national presence which radical feminist organisations did not, and the media filtered the more radical feminist ideas out of their coverage (Rosenthal, 1984). Meanwhile, radical feminism revealed its own internal fissures, in particular, its avoidance of the question of women's differences (Echols, 2019).

Radical feminists tended to presume that all women were unified through their shared gender identity and perpetuated an erroneous universal sisterhood which elided oppression related to race, class, and sexual identities (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002; Breines, 2002; Willis, 2019). Breines (2002) accredited this mindset to their liberal egalitarianism and Marxist class analysis, both of which asserted likeness and equality as critical to unity. This position led to generalised theories of oppression which distanced women who were not white, heterosexual, or middle-class. For example, the radical feminist antagonism towards the family unit alienated women of colour for whom the family traditionally offered shelter from racism (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). The censures of radical feminism as racist, classicist, and heterosexist proved immobilising when paired with its structural disorganisation[16] (Echols, 2019). In addition to this splintering, the radical feminist mechanism of consciousness raising was depoliticised through the media, the expansion of a therapeutic climate, and by its co-option by liberal feminist organisations as a re-evaluative process rather than a revolutionary one (Rosenthal, 1984).

The splintering of radical feminism occurred within a broader fragmentation of feminism. Activists began to consolidate around single-issue causes while NOW focused on the ratification of the ERA, to the extent of deprioritising issues such as women's poverty (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). Feminist theorists, meanwhile, disagreed about women's sexuality, female desire, the nature of consent under patriarchy, and heterosexuality as a domain of both pleasure and danger for women (Echols, 2019). The emergence of anti-porn feminists[17] further fragmented feminism along the lines of ideology, race, class, and sexuality (Echols, 2019).

In the natural progression of social movements, some feminists left the women's movement due to the burnout of intense participation or because of increasing obligations to other facets of life (Baxandall & Gordon, 2002). Their numbers were not replenished – feminists had not adequately connected with the younger generation of women, many of whom believed feminism had

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[16] Radical feminist groups abjured hierarchies and institutional tools and processes. Their resultant leaderless egalitarianism and lack of institutional engagement contributed to their decline (Echols, 2019).
[17] Anti-porn feminism was a reaction against the sexual revolution championing women's rights to sexual freedom while ignoring the harms which often accompanied it.

accomplished its aims, was irrelevant to their lives, and repressive of female sexuality, femininity, and fun (Echols, 2019). This "postfeminist" sentiment emerged upon the waning of the women's movement and alongside the political and cultural counterassault against feminism, a phenomenon termed "backlash" (Faludi, 1992).

In 1981, Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as the fortieth President of the US. The social conservatism and neoliberal economics of his administration combined to exacerbate the social denunciation of feminism. The Reagan administration claimed to support women's rights but reneged its support for the ERA, opposed abortion, and advocated for a return to traditional, Christian family structures and values (Eisenstein, 1981). This public conservatism was accompanied by the disingenuous narrative that feminism had achieved its aims, equalised sex relations, and left women miserable in its aftermath (Faludi, 1992).

This "backlash" against feminism was a reaction against the moderate gains of the women's movement. Though women's progress has stoked cultural anxieties about women's role and men's social, economic, and political dominion since time immemorial, the backlash then was a distinct phenomenon. It emerged as an explicit response to women's real or perceived advancements, and it perpetuated the postfeminist notion that feminism should be celebrated but also faulted for women's "worsened" social position (Faludi, 1992). In expression, backlash was "at once sophisticated and banal, deceptively 'progressive' and proudly backward" (Faludi, 1992, p. 12). It authorised itself through appeals to "scientific research," popular psychology, moralism, fanaticism, and even repackaged its claims in feminist language (Faludi, 1992). Its most popular discourse alleged the loneliness of liberated women: career-focused women who postponed having children ended up depressed, single, and infertile (Faludi, 1992). "Professional" advice authors, popular therapists, infertility experts, and plastic surgeons profited from women internalising the social conservatism and antifeminist backlash (Faludi,1992).

Feminist activism persisted despite the backlash, although its institutional focus thinned its radical political potential (Messner, 2016). Feminists addressed the political fissures identified during the women's movement. Gender became considered a social and mutable construct, although it was acknowledged that sex-differentiated policies were required to redress gendered injustices. The analysis of patriarchy was seen to require analysis of all systemised hierarchies, such as race and class, and more women of colour joined feminist groups. Liberal feminists persisted in their pursuit of equal rights, though their division over no-fault divorce and benefits for pregnant women reflected the inherent challenge of mandating equality within unequal conditions (Echols, 2019).

The Emergence of Men's Liberation Discourse

Men responded to the women's movement with either silence or hostility, although some began to consider what feminist politics could mean for them (Connell, 1995; Messner, 1998). This group

tended to be white, middle-class individuals in their twenties to thirties, who were left-leaning and involved in higher education (Gambill, 2005). Earlier feminist consciousness raising efforts had included the topic of "male liberation", and this was perceived by its male proponents as the necessary and rational parallel to women's liberation (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Messner, 1998). Described by male liberationist Jack Sawyer (1970):

> Male liberation seeks to aid in destroying the sex role stereotypes that regard "being a man" and "being a woman" as statuses that must be achieved through proper behaviour. People need not take on restrictive roles to establish their sexual identity. (p. 32)

Men began to write on male liberation, and full-length texts were published in the early to mid-1970s, including Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man* (1974) and Jack Nichols' *Men's Liberation* (1975). The texts recognised the discrimination women faced and acknowledged feminism as a movement for women's justice. Their central concern, though, was how the male "sex role" adversely impacted men, their mental health, interpersonal relationships, and emotional experience.

By the male sex role, the authors referred to an intense American masculinism which dictated that men be financial providers with innate tendencies towards dominance, control, competitiveness, rationality, and toughness (Nichols, 1975). Male liberationists argued that the pursuit of masculine ideals embodied a double bind for men – failure rendered men objects of personal and societal scorn, but success induced the dehumanisation of himself and others[18] (Sawyer, 1970). Men's liberation discourse thus called upon men to unbind themselves from the "contrived, socially fabricated prohibitions, cultural straightjackets, and mental stereotypes that control and inhibit behaviour through arbitrary definitions of what it means to be a man" (Nichols, 1975, p. 317). Though articulated as complementary to the aims of the women's movement, men's liberation discourse had inherent inconsistencies upon which it fractured (Messner, 1998).

Its primary incongruence was reliance upon the sociological notion of sex roles, which emerged in the 1950s and gained prominence during the 1970s (Messner, 1998). Roles were said to mediate the connection between individuals and social and political structures. Sex roles provided a lens for sociologists to analyse differences between the sexes without resorting to biological reductionism (Edwards, 1983). The concept helped female sociologists to expand their discipline, and to emphasise how the social system and socialisation shaped roles (Edwards, 1983). In application, however, sociologists tended to confuse biological sex with the social and mutable construct of gender, and to conduct individual analyses without institutional considerations (Connell, 1995). The latter shortcoming obscured the interaction of institutions, power relations, and the influences of sex, gender, and race. In consequence, men and women's sex roles were equalised, and women's institutional and social oppression obscured (Edwards, 1983; Messner, 1998). This equalisation was evident in men's liberation discourse.

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[18] In the words of Jack Sawyer (1970), "being a master has its burdens" (p. 32).

In his book *The Liberated Man* (1974), Warren Farell co-opted Betty Friedan's concept of the "feminine mystique" to propose that men were entrapped and unfulfilled by the "masculine mystique". In an inadvertent allusion to his eventual transition from a profeminist liberationist to an antifeminist men's rights proponent, Farrell (1974) suggested that men sometimes had it worse. Considering feminists' condemnation of women's degradation in advertising, he claimed:

> Men may be even *more* restricted in their identity as human beings. Men can climb to the top of a wide range of occupations to fulfil their image; but they are even more restricted than women in the contempt they should receive should they deviate into a feminine role or fail the masculine one. For example, little girls are allowed to be "tomboys" (ever heard of a "janegirl"?). (Farrell, 1974, p. 98, emphasis in original)

Had Farrell considered why boys were reprimanded for exhibiting feminine traits, he may have arrived at his own earlier point that the derision of feminine qualities was "really a mockery of women" (Farrell, 1974, p. 47). He also glided over men's access to "the top" as compared to women's social, economic, and political exclusion from it. The incongruence of his argument, and men's liberation discourse in general, stemmed from an anecdotal assessment of men's position as opposed to a nuanced, institutional analysis (Messner, 1998). Its discourse authorised itself through the concept of sex roles and erroneously equalised men's pressure and dissatisfaction around masculinist ideals with women's oppression under institutionalised male supremacy (Hanisch, 1969; Messner, 1998). This position eventually enabled the idea that women were just as responsible for the persistence of men's plight. In Farrell's words, "the unliberated woman, who has internalised her need to live through her children and her husband, has unwittingly contributed her half to the strength of the cage the man has built around himself" (1974, p. 73).

Men's Consciousness Raising and Self-Help Groups

Women's liberation prompted male liberationists to form men's groups. Typically small and male-exclusive[19], they were dedicated to discussions of or actions around the male sex role (Stein, 1983). In principle, such groups enabled men to connect to one another on an interpersonal level, learn actions traditionally relegated to women (e.g., care, nurturing), explore the issues specific to them as men, and learn about institutional and individual sexism (Stein, 1983). Most men's groups also discussed the changing patterns of behaviour in their relationships with women (Stein, 1983). Participation in men's groups came with its challenges, amongst them a conflicted response to actual change (Stein, 1983). Though individual men chafed at adhering to the male sex role, their compliance nonetheless aligned with institutionalised privileges, such as ease of educational access and economic and political power (Stein, 1983). Men lamented that the male sex role required them to be unemotional and tough, but struggled to construct a masculinity which included "feminine" traits

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[19] Though liberationists committed to the liberation of both women and men, these groups were all-male to encourage vulnerable communication amongst men (Wong, 1978). It was also because women's liberation groups were spaces for women to be free of men.

because the feminine had been denigrated for its association with women and homosexuality. Further, the feminist criticism levied against the male sex role induced in some men an excessive and immobilising sense of personal guilt. This frustrated their discussion about women's oppression and stifled the creation of masculinities not associated with guilt or oppression (Stein, 1983). Nonetheless, for Stein (1983), whose account is part of the limited literature on the topic, mere participation in a men's group was a "statement of non-traditional masculine values" (p. 151).

Men's groups were variously called Men's Liberation Groups, the Human Liberation Movement, or "simply men in favour of women's liberation" (Farrell, 1971, p. 19). Some groups focused on male consciousness raising. These sessions were described "as the dominant class conducting formal meetings to raise consciousness about undoing their class and power status" (Farrell, 1971, p. 19). Informed by the counterculture and feminist groups such as New York Radical Women and the Redstockings, men's consciousness raising was said to be anti-power in orientation (Farrell, 1971). Their discussion considered "not only whether or not their sex has given them an unfair advantage in obtaining power but what subtleties of behaviour and attitudes are locking them into these power positions and locking women into their place" (Farrell, 1971, p. 19).

Men's consciousness raising groups articulated men's power as both a corruption and a burden *for men* (Farrell, 1971). Therein lay another incongruence of men's liberation discourse. For men's consciousness raising to contribute to human liberation, it had to recognise women's oppression and men's institutional and individual facilitation of it. Instead, men's consciousness raising groups often turned discussions about men's behaviour into a project of raising men's confidence and self-development (Farrell, 1971). It is no wonder, then, that consciousness raising was re-oriented towards personal change in men's self-help groups. Such groups consisted of individuals engaged in mutual self-helping activities towards their shared goals (Wong, 1978). Male self-help groups focused on unburdening men from the social expectations that constrained their lives, mainly through consciousness raising and interpersonal support, but also through social and political action (Wong, 1978). Male self-help groups that dealt primarily with consciousness raising were ill-studied because consciousness raising was elusive, affective, and therefore hard to define. However, researchers did observe other forms of consciousness raising.

Chesebro et al. (1973) observed that participants in a radical consciousness raising group experienced self-realisation, group formation, the creation of new group values, and a commitment to other political causes. Their report suggested consciousness raising led to attitudinal changes in individuals, though their account was anecdotal and did not speak to behavioural change. Kincaid (1977) studied an adult women's consciousness raising group in a community college and found that participants became more inner-directed, interested in extrafamilial activities, and increased their appreciation for other women. Baker and Snodgrass (1979) facilitated a sociology seminar which

incorporated consciousness raising methods and found that white, unmarried men[20] increased their support towards non-traditional sex roles. Their sample size was not of statistical significance, but their findings suggested the mechanism's potential for attitudinal change. Shorr and Jason (1982) compared responses to sex-specific consciousness raising groups and found both women and men rated emotional support of greater importance than advice, behavioural change, and social and political outcomes.

The literature, limited as it was, ratified New Left warnings to radical feminists. Consciousness raising was appropriated for personal fulfilment and attitudinal change around gender concerns. The issue with this appropriated consciousness raising was its core implication that individuals must change themselves, and that political mobilisation was either useless or unneeded (Rosenthal, 1984). This apolitical and individualistic sentiment would be exacerbated in the 1980s as the self-help genre proliferated (Rosenthal, 1984) within a neoliberal political economy.

Men's Rights Groups

Simultaneous to the development of men's consciousness raising and self-help groups, men's rights as fathers became a focal point. In the 1960s, a surge in divorce rates was popularly associated with feminism challenging traditional sex roles. The perception that the structures of marriage and families were imperilled emerged, and some men began to consider themselves particularly disadvantaged in this new landscape (Gambill, 2005). Divorce proceedings, and in particular, child custody arrangements and alimony obligations, became the subject of male scrutiny.

To be clear, feminists had long-considered unfair divorce arrangements for men to be a result of the patriarchal social order (Gambill, 2005). Patriarchy benefited most men, but certain male privileges ultimately disadvantaged them. For example, mothers were assumed to be the primary caregivers in custody arrangements, and fathers were made responsible for child support payments (Clatterbaugh, 1990). However, some men began to feel they, rather than women, were the victims of an unfair social order (Gambill, 2005). One of the earliest proponents of this viewpoint was Richard Doyle, who in 1973 founded the Men's Rights Association to redress alleged male discrimination through policy, public education, and counselling (Gambill, 2005).

In 1977, Richard Doyle, Daniel Amneus, and other men's group leaders launched Men's Equality Now (MEN) to centralise information about father's rights and divorce reform (Gambill, 2005). It sought to influence divorce law, redress "anti-male prejudice", and support the traditional organisation of families. MEN appealed to equivalent organisations in Britain and Australia to present a united front and planned to expand its efforts into Europe. It achieved little in its first two years but

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[20] Having tested their support for non-traditional roles both before and after the seminar, Baker and Snodgrass (1979) found that men from racial minorities scored lower than the mean. This was likely because the seminar did not have a nuanced discussion about the intersection of race and sex, and that men of colour experienced racial discrimination as the primary form of oppression.

media attention was gained in 1979 after its Human Rights Director petitioned the United Nations about the discrimination against men in the United States (Gambill, 2005). Internally, MEN experienced intense factionalism over its political and public image. Moderates in the group felt uncomfortable with Doyle advocating for women's subordination to men. At the time, most men's rights proponents supported the ERA and non-traditional sex roles (Gambill, 2005). But Doyle's virulence towards feminism and women on the basis of male victimisation would fester and inform the antifeminist men's rights movement, upon the dissolution of the men's liberation project in the late 1970s (Coston & Kimmel, 2013).

Public interest in men's issues and men's rights expanded upon the publication of Herb Goldberg's *The Hazards of Being Male* (1976). He was a psychology professor and therapist to a slew of recently divorced men. His own wife had separated from him during the mid-1960s, after becoming a feminist herself (Gambill, 2005). Informed by this experience and his patients' accounts, Goldberg (1976) asserted that men were not a privileged and oppressor class. Rather, they were subjugated and dispensable "success objects", forced to be the financial providers and the protectors of women and children. They also had to endure wartime conscription and more severe treatment in the criminal justice system. These burdens allegedly manifested in men suffering more than women with substance abuse, mental and physical illnesses, and suicide. Goldberg (1976) thus wrote:

> Unlike some of the problems of women, the problems of men are not readily addressed through legislation. The male has no apparent and clearly defined targets against which he can vent his rage. Yet his is oppressed by the cultural pressures that have denied him his feelings, by the mythology of the woman the distorted and self-destructive way he sees and relates to her, by the urgency for him to "act like a man" which blocks his ability to respond to his inner promptings both emotionally and physiologically, and by a generalised self-hate that causes him to feel comfortably only when he is functioning well in a harness, not when he lives for joy and for personal growth. (p. 4)

His thesis appealed to men discontented with their lives, and who connected their malaise to changed sex roles and gender relations (Gambill, 2005).

Influenced by Goldberg, Richard Haddad formed Free Men in 1977, an apolitical organisation dedicated to releasing men from social expectations through public education. He formed the opinion that sex roles were a consequence of the division of labour in ancient hunter-gatherer societies, and that women and men had both benefited from the arrangement, but now needed to be liberated from them. Haddad supported liberation from sex roles, but not feminism[21]. He supported consciousness raising as far as it served men's interests. His men's liberation was not associated with other social or political causes[22]. Haddad embodied the departure of some profeminist men's liberationists towards

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[21] Richard Haddad identified as a feminist until a male friend involved with NOW was denied entry to a feminist, women's only café. The café reneged its rule when threatened with legal action, but Haddad interpreted the initial exclusion as a signal of feminism's hypocrisy (Gambill, 2005).

[22] The apolitical nature of the group weakened upon it being joined by men's rights activist and founder of Men's Rights Incorporated, Fred Hayward. Free Men then collaborated with father's rights groups (Gambill, 2005).

the emergent antifeminist men's rights movement – an unfortunate shift which some feminists had predicted.

Feminist Responses to Men's Liberation

The women's movement had varied responses to the project of men's liberation. The liberal feminist organisation NOW supported male liberationists because their discourse around equal oppression between the sexes positioned men as allies (Messner, 1998). NOW elected Warren Farrell to their New York City Board three times, where he established over sixty men's liberation chapters, conducted consciousness raising groups, and served on its Masculine Mystique Taskforce (MMT) in 1971 (Faludi, 1992; Messner, 1998). The MMT called for policies to facilitate an equalisation of childcare responsibilities between women and men, and for changes to the education and media systems which would diminish sex-based stereotypes (Messner, 1998). To the question of what benefits men reaped from the erosion of their social and cultural power and an increase in their domestic labour, Farrell (1974) responded that liberated female partners would reduce the need for men to fulfil the burdensome male sex role. This would free men from the pressure to be success objects[23].

In contrast to NOW were those feminists critical of men's liberation discourse. The feminist psychologist Nancy Henly warned that men's liberation groups often directed their attention to:

> the bitchiness, rather than the oppression of women: under the present system, women are taught to be bitches, manipulating men, etc. If we off the system, women will be tolerable, and men will therefore be liberated. Such discussions are not only inadequate and misleading, but also dangerous, since they ignore the political context which is necessary to understand women's oppression. (Henley, 1970, as cited in Messner, 1998, p. 264)

The radical feminist Carol Hanisch (1975) denounced male liberation discourse as a reactionary force against the women's movement. She argued that it would impede women's liberation by focusing entirely on men. Her stance was supported by the words of a male participant in NOW's 1974 Masculine Mystique Conference:

> There was a feeling that a men's liberation movement can be more than just a 'men's auxiliary to the women's movement.' In other words, we began to see that there were larger tasks than getting men to abandon the roles of power and privilege which oppress women...I got the feeling that it was possible for us to step beyond guilt and look at the ways in which are male roles are grievously oppressive to us as men. (Hanisch, 1975, p. 74)

The quoted participant did not desire to inspect men's role in women's oppression, despite having relied on the women's movement to articulate his own discontents with the male role and its oppressiveness. He ratified some feminists' concern that men's liberation would enable men to "extract benefits from feminism without giving up their basic privileges, a modernisation of patriarchy, not an attack on it" (Connell, 1995, p. 42). Even feminists who attended the Masculine

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[23] Including freedom from being sexual initiators, from competition with other men, and alimony payments.

Mystique Conference and supported its resolutions for men to be more involved in childcare, birth control, and combatting sex discrimination, became concerned that its focus on male deprivation and men's desires independent of women threatened to eclipse women's issues (Gambill, 2005).

Radical feminist criticism of men's liberation discourse did not overlook the suffering of men. Rather, it argued that men's discontent stemmed not from the "masculine mystique" but from factors such as inflation, wage depreciation, job insecurity, the cog-like nature of certain labour, and rampant consumerism. In other words, the problems of capitalism which affected all labourers (Hanisch, 1975). The male liberationist Jack Nichols indeed considered capitalism to be the source of male exploitation and unfulfillment. But his treatise *Men's Liberation* (1975) declared:

> The average worker will probably never understand economic and technological intricacies. The concerns of today's males must be brought closer to home: to what he wants himself, as opposed to what he wants for the system at large. It is his concern with himself that must be touched. (1975, p. 317)

He claimed that consciousness raising would support men's personal liberation. In a swift abandonment of the radical principles which underpinned women's liberation, from which male liberationists etched out their own discourse, Nichols (1975) wrote: "the liberation of each man from power complexes begins as a personal liberation. It originates with individuals rather than in the structures around them" (p. 317).

How might this commitment to personal liberation, rather than collective action, be understood? Clatterbaugh (1990) suggested that for liberal men who already had access to the institutions liberal feminists wanted to expand and radical feminists wanted to dismantle, "the road to a better society is likely to appear as a personal journey rather than as a collective political action" (p. 52). In this regard, "the place of men in the social-political hierarchy often makes personal change more attractive, and their own faith in the system makes political action less urgent" (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 52). Men's liberation depoliticised liberation.

In addition, men's liberation discourse could not resolve its fundamental incongruence between men's "equal" sexist oppression and men's institutional power. The profeminist psychologist Joseph Pleck, attempted a resolution by proposing that men held institutional power but did not feel powerful (Messner, 1998). The fallacy of men's equal oppression could be overlooked insofar feminists also focused on the abstract construct of sex roles; but feminists focused on the behaviour of men as a social group – especially in relation to domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape against women (Coston & Kimmel, 2013). It was here that men's liberation fractured. It split into a profeminist faction concerned with power and gender relations, an apolitical faction occupied with redefining masculinity for men, and a "men's rights" faction which retained the aspects of feminism which benefited men[24], undermined women's oppression, and recast men as the victims of institutionalised gender discrimination (Coston & Kimmel, 2013; Messner, 1998).

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[24] Namely, that women could express their (hetero)sexuality as a form of liberation (Coston & Kimmel, 2013).

Growth of the Men's Rights Movement

In 1980, Richard Haddad's group Free Men expanded to host over 600 members across the US (Gambill, 2005). Its expansion and aspiration to form a consolidated national structure led to it being dissolved and reconstituted as the Coalition for Free Men (Gambill, 2005). That same year, the National Congress of Men was formed as an umbrella group for father's rights groups, though there were members who wished to address men's issues beyond divorce and custody arrangements (Clatterbaugh, 1980). Meanwhile, the founder of Men's Rights Incorporated, Fred Hayward, gained public attention for appealing to the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination about men's higher life insurance costs after they barred life insurance based on race (Gambill, 2005). Hayward had earlier petitioned the Commission to end "Ladies Nights", in which pubs offered women discounted drinks to incentivise their attendance because he said it reinforced male predation and female passiveness (Gambill, 2005).

In 1981, political progressives in Richard Doyle's MEN International tired of its antifeminist and misogynistic public image and attempted to establish a coalition of progressive men's rights groups. To this end, Fathers for Equal Rights hosted a convention in which men's rights activists championed a consolidated cause. Hayward spoke at the convention and attempted to dispel the notion that the men's rights movement was a backlash against feminism (Gambill, 2005). He would work with feminists towards their shared goal of sex equality if they were not "sexist pigs" who ignored men's problems (Hayward as cited in Gambill, 2005, p. 84). The convention decreed to support the ERA and improved outcomes for men in divorce proceedings, mental health, and media descriptions. Eventually, it led to the establishment of the National Congress for Men (Gambill, 2005).

The developments above indicate that the men's rights movement was not a consolidated or a cohesive movement. Rather, it expressed contesting ideas of what men's issues were and how they were to be addressed. Groups such as Men's Rights Incorporated focused on legal reform, whereas other groups, uninterested in policies, were instead occupied with supporting men and providing them with advice (de Coning & Ebin, 2022). In the latter context, men's rights involved self-help and self-improvement. Changing men's attitudes towards their sex role was more pressing than concerns about the expansion of their institutional power (de Coning & Ebin, 2022). That said, there were shared sentiments across the various approaches to men's rights. For example, the women's movement had unfairly blamed men for women's oppression, and men were the group discriminated against in the social, political, and economic landscapes[20] (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Coston & Kimmel, 2013). This perception became manifested in various grievances, such as that divorce and custody arrangements favoured mothers, that men were perceived to be dispensable, that some states dealt

men harsher criminal sentences than women, and that sexual assault was recognised when committed by men but not against them (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Coston & Kimmel, 2013).

Like men's liberation discourse, men's rights discourse identified male discontents but misidentified their causes, proposed inappropriate measures, or engaged in fallacies. For example, in response to the potential resumption of military conscription following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, men's rights advocate Fred Hayward campaigned for women to be included in the draft (Gambill, 2005) rather than challenging the forced conscription of men[25]. In their approach to domestic violence, men's rights proponents did not focus on men who faced abuse but alleged that women were as violent as men and that policy initiatives for abused women promoted bias against men (Mann, 2008). The men's rights approach to the draft and domestic abuse suggest an interest in further disadvantaging women rather than liberating men from adverse conditions.

Of course, there were instances of men being subject to routine disadvantage. They were likely to be denied joint custody of their children regardless of their dedication as fathers, and men were over-represented in dangerous professions (Coston & Kimmel, 2013; Hodapp, 2017). However, there remained a material difference between disadvantage and discrimination. Men's *disadvantages* originated from patriarchal, paternalistic policies which framed women as helpless and vulnerable (Coston & Kimmel, 2013), or naturally disinclined to certain forms of labour. For example, men's rights activists decried the over-representation of men in hazardous professions, but simultaneously opposed the entrance of women into those professions because they were believed ill-qualified for entering that "male territory" (Coston & Kimmel, 2013).

In essence, the men's rights movement became an effort to return men to unchallenged dominance, but a dominance in which they could express their emotions (Coston & Kimmel, 2013) and were relieved of performing the male sex role. The movement gained a particular vehemence during the 1980s, as men's troubles grew under the neoliberal political economy.

Men's Troubles in a Neoliberal Political Economy

In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration inherited an economic landscape marked by slow growth, large-scale job displacement, trade deficits, and persistent, double-digit inflation (Meltzer, 1988). They sought to address these concerns through the establishment of free markets and trade, cuts to government spending, lowered tax rates for businesses, the deregulation of industries such as agriculture and manufacturing, and the privatisation of public resources (Harvey, 2007; Meltzer, 1988;

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[25] The question of women being included in the draft was raised in an environment of increasing antifeminism. It has been argued that it was lodged to de-radicalise feminist demands (Eisenstein, 1981). Feminists had conflicted responses to the draft including women. NOW opposed it on principle but its comment to the equal treatment of women and men under the law necessitated its support (Feminist Majority Organisation, n.d.). Feminists who opposed the draft did so because individuals did not owe the state their participation in war, and because war routinely subjected women to sexual violence and death (Lindsey, 1982).

Prasad, 2012). In other words, the Reagan administration (as well as those of Stephen Harper in Canada, Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, and John Howard in Australia) facilitated a neoliberal political and economic order (Messner, 2016). In pursuit of their agenda, they delegitimised the needs of workers, curbed the power of trade unions, and slashed state welfare provisions under the guise of fiscal rectitude[26].

Previously, male-dominated workers had a historic and implicit contract with capitalists. Their stable labour would be compensated with fair and adequate wages (Jones & Kodras, 1990). International competition in manufacturing and production led capital to renege on this contract in the late 1970s, and the "family wage" on which men typically supported their households declined (Jones & Kodras, 1990). The following decade put further pressure on workers: three successive recessions between 1980-1982 cut around 4.2 million jobs in the production of goods (Plunkert, 1990). Jobs in manufacturing and mining were cut by seven per cent and 25 per cent over the decade (Plunkert, 1990). Women entered the labour market in record numbers, motivated by economic hardship, feminism, or both (Messner, 2016). Disinvestment in welfare and public education, decline of decent work opportunities, and an expansion of the punitive prison system further disenfranchised marginalised communities, especially blue-collar men of colour (Echols, 2019; Faludi, 1992; Harvey, 2007; Messner, 2016).

For white men, the fulfilment of their traditional[27] role as the financial provider for their families became harder, if not impossible. Their frustration culminated in a perception that men were in plight or decline (Faludi, 1992; Messner, 2016). The social conservatism of the Reagan administration along with the media and cultural backlash against feminism helped to blame feminism for men's real and perceived issues (Faludi, 1992). In addition, the neoliberal Reagan administration initiated "a new conservative political order premised on the fear of governmental abuse and the valorisation of self-reliance" (de Coning & Ebin, 2022, p. 145). Neoliberalism did not cede upon Democrat Bill Clinton being elected the President of the US in 1992. Instead, his administration ended the Democrats' traditional association with labour and welfare and favoured the interests of commerce and finance, deregulation of markets, the weakening of labour rights and wage protection, and the expansion of prisons, policing, and criminal sentences (de Coning & Ebin, 1992). The sentiment of male victimisation amid political, economic, and social change was exacerbated by the developments in gender, queer theory, and popular culture.

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[26] By 1982, the Reagan administration had cut around $44 billion from social welfare (see: Krieger, 1987).
[27] Sears (2021) argues that the autonomous family unit of a male breadwinner and female homemaker was less traditional than its cultural narrative suggests; men participated in aspects of childcare, women in the labour force, and both relied on family members and friends for support.

Gender, Queer Theory, and Popular Culture

The 1990s saw immense changes in the cultural norms around gender, sex, and sexuality (Lancaster, 2006). In the social sciences and feminism, queer theory developed as its theorists turned to Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of power[28] to facilitate discussions about non-essentialist gender and sexual identities, queerness, and resistance to heterosexism and homophobia (Minton, 1997). Queer theorists argued against gender and sexual identities being static and instead proposed them to be fluid and in a continual process of formation (Piantato, 2016). The philosopher and feminist Judith Butler even renounced the distinction between sex as a biological fact and gender as a social construct to argue that both were constructed. Sex required signification through gender, and gender itself was a series of acts reliant upon their interpretation as gendered and open to re-signification (Butler, 1990). Further, the "performance" of gender was shaped by the regulative discourses of the dominant heterosexual culture (Butler, 1990; Piantato, 2016). Feminist theorists turned to focus on the body, the subject, and their relation to power as a consolidation of discourses (McRobbie, 2008).

Feminist values, meanwhile, proliferated across popular culture and a "popular feminism" emerged which allowed corporates to profit from allying themselves with girls and women (McRobbie, 2008). In film and television, action heroines such as Ellen Ripley in *Alien* (1979-1997) and Sarah Connor in *Terminator* (1984-1991) emerged as desexualised protagonists who hybridised masculine and feminine traits and were not subservient to the men in their narratives. More heroines, albeit less desexualised ones, emerged with *Xena the Warrior Princess* (1995-2001) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). These characters represented not feminist politics, but a feminist identity predicated on female power and strength (Hains, 2009). Girl-centric television was further incentivised as young girls between adolescence and their teenage years became the subjects of a "tween" commodity market (Hains, 2009). Cultural products began to embody what Rosalind Gill (2007) termed the postfeminist sensibility, which: connected femininity to women's bodies; encouraged female self-surveillance and discipline; valorised individualism; conflated consumer choice with female empowerment; and re-popularised the notion of sex differences.

The commercial appropriation of feminism was not itself a new phenomenon, but it was distinct during this time for its reinforcement of neoliberal rationalities (McRobbie, 2008), which overlapped with postfeminist notions. From this perspective, female achievement was facilitated by individualism and participation in the market (as labourers, as consumers).

Popular feminism and the postfeminist mindset within a neoliberal landscape had at least two useful characteristics for men's rights discourse: it undermined the political necessity of feminism, and emphasised alleged sex differences between women and men. The latter was emphasised with the emergence of Evolutionary Psychology (EP).

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[28] Power as a set of ubiquitous and asymmetrical relations which could be resisted through oppositional politics.

Gender and Evolutionary Psychology

EP proposed that modern humans have inherited cognitive mechanisms through the natural and sexual selection of our ancient human ancestors (Confer et al., 2010; Siegart & Ward, 2002). Inherited mechanisms were those which theoretically helped ancient humans to survive, move, and reproduce (Downes, 2021). Traits unrelated to these activities were also passed down as by-products of the necessary traits or because of biological mutations and changes in the environment (Siegert & Ward, 2002). The framework was criticised as empirically indefensible because its studies were not replicable, evidence of cognitive mechanisms remained weak, and its account of how modern human behaviours related to the survival mechanisms of ancient human ancestors were untestable just-so stories (Cameron, 2015; Lancaster, 2006; Siegert & Ward, 2002). Also criticised was its proposition that there existed innate biological differences between how the sexes thought, felt, and behaved, and that these were divorced from the contextual and cultural factors which also influenced human behaviour (Lancaster, 2006; Siegert & Ward, 2002).

In 1990, the international Human Genome Project began determining the base pairs that comprised human DNA, as well as mapping and sequencing the genes in the human genome. This had profound implications for understanding what it was to be human, as well as for advancements in medicine and biological technologies (Morse, 1998). The media reported on the project, and in the cultural excitement around genes, indulged in just-so stories about human behaviours and biological adaptation. Narratives which reinforced sex differences and stereotypes were especially popular: "Men seem restless? Hunters hardwired to be on the prowl. Women like to shop? It's the biological legacy of gathering," (Lancaster, 2006, p. 105). Cultivation of the "scientific soundbite" meant that nuanced scientific research was increasingly simplified and reported with attention-grabbing headlines that appealed to familiar cultural ideas. The "reasoned analysis and sound standards of science from public discussions of science" were displaced (Lancaster, 2006, p. 103).

Media developments help to explain the dispersion and naturalisation of EP discourses, but their sheer popularity was partly informed by widespread heterosexual anxieties around sex and gender and the continued backlash against feminism (Cameron, 2015). As patriarchal and heterosexual approaches to sex and gender were further destabilised through the work of queer theorists, and the language, if not the radical politics, of feminism saturated popular television, some felt a nostalgia for the universal and immutable sex roles which pseudoscientific EP authorised (Lancaster, 2006). Its discourse also enabled the ideology that persistent systemic inequalities between women and men were the natural consequence of their biological differences (Cameron, 2015).

Crucially, men's rights discourse simplified and appropriated EP to proclaim that men's innate needs were unmet in modern gender relations (Lancaster, 2006).

Men's Rights Goes Online

When the Internet emerged to make the World Wide Web accessible to millions during the 1990s, some men's groups found an international platform on which to coalesce (Ging, 2019; Messner, 1998). Though Ging (2019) and Messner (1998) concur on the significance of men's rights migration online, there is not a detailed description of the process. This shortcoming is partly addressed through the Internet Archive (which routinely archives webpages), and by considering the men's issues-related websites which emerged between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s.

In 1995, the National Coalition of Free Men used the browsers NetScape and Spry Mosiac to create a website which consolidated research and resources about issues such as discrimination against men, male circumcision, and divorce proceedings. Special articles needed to be purchased and ranged in price from $1.25 to $25.00 USD; they could be shipped worldwide (NCFM, 1995). The organisation also had some websites for specific locations, such as Massachusetts and DC.

In 1998, the founder of the American Union of Men created an unmoderated Yahoo! Group which was "anti-feminist, religious, and politically liberal on non feminist [*sic*] issues" (AUM, n.d.). The group only had 51 members, but it was evidently a part of the growing network of men's groups online and linked to (and on) the Men's Activism News Network.

In 1999, Men's Health America created a moderated Yahoo! Groups forum to help men live healthier and longer lives (MHA, n.d.). The forum gained 411 members and its posts typically centred around news reports about men's health. Topics included the exclusion of Black men from medical studies, research findings around men's improved health when married, and the potential link between paternal age and child schizophrenia.

Around 1999, the National Centre of Men's "voluntary fatherhood" project went online. Called Choice for Men (C4M), it aimed to help men disregard or relieve their responsibilities as fathers through measures such as the relinquishment of their parental rights or obligations to financial remuneration (National Centre of Men, n.d.). C4M appeared in response to the alleged issue of men being trapped or tricked into parenthood, which it estimated to affect 33% of men in the US[29]. It lamented that women had access to abortion to terminate parenthood, but men did not have equivalent protections against parenthood. It reiterated narratives of women infringing upon men's rights through coercing child support.

In 2000, several websites dedicated to men's issues emerged. The Men's Activism News

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[29] This emerged from a preliminary finding that 33% of births in the US, according to fathers, were unintended.

Network (n.d.) began to report on global developments on men's rights issues. The site administrator wrote, "it's not *just* a news site, it's an interactive *forum* which I hope will help to further unify the many men's groups around the country, and even perhaps the world" (Men's Activism News Network, n.d., para. 1). It primarily shared news reports, although users could submit their own articles. Article categories reflected a familiar slew of concerns: divorce, domestic violence, false rape allegations against men, fatherhood, masculinity, and men and religion.

The Men's Defence Association (2000), which had formed in 1971 to assist men in legal matters, also moved online. It was committed to the protection of the "traditional image of fathers, family and manhood from the onslaught of 'politically correct' thinking that men are evil, violent and unnecessary in child development" (Men's Defence Association, 2000). The Australian organisation Men's Rights Agency (2000) created a similar website outlining the need for men to "level the playing field" after alleged "extremists push[ed] for feminist advancements ahead of all other considerations". Its website outlined services directed to improving male outcomes in discrimination, domestic violence, family law and child support. The Family of Men Support Society (2000), a Canadian men's group formed in 1992 to assist men at risk of experiencing or enacting domestic violence, also moved online. Its website proclaimed a zero tolerance towards domestic violence and aimed to reduce family violence through community education and support systems for men. Women's victimisation was not delegitimised but its assertion that women and men were equally likely to experience domestic violence lacked nuance, arguably to the extent of falsely equalising the experiences of women and men[30].

The preceding examples indicate that the migration of men's rights groups to the Internet echoed features of the offline movement. It was fragmented with different and sometimes competing perceptions of women and men's experiences. Though some of the examples cited (Family of Men Support Society, Men's Health) were not explicitly antifeminist, they did perpetuate beliefs which contributed to the dismissal of women's concerns. In essence, the arrival of the Internet increased the transnational flow of antifeminist beliefs and spread the discourses of men's rights activism beyond English-speaking nations, thereby homogenising global sexism and misogyny (Ging, 2019).

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[30] Research by Swan et al. (2008) found that women and men perpetuate equivalent levels of psychological and physical violence against their intimate partners. Their claim, often weaponised by men's rights groups to undermine violence against women, came with several caveats. These include that: women's violence typically occurs in response to violence against them, and is more likely to be motivated by self-defence; men's violence is more likely to be motivated by a desire to control their partner; men's violence more frequently involved sexual abuse, stalking, coercive control, and women are significantly more likely to be injured during violence incidents; and women and men have an equal likeliness towards less serious, situational violence, but significant intimate terrorism is more likely to be perpetuated against women (Swan et al., 2008).

Chapter Two: The Manosphere Complex

Web 2.0 enabled a shift from the Internet as a source of information to a resource for co-production and a site of entertainment (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012). Second generation Internet platforms facilitated heightened communication, the dispersion of information, online communities, networks, and collaboration (Carstensen, 2009). The interactive dimension led to the proliferation of websites, YouTube channels, blogs and forums dedicated to men's rights and men's concerns (Ging, 2019; Lilly, 2016). The resultant amorphous, loose confederacy of men's communities, blogs, and forums was termed the "Manosphere" (Ging, 2019). This chapter outlines the Manosphere and its evolving communities.

What is the Manosphere?

The term "Manosphere" first appeared in a Blogspot post in 2009 about the emergent collection of men's online communities (Ging, 2019). It was then popularised by Ian Ironwood's book *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity* published in 2013, which introduced its plethora of communities and explained their preoccupations with feminism's alleged misandry. From there, the term was adopted amongst online Men's Rights Activists (MRA) and media (Ging, 2019). In recent years, the Manosphere has received widespread media attention for its association with real-world violence and its virulence towards women (Ging, 2019). Yet the Manosphere remains a nebulous, heterogenous and ever changing environment (Lilly, 2016) which evades a singular definition. It has been conceptualised as a loose collection of misogynistic online communities dedicated to men's issues and experiences (Ging, 2019; Ribeiro et al., 2021; Farrell et al., 2019) and as the cyber-expression of the offline men's rights movement (Lilly, 2016; Gotell & Dutton, 2016).

To date, academic literature on the Manosphere has tended to focus on its Internet platforms or on individual events within them (Ging, 2019). Scholars have also attempted to taxonomize its core communities (Lilly, 2016), trace its online evolution (Ribeiro et al., 2021), synthesise its underlying philosophies and rhetoric (Ging, 2019), and language (Farrell et al., 2019). Writers on the subject depict a Manosphere still informed by the groups and discourses of the pre-Internet men's movements, but with distinctive activities and beliefs. What follows elaborates on this dynamic by exploring the prominent Manosphere communities, core discourses, and popular platforms. The communities selected for discussion follow Lilly's (2016) taxonomy: Men's Rights Activists (MRA), Pick-up Artists, Involuntary Celibates (Incels) and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW).

Evolving Manosphere Communities

Men's rights activism comprised one of the earliest communities in the manosphere, with a Reddit forum[31] being established in 2008 (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Online men's rights activism shared certain beliefs with its offline predecessor, such as the allegations that women's oppression is a myth, that societies are organised around women, that feminism demonises men, and that men are required to sacrifice themselves for women through financial provision, expectations of chivalry, and military service (Hodapp, 2017). Its activists continue to misconstrue the nature and causes of social inequality and unfreedoms (Hodapp, 2017). However, they differ from their offline predecessor in that they articulate their shared grievances through the Red Pill, an organising philosophy which loosely unifies manosphere communities and content (Ging, 2019).

The Red Pill is a reference to the science fiction film *The Matrix* (1999), in which the male protagonist, Nero, learns that humans are being unknowingly controlled by machines. Nero is offered a choice between the Blue Pill to return him to a state of blissful ignorance, and the Red Pill to remain awakened to the uncomfortable truth of the world. In the Manosphere, the latter represents men being awakened to the "truth" of feminism being misandrist (Ging, 2019). Men's rights discourse often references the Red Pill in its approach to men's legal and discursive rights (Lilly, 2016; O'Donnell, 2022). Like their offline predecessor, their core concerns are the family court system, alimony and child support; state programmes which support female victims of sexual assault but not male victims; false rape allegations against men; and that women can "opt out" of pregnancies but men cannot opt out of raising children (Brook-Lynn, 2014).

Once again similar to its predecessor, online MRA are not a politically unified group. Their general emphasis on freedom of speech, independence, individualism, and equal treatment reflects liberal values (Hodapp, 2017). But they sometimes express ideologies and discourses which overlap with the political far right – prejudice against women, hostility towards women, and a belief in male supremacy (Phelan et al., 2023). That said, the term "far right" is a broad political affiliation which covers xenophobia, racism, and anti-statism. Its occasional overlap with men's rights does not indicate that all men's rights activists are far right (Phelan et al., 2023), although one study suggests that participation in online men's rights activism may provide an algorithmic path to the far right (Mamié et al., 2021).

In terms of political action, online MRA tend to remain in their digital spaces, which span multiple Internet forums, blogs, and YouTube channels (Ging, 2019 ; Hodapp, 2017). Perhaps overlapping with the anti-statism of the far right, some MRA refuse to engage in legal activism

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[31] A free forum-focused website in which users join communities called Subreddits. Registered accounts can post text and hyperlinks to Subreddits, where other forum members vote to make them more visible ("upvoted") or less visible in the forum ("downvoted").

because of the alleged "women-centric" arrangement of the political and social landscapes (Hodapp, 2017). Men's rights activism instead aims to disrupt the culture at large, an aim which often manifests in malicious online harassment such as trolling and exposing personal information about an individual (Hodapp, 2017). The emphasis on disrupting or facilitating cultural discourse suggests that online men's rights activism operates more as an articulation of male grievance than a concerted effort towards political change (Ging, 2019). That said, it can be politicised. Rohlinger (2019) makes the case that a men's rights Reddit forum, r/TheRedPill, mobilised to help elect the right-wing populist Donald Trump the US President in 2016.

A Voice for Men (AVFM) is a seminal Manosphere and men's rights platform. A US-based limited liability company and online publication founded by Paul Elam[32] in 2009, it espouses that women are free from sex roles, but men remain chained. Its mission statement declares:

> What used to be cooperation between sexes is now gynocentric parasitism that inhibits every level of men's existence, from cradle to coffin. The efforts to enhance the rights of women have become toxic efforts to undermine the rights of men (AVFM, 2014, para. 5).

AVFM aims to resolve men's difficult experiences and to initiate equality between the sexes by opposing sex roles, male disposability, and gynocentrism[33]. It embodies a discursive approach to men's rights and declares that "changing the cultural narrative" will facilitate its aims. Editorial content tends to represent feminism as a social ill which prevents the resolution of men's issues and supports female submission to men (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022).

It is important to note that AVFM is a for-profit publication. In 2014, Elam divulged that he was the sole proprietor; he received all profits but donated a portion of them to undisclosed activist efforts (Elam, 2014). The publication made its profits through PayPal donations and subscriptions to its umbrella company, Red Pill Solutions (Elam, 2020). When deplatformed from PayPal in 2020 for violating its acceptable use policy – which Elam lamented as a cultural prohibition on antifeminism – AVFM moved to another subscription-based platform (Elam, 2020). In 2022, Elam handed ownership and control of AVFM to its managing director (Elam, 2022). As of writing, he uses his personal website to offer men paid personal coaching sessions about the Red Pill and relationships, an indication of the monetisation of relationship coaching in the Manosphere.

The Reddit forum r/TheRedPill is another prominent men's rights platform within the Manosphere, though it focuses less on men's rights and more on men's sexual strategies. The forum was founded in 2012 by the user pk-atheist, later exposed to be the New Hampshire Republican

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[32] Paul Elam is considered a seminal but controversial figure in the online men's rights movement because his vitriol towards women threatens to deter potential supporters (O'Donnell, 2022). He controversially proposed that US Domestic Violence Awareness Month be changed to "bash a violent bitch month" (Elam, 2015), later clarifying that this was a sarcastic response to a *Jezebel* article which satirised women's violence against men. As O'Donnell (2022) aptly pointed out, Elam disproportionately escalated the original contemptible content rather than critiquing it.

[33] The term refers to the alleged societal focus on women and women's views.

representative Robert Fisher (Bacarisse, 2017). The forum's routine vitriol towards women led to it being quarantined. It cannot be monetised nor accessed through Reddit search or recommendation functions. Users must opt-in to engage with its content. Under quarantine, its membership numbers are unclear, although it remains active as of September 2023.

The r/TheRedPill forum tends to frame women as promiscuous, deceptive, and willing to trade in sex and sexuality for power (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022). Forum users condemn women for their alleged manipulation in abhorrent terms. For instance, "women use their fish holes as ATMs when it suits their wants and needs" (max_peenor, 2019). And, "[women's] sole objective is to lock down high quality semen. They're biologically whores" (awalt_cuptake, 2017). In addition to its conjecture and censure of female sexuality, the forum misrepresents feminism. In the words of Robert Fisher, under his digital alias:

> **Feminism is a sexual strategy.** It puts women into the best position they can find, to select mates, to determine when they want to switch mates, to locate the best dna [*sic*] possible, and to garner the most resources they can individually achieve. (pk_atheist, 2021, para. 13, emphasis in original)

Having "awakened" men to this alleged truth, the forum focuses on the methods available to men to self-improve their characteristics and "better their position in the social hierarchy" (Daly & Reed, 2021, p. 16). The material cited above indicates an articulation of both Evolutionary Psychology (EP) and economic rationalities, a Manosphere tendency first identified by Van Valkenburg (2018). In essence, this pairing claims that women have a biological imperative to select and exploit their male partners for resources. Women are alleged to pursue "Alpha" males with sexual prowess and machismo for their genetic material, and to exploit subordinate "Beta" males for emotional and economic support[34] (Ging, 2019; Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022; Van Valkenburg, 2018). So-called "Alpha men" and their aspirers aim to revive the patriarchal subjugation of women relationally, sexually, and culturally. Their attempts are argued to impede men's interpersonal relationships, sense of self-worth, and mental health (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022).

The r/TheRedPill forum applies a neoliberal capitalist logic to sexual relations through: representations of feminism as a strategy for women to optimise their resources; positioning women as the sellers and men the buyers of sex; and its evocation of a sexual marketplace. In the latter, human bodies are rendered commensurable, their value quantified through a calculation of social standing, economic status, and physical appearance (Van Valkenburg, 2018). Women are said to self-improve their sexual value through activities such as makeup and cosmetic surgeries, and men through improvements to their appearance and socioeconomic status.

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[34] The Alpha and Beta masculinities have been considered respective examples of hegemonic and complicit masculinities (Vallegra & Zurbriggen, 2022). Hegemonic masculinity describes a configuration of gender practice which legitimises patriarchy. It is aligned with institutional power, though men engaged in its practice are not necessarily powerful. Complicit masculinities benefit from patriarchal arrangements without embodying hegemonic masculinity (see: Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Alpha and Beta masculinities position men as the victims of the gender social order, denying the truth of men's institutional power. For Ging (2019), this renders them "hybrid" masculinities.

Associated with r/TheRedPill but itself a distinct Manosphere community is pick-up artistry. Pick-up Artists are men dedicated to maximising their sexual encounters with women (Lin, 2021). As with r/TheRedPill, they adhere to the precepts of biological and gender essentialism, focus on improving men's sexual success with women, and attempt to assert dominance over women (O'Donnell, 2022). Distinct from men's rights activists and r/TheRedPill, they do not engage in quasi-politics and have their own specific strategies to attract women (O'Donnell, 2022).

There is limited literature about the beginnings of pick-up artistry in the West, but pre-Manosphere it is said to have emerged during the 1970s as feminist-instigated social and legal reforms facilitated a freer sexuality for women and the normalisation of premarital sex (King, 2018). The publication of Eric Weber's *How to Pick Up Girls* (1970) marked the beginning of self-help groups dedicated to improving men's seduction skills (Almog & Kaplan, 2017; King, 2018). The author Ross Jeffries also became a central figure by advancing seduction tactics derived from neuro-linguistic programming, alongside a pseudo-scientific approach to personal development and communications. These were consolidated in *How to Get the Women you Desire into Bed* (1988) (Almog & Kaplan, 2017).

The Canadian illusionist Erik von Markovik[35] then became a prominent Pick-up Artist. He advocated a three-step approach: attraction, facilitating comfort, and seduction[36]. His techniques pedalled EP narratives, economic rationalities, and manipulation. He asserted that women protected themselves from men with a low social and reproductive value and that men could break through this barrier. He also invented the famous and contentious technique of negging – the act of mildly insulting or backhandedly complimenting a woman with the intention of making her seek attention and validation. The journalist Neil Straus became another prominent figure upon the publication of his book *The Game* (2005), which outlined his personal transformation into a Pick-up Artist.

This "seduction community" targeted men perceived to require empowerment and direction – those who were introverted, lacked social skills, and felt inadequately masculine (Almog & Kaplan, 2017). The "reforming" of such characteristics was recalled by Pick-up Artists such as von Markovik and Straus, who proclaimed themselves to be "reformed" geeks (Almog & Kaplan, 2018). In relation to pick-up artistry ideology, interactions between men and women were structured "such that one side (the man) gains freedom of choice and influence, while the other side (the woman) is described as an object that may be manipulated by playing on inherent biological-evolutionary mechanics" (Almog & Kaplan, 2017, p. 33). Relationships between men and women were a "collection of methodological procedures" and rules, described as the "game" (Almog & Kaplan, 2017, p. 34). The latter involved coaching the "outer game", in which men were helped to approach women confidently, to converse in

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[35] Also known as his stage name, Mystery.
[36] Erik von Markovik also hosted the reality television programme *The Pickup Artist* (2007-2008). Episodes followed male contestants being mentored on the techniques of seduction and putting them to use by approaching women. Contestants with the weakest skills were eliminated until a final participant remained – this master pick-up artist won $50,000 (Banet-Weiser & Bratich, 2019).

a relaxed manner, and to achieve their desired outcome. The "inner game" strengthened men's inner beliefs, values, and objectives to develop their self-confidence (Almog & Kaplan, 2017). This required men to self-develop their liberation from restrictive cognitive responses, including eliminating irrational perceptions and fears (Almog & Kaplan, 2017). Pick-up coaches proffered a range of techniques to achieve this, drawing from cognitive-behavioural therapy and neuro linguistic programming (Almog & Kaplan, 2017). In all, pick-up artistry meant that, for some men, "directing resources to success in sexual relations is considered a step towards establishing an integrative, coherent, and successful masculine identity, both in the sphere of economic-professional success and in the sphere of love and sexuality" (Almog & Kaplan, 2017, p. 34).

Like men's rights proponents, Pick-up Artists migrated online to notice boards and forums upon the emergence of the Internet (Almog & Kaplan, 2018). Pick-up artistry then became somewhat less focused on the seduction of women and sexual success (King, 2018) and more directed toward the broader project of male self-improvement. Daryush "Roosh V" Valizadeh and his blog *Return of Kings* (2012-2022) was central to the pick-up artistry of the Manosphere. It described itself as a blog for:

> heterosexual men [...] who believe men should be masculine and women should be feminine. [...] in a world where masculinity is increasingly punished and shamed in favour of creating an androgynous and politically correct society that allows women to assert their superiority and control over men. (Valizadeh as cited in O'Donnell, 2022, p. 18)

Valizadeh[37] and contributing authors shared their thoughts and advice about life, culture, work, finance, women, masculinity, and contemporary gender relations. Titles of their articles included: *Paternity Fraud is Worse than Rape*, *Feminists are Hysterical about Rape because No Man Wants to Rape Them*, *Why it's Important to Develop an Insane Degree of Self-Love*, and *3 Ways to become a More Masculine Leader*. In relation to pick-up artistry, *Return of Kings* posted a breadth of articles, including general commentary. Chase Amante from the men's dating coaching website *Girls Chase* sponsored articles which advertised his dating coaching. For example, *To Get a New Girl in Bed, Peel off her "Public Self"* (Amante, 2018) explained that women's sexuality was often constrained by social expectations around female propriety. He declared that women faced "dangerous" men who perceived them as "easy, discardable whore[s]" (Amante, 2018, para. 11). His point was that men could learn to overcome women's guardedness to have sex with them.

Commentary about pick-up artistry and contemporary dating relations on *Return of Kings* ratified the Manosphere's economic rationalisation of relationships. In *The Deregulation of the Sexual Marketplace* (2014), the contributor Thomas Hobbes[38] argued that feminism and the lessening of

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[37] Valizadeh's blog was monitored as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Centre (SPLCentre, n.d.). In 2022, Valizadeh removed all content from the blog, alleging himself to be a reformed Orthodox Christian who wanted to repent for the harm he caused women and men (Valizadeh, 2022). The blog posts are archived.
[38] Presumably a reference to the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679).

social restrictions around premarital sex, non-monogamous relationships, casual relationships, divorce, and single parenthood had all induced a "crisis of intimacy" which "disenfranchised" men. Hobbes (2014) wrote:

> Clearly, when it comes to sex, women are in far greater demand. […]. The question of how to divide up this relatively limited amount of desire among women is one every human society has struggled with. Basically, if you fail to regulate the market, the logical result is a small minority of men garnering the attention of the vast majority of all women. […]. To prevent this, societies have almost always regulated women's sexuality to some degree. (Hobbes, 2014, para. 7-9)

Hobbes (2014) cited one piece of research which suggested that women who had premarital sex or had cohabitated with a partner former to their spouse were likelier to get divorced. He concluded that "there's an ever-increasing number of washed-up hags out there who are coming to regret their earlier promiscuity" (para. 19). Hobbes proposed that male sexual disenfranchisement had led to three divisions: the Manosphere, consisting of men who accepted and potentially benefitted from the deregulated sexual marketplace; white knights who rejected the sexual marketplace; and pick-up artistry haters who rallied against it all.

The *Best of the Manosphere: How to Un-Pick Up Girls* was a presumably satirical guide to breaking up with women. Suggestions included smoking, being aloof, and leaving a semi-automatic gun out at home. Its "humorous" suggestions were imbued with sexism. For instance, "girls, by and large are vindictive creatures that want to keep [men] down" (Seau, 2013, para. 16). Blog contributor Sam Seau wrote that the guide encapsulated that:

> Being a man isn't about worrying over the future, arguing politics, or bragging about who can bang the most women. These are things we can talk about, of course. The spirit of the Manosphere is to enjoy your life, the best you can, as the man I am. (Seau, 2013, para. 33)

The article *Women Should Give Bountiful Thanks to the Manosphere* offered another perspective. Its author argued that the Manosphere improved "women's dating pool of desirable guys, providing more men who are socially calibrated and clued into what they actually want" (Albrecht, 2017, para. 5). It advanced the discourse that while equality between the sexes was desirable, feminism was a social ill which threatened the traditional and stable family structure (Albrecht, 2017, para. 5).

The cited articles reveal that the pick-up artistry of the Manosphere is heterogeneous. It includes prescriptive attempts at improving men's social skills and success with women, and reflections on the Manosphere, including a vitriolic diatribe about the contemporary sexual "marketplace". They also variously frame the Manosphere as men acclimatising to contemporary gender relations (Hobbes, 2014), becoming socially calibrated (Albrecht, 2017), and learning to live their best lives (Seau, 2013). This further connects the Manosphere to the project of male self-improvement. In diametric opposition to pick-up artistry and its self-improvement focus is a Manosphere community of emotionally and sexually frustrated men.

Incels

A portmanteau of the words involuntary and celibate, the term "Incel" first appeared on the all-text website *Alana's Involuntarily Celibacy Project* in 1997 (Taylor, 2018). Its founder was a Canadian woman in her mid-twenties who started dating later than her peers and struggled with feelings of loneliness and the sense of being a late bloomer; she intended for her website to operate as a forum for people in similar positions (Taylor, 2018). But by the mid-2010s, the term Incel had been co-opted by the manosphere to represent men[39] aggrieved by their inability to form romantic or sexual relationships with women, and who felt "subordinated in the global masculine hierarchy" (Daly & Reed, 2021, p. 15).

Incels ascribe to the "Black Pill," a derivation of the Red Pill. The Black Pill agrees that an individual's place in the social hierarchy is primarily designated by their attractiveness, and that women are the instigators of this categorisation (Hoffman et al., 2020). Both pills posit that women are lookist and discriminate against men who are unattractive (Daly & Reed, 2021). However, where the Red Pill asserts that men can self-improve their position, the Black Pill is fatalist and denies improvement is possible (Pelzer et al., 2021).

Incels believe that women deny them romantic and sexual relations because of their unattractiveness. Such individuals perceive themselves as being inferior to women and conventionally attractive, socially dominant men (Daly & Reed, 2021). Their frustrations emerge in malicious comments about women's behaviour, appearance, and sexuality (with derogatory words such as "slut" and "whore"). There are also fantasies about violence against women, toxicity towards "normal" people who do not understand them and society at large (Pelzer et al., 2021). Their worldview embodies an extremist mindset, which is conducive to violence (Baele et al., 2019).

Incels have indeed gained public notoriety in recent years for their association with violence in Canada, the United Kingdom and the US. These instances include the April 2018 Toronto van attack, in which a man drove onto a pavement, killed 11 people, and later cited the "Incel rebellion" as his inspiration (BBC, 2022), and a November 2018 mass shooting in Florida (Vigdor, 2022). Incels were declared an emerging security risk in the United Kingdom in 2022 (Dodd, 2023). That said, Baele et al. (2019) stress that there is not yet a causal link between Incels and violence. Other researchers have suggested Incels be targeted for mental health intervention as they exhibit lower levels of life satisfaction and higher tendencies towards self-victimisation, depression, anxiety, and loneliness than other men (Costello et al., 2022). Where Incels rally against their perceived sexual

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[39] Consequently, the term "Femcel" was coined to describe women involuntary celibates. Most male Incels reject that women may also face difficulties forming romantic and sexual relationships; for them, it is men who "need" sex and Femcels are entitled, self-victimising women who crave male attention.

disenfranchisement, another Manosphere community, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), swears off women entirely.

MGTOW is an explicitly antifeminist subculture which, like men's rights activism, posits that men are trapped in a narrow, breadwinner gender role as victims of a gynocentric society (Lin, 2017). Unlike MRA, however, MGTOW are not interested in influencing cultural discourse or prompting legal reform but in separating themselves from women and society at large (Lin, 2017). MGTOW distance themselves from the Red Pill, proffering that individuals who have swallowed the Red Pill but still engage in gynocentric activities or systems (such as marriage) have also taken the Blue Pill, and are thus Purple Pill (Lin, 2017). The Purple Pill is also the first stage of an MGTOW individual's journey, after which he begins to abstain from long-term relationships with women, then limits his interactions with them entirely, and eventually ceases to interact with society and the state (Lin, 2017). Not every MGTOW follows this script (Lin, 2017).

The MGTOW community is composed primarily of heterosexual, white, middle-class men from the United States, Canada, and Europe, whose central philosophy waxes lyrical on American vistas and colonial frontiers. They perpetuate a "neo-individualistic dogma to live on one's own terms at all costs" (Lin, 2017, p. 78). In terms of its central figures, Lin (2017) identifies the YouTuber Sandman. His account was established in Canada in 2013, and has 195K subscribers. Its first and biggest Subreddit was established in mid-2011, and supplementary subreddits such as r/MGTOWBooks, as well an external MGTOW forum, emerged in 2014 (Ribeiro et al., 2021). The MGTOW communities have experienced a steady growth in popularity and its main Subreddit was the most popular Manosphere community in 2017, when r/Incels was banned (Ribeiro et al., 2021). It has since settled as the second most popular community (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

Popular Figures in the Manosphere

In addition to the communities, popular figures and discourses outlined above, there are individuals whose beliefs have placed them in the orbits of the Manosphere and mediated popular culture. Two famous figures are Jordan Peterson and Andrew Tate, both of whom ascended to public recognition in the mid-2010s.

Jordan Peterson

Jordan Peterson is a Canadian psychologist, scholar of personality, author, YouTube philosopher and an influential thought leader – at least amongst those who share his masculinist anxieties around gender (Bowles, 2018). He gained public attention in 2016, not for his clinical and research

contributions but for refusing to use a student's preferred pronouns while the Canadian parliament contemplated banning discrimination against diverse gender identities and expression (Beauchamp, 2018). Peterson (2016) released a YouTube video in opposition to the legislation, which he decried as political correctness and an impediment to free speech, making him prominent amongst the online right groups (Nesbitt-Larking, 2022).

In 2018, Peterson released his self-help bestseller, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. This provided practical advice on finding meaning and purpose in life through appeals to abstract principles, personal anecdotes, philosophers such as Fredrich Nietzche, Christian religion, mythology, and Evolutionary Psychology (EP). Peterson's (2018a) organising principle was that the opposing forces of order and chaos comprised the world; order was masculine, hierarchical, predictable and cooperative, and chaos was feminine, unpredictable, unstable, and unknown. Though Peterson (2018a) stressed that an excess of either force would be dire, his text is titled the cure to chaos, the feminine.

Peterson's (2018a) first of twelve rules was that individuals stand straight with their shoulders back. Thus began an elaborate rigmarole about lobsters, crustacean and human neurochemistry, the fight for territory and resources, and how all human and non-human societies were winner-take-all. His point was that individuals should accept inherently unequal conditions and be responsible for themselves, a popular notion in neoliberal self-help discourses, which will be elaborated in the following chapter. He authorised the existence of systemic inequalities through an appeal to Darwinian social hierarchies, once telling a journalist that people who scrutinised social relations as patriarchal did not "want to admit that the current hierarchy might be predicated on competence" (Peterson as cited in Bowles, 2018, para. 22).

In his book, however, Peterson dismissed patriarchy as a "disposable, malleable, arbitrary cultural artefact" (2018a, p. 38). He invoked it as an inadequate psychometric as opposed to a structure which affects how women move through the world. The simultaneous dismissal and endorsement of women's oppression aside, Peterson (2018a) exhibited another tendency of the Manosphere: an attempt to legitimize his opinions through just-so stories about biological evolution and economic rationalities. Discussing female lobsters and their attraction to the "top lobster," Peterson (2018a) wrote:

> This is a brilliant strategy [...]. It's also one used by females of many different species, including humans. Instead of undertaking the computationally difficult task of identifying the best man, the females outsource the problem to machine-like calculations of the dominance hierarchy. [...] This is very much what happens with stock-market pricing, where the value of any particular enterprise is determined through the competition of all. (p. 34-35)

The claim was biologically reductionist and sexist in its implication that women connived to select their partners based on their exhibited dominance.

Overall, Peterson's (2018a) self-help discourse encouraged its readers to embrace an

individualistic "ascetic lifestyle in the form of a mutated Christian conservatism" (Guignion, 2019, p. 12). His reductionist approach to gender and gender relations overlapped with the Manosphere, and his celebrity within it escalated upon an interview with the *New York Times*. Asked about the Incel-inspired Toronto van attack, Peterson stated that such violence occurred when men lacked partners, and its cure lay in enforced monogamy[40] (Bowles, 2018). Peterson's amalgamation of beliefs attracted a politically disparate but predominantly male audience, and part of his appeal lay in the credibility of being a lauded academic in his field. In addition, he achieved a resonance amongst disaffected men who felt unrepresented in the public and political conversation (Beauchamp, 2018; Rowan, 2020).

Andrew Tate

Andrew Tate is a British-American businessman, social media personality, former professional kickboxer, and self-proclaimed misogynist. In 2012, Tate co-founded a webcam business in which men paid to chat with women models (Sommerlad, 2023). In 2016, Tate came to public attention as a participant in the reality television show *Big Brother* (2000-2018), where he garnered controversy for his past comments about women. He was eliminated after old footage surfaced of him hitting a woman with a belt, although the act was claimed to be consensual (Sommerlad, 2023). In following years, Tate amassed a following on social media for proffering financial, masculinist, and misogynistic advice to young men.

Tate's slew of beliefs about women and gender relations included that women belonged to men and in the home (Das, 2022), that men preferred having sex with 18- and 19-year-olds because they likely had less sexual experience than older women (Sung, 2020), and that women who had been sexually assaulted bore some responsibility for their assault (Sommerlad, 2023). His disdain towards #MeToo influenced his move to Romania in 2017, where he believed rape charges were harder to establish (Sommerlad, 2023). In 2022, Tate was deplatformed from Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. He responded that his censures of women, and even descriptions of violence against them, had all been a part of a "comedic character" (Fletcher, 2022). His current online platforms include his X[41] account and his online financial education platform, Cobra Tate.

Cobra Tate claims to help men create wealth through education and networking. It alludes to the Manosphere Red Pill allegory and claims to help men "break through the Matrix." Its two paid programs are Hustler's University and the War Room. Hustler's University teaches men to freelance and to utilise AI, cryptocurrency, and investment techniques to improve their finances. The War Room

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[40] The interviewing journalist Nellie Bowles interpreted this as Peterson's tacit support for the state-enforced redistribution of sex, but Peterson (2018b) later claimed he meant normative monogamy reduced male violence against women. It does not. One in three women are estimated to be impacted by intimate partner violence worldwide (WHO, 2021).
[41] Formerly Twitter.

involves a global network of men wanting to "become the very best versions of themselves through physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial development" (The War Room, n.d.).

In June 2023, Tate was charged with human trafficking, rape, and organising a criminal gang to exploit women (Morris, 2023). The investigation found messages between Tate and a Moldovan woman in which he claimed his adult webcam business was a money laundering front (Morris, 2023). The extent to which Tate's dubious financial dealings and sustained virulence towards women has influenced men is currently unclear. Schoolteachers in the United Kingdom have cited his online popularity as an influence on sexual harassment in schools (Fazackerley, 2023).

Reflections on the Manosphere

The Manosphere is the embittered, malicious reaction of misogynistic and sexist men to feminism and women's ongoing social, economic, and political progress. The early men's movement from which it spawned parasitically drew upon feminism to identify and articulate the grievances of heterosexual men within a neoliberal political economy. Like its offline predecessors, Manosphere grievances are largely a consequence of a patriarchal social order which subjugates women socially, economically, culturally and politically to men. This disadvantages some men in particular legal settings and prevents some men from developing a masculinity unrelated to male dominance over women. In addition, feminism and women's economic progress has meant that fewer women are coerced into marriage as a financial necessity. Simultaneously, neoliberal capitalism has facilitated economic crises, wealth inequality, inflation, and job precarity, all of which trouble economic security and professional mobility. All the while, neoliberal ideology implicitly castigates individuals for their failure to "succeed". This produces a general sentiment of men's promised privileges not being realised.

Like its offline predecessor, the Manosphere lacks institutional analysis and empathy. It offers fallacious arguments through its Red Pill philosophising, evolutionary just-so stories about women and men's distinct biological motivations. The economics of relationships are emphasised in order to rationalise the core discourse of men in plight. As Coston and Kimmell (2013) wrote of the online men's rights movement, the Manosphere attempts to valorise and reassert patriarchal social relations. MRA, aside from their targeted campaigns of digital harassment and short-lived politicisations, primarily re-articulate men's rights concerns. As Ging (2019) identifies, they engage mostly in an articulation of male grievance. Pick-up Artists' sexist approach to women and their relationships with men casts women as manipulable objects for male gratification. To the extent that it succeeds in policing women into restricted, traditional roles as wives, mothers, and sexual objects, it begets misogyny.

The Incel community is more concerning. Researchers have identified it as an extremist faction, potentially violent faction, and suggested that its participants require a mental health intervention. The MGTOW is similarly toxic, though its "swearing off" of women potentially relieves them from the threat of violence. Its anti-statism and romanticisation of the colonial frontier, and thus its underbelly of white supremacism, remain a cause for concern. In recent years, and for reasons unknown, Manosphere participants have actively migrated away from the MRA and Pick-up Artist communities to the comparatively more toxic Incel and MGTOW communities (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

To varying extents, Manosphere communities dehumanise, objectify, and denigrate women. All its communities necessitate criticism and intervention. Though concerned by the complex as a whole, I am especially critical of the individuals who cultivate the Manosphere discourse of men in plight, and proffer to sell solutions through self-help and self-improvement – individuals whom Bujalka et al. (2020) call "thought leaders". Major figures such as Jordan Peterson and Andrew Tate have amassed hoards of male followers for espousing masculinism, sexism, or misogyny. Researchers have studied the two separately: Nesbitt-Larking (2022) describes Peterson as emblematic of a broader social and cultural context of reinvigorated masculinism, in which men are searching for role models from whom to take cues about masculinity and feminism. Verma and Khurana (2023) argue that Tate endangers healthy masculinity for men. Copland (2022) argues that his resonance amongst men reflects male anxieties and alienation in a period of economic crisis. I position both as a consequence of men's social, economic, and political alienation. Intentionally or inadvertently, both encourage Manosphere participants to sell fallacious, individualistic, sexist or misogynistic self-help and self-improvement advice. The following chapter problematizes self-help and its connection with the Manosphere.

Chapter Three: Self-help, Neoliberal Subjects, and Men

Preceding considerations of women and men's rights indicated that male self-help groups allowed men to identify their grievances with masculinity. Subsequent discussion of the Manosphere complex highlighted the trend towards a disciplined, masculinist individualism. This chapter connects the niche male self-help ideology of the past to neoliberal capitalism. After an account of the development of self-help in Western societies, attention focuses upon contemporary self-help discourses. In the latter context, self-help creates and maintains self-governing masculinist neoliberal subjects in the Manosphere. Against these developments, this chapter also considers the potentially progressive "Manconomy" as identified by Spencer Dukoff (2019).

Self-Help Development and Neoliberalism in Western Societies

The emergence of self-help in Western societies is not well documented, but it originates from Benjamin Franklin's autobiography in 1791 (Nehring et al., 2016), and the London-based Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge established in 1826 (Johansen, 2017). The latter was comprised of male middle-class English philanthropists who developed popular education literature for the growing reading public (Johansen, 2017). Their popular instruction was secular but it had a moral and civilising intent and often used history to reinforce a sense of order and divine providence (Johansen, 2017). Its self-help drew from parables, proverbs, and the personal anecdotes of its authors (Fielden, 1968).

Though the literature above represented the beginnings of self-help, the term itself was popularised in guides to working-class radicalism, such as George Jacob Holyoake's *Self-Help by the People* published in 1857 (Blum, 2020). Radical self-help was an attempt by the working-class to "grasp some of those cultural and material benefits which were denied to them" in the emergent industrial era (Blum, 2020, p. 14). But the genre also became a means for the middle-class to dismiss working-class demands for improved conditions, a transformation embodied by Samuel Smiles, the

most famous self-help author of the time (Blum, 2020). Originally published in 1859, his book *Self-Help* declared:

> …men must necessarily be the active agents of their own well-being and well-doing; and that, however much the wise and the good may owe to others, they themselves must in the very nature of things be their own best helpers. (Smiles, 1882, p. 26)

Smiles (1882) appealed to the emergent class of businessmen and industrialists, offering pleasing and uncritical accounts of their newfound success (Fielden, 1968). Smiles (2882) attributed their success to moral qualities, such as diligence and self-control (Fielden, 1968), and his stories about success against the odds encouraged upwardly mobile men to participate in enterprising self-help (Gerrard, 2017).

Smiles (1882) also proposed the notion that self-reliance and an improvement of one's rank and competencies would inevitably generate wealth; a liberal, middle-class notion which ratified then-popular narratives around social mobility (Fielden, 1968). In his emphasis on self-reliance, Smiles (1882) discouraged working-class people from depending on institutions for their well-being and happiness (Blum, 2020). Implicit here was the notion that individuals were to blame for their failure to generate wealth (Fielden, 1968). The striking resemblance between Smiles' (1882) self-help and contemporary discourses around individual responsibility, self-reliance, and autonomy suggest that these discourses are not unique to neoliberalism, but that capitalism has long encouraged individualism (Gerrard, 2017).

Apart from endorsing laissez-faire liberalism, self-help was mobilised by the alternative religious movements New Thought and Mind Cure (Woodstock, 2005). Between 1880-1910, their rhetoric proclaimed that individuals could harness the power of their mind, mould their thoughts to the intentions of God, and improve upon their health and happiness (Woodstock, 2005). This kind of self-help positioned science as subservient to religion, and used it to convey divine order (Woodstock, 2005). The belief that immaterial thoughts shaped material consequences seeped into culture and gained a particular credence after World War II, when it became articulated as "positive thinking" (Woodstock, 2005).

From the 1940s onwards, self-help began to appeal to science (Woodstock, 2005). This was in part due to the post-war professionalisation of the psychological disciplines. It enabled a "useful, socially sanctioned system of healing: diagnosis and treatment. Patients couched moral and spiritual problems in pseudoscientific terms" (Woodstock, 2005, p. 167). Self-help in the mid-twentieth century became enfolded within popularised psychotherapy and the self-inspection of past trauma. By the end of the century, the tension between these two strands was resolved such that the self-inspection of individual trauma worked alongside positive thinking (Woodstock, 2005). The post-war period also witnessed the proliferation of self-help organisations (Katz & Bender, 1976). They were small, voluntary groups dedicated to mutual aid and individual/social change in circumstances of social unrest and alienation (Katz & Bender, 1976). Special-purpose groups

mushroomed in the 1960s as seismic crises and social movements unfolded – the Vietnam War, the struggle for Civil Rights, the War on Poverty, and an anti-establishment youth counterculture (Katz & Bender, 1976). Broadly, there were five kinds of self-help groups. Some dealt with personal growth and self-fulfilment, and often articulated themselves as therapeutic. Others advocated for social causes, including professionals and institutions such as Welfare Rights Organisations. There were those who sought alternative ways of living and working, such as Gay Liberation; and others that provided refuge for people experiencing physical or mental hardship. Also evident were mixed groups that did not have a primary focus (Katz & Bender, 1976).

The proliferation of self-help groups and self-help therapies occurred alongside the youth counterculture's non-interest in conventional religion compared to spiritualism. For college-educated individuals especially, self-help appealed for its focus on personal happiness (Woodstock, 2005). New spiritualism, which located truth and morality in the "inner self", shifted popular self-help discourses away from their preoccupation with illness, crisis, and fantasies of being cured to those of personal maintenance and care for the self (Woodstock, 2005). Self-help became categorised as self-improvement (Woodstock, 2005). The discourses of this new self-improvement echoed earlier New Age self-help, which claimed that institutions impeded the development of the self and that individuals should prioritise self-care (Woodstock, 2005). The act of caring for the self was not solely an individualistic pursuit under a self-oriented spiritualism and liberalism. For marginalised and underserved communities, self-care was also a political undertaking[42] (Ward, 2015). However, the self-care that emerged tended to focus on individuals, self-change, and the privatisation of needs (Katz & Bender, 1976).

Self-help forms continued to mushroom in the 1970s, a phenomenon attributed to multiple and interrelated factors, such as: further industrialisation, the erosion of traditional family structures (Kurtz, 1990); the collective struggle for improved welfare and health outcomes (Ward, 2015). Research developments in medicine, psychology, and education established that individuals had important roles in their own education and socialisation (Katz & Bender, 1976). Radical feminist consciousness raising was informed by this self-helping and therapeutic climate, though its initiators distinguished their efforts from it (Rosenthall, 1984). Meanwhile, psychologists and psychotherapists became involved in do-it-yourself treatment publications. These self-helping programmes risked inaccurate self-diagnosis, the misunderstanding of their instructions, and no follow-up with professionals (Rosen, 1987). These were commercial endeavours unregulated by professional standards, and claims around their effectiveness were exaggerated (Rosen, 1987). Further, Hochschild (1994) observed that the popular advice literature published between 1970 and 1990 encouraged individuals to "manage their needs more" despite not needing one another less (p. 3). She wrote that

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[42] One central example is feminist health campaigning against the medicalisation of women's bodies. Women were encouraged to learn about their bodies as a way of becoming more empowered around their health and decision-making (Ward, 2015).

"from the vantage point of the early feminist movement, modern advice books reaffirm one ideal (equality) but undermine another (the development of emotionally rich social bonds)" (Hochschild, 1994, p. 3).

In the 1990s, the arrival of the Internet made self-help more accessible, interactive, conversational and multi-modal (Woodstock, 2005). In terms of sense-making, popular self-help ordained a "bullet-point" spiritualism which emphasised health, happiness, wellness, and interpersonal connection but obscured the material processes behind their attainment (Woodstock, 2005). Positive thinking and the notion that happiness and resilience could be both attained and increased if individuals worked on them consciously, remained central to self-help. This was an apolitical position, as it minimised the impact of institutional inequalities and negated the need for political action (Riley et al., 2019). In all, self-help drew upon a plethora of psychological frameworks, from positive psychology to cognitive behavioural therapy to Evolutionary Psychology (Riley et al., 2019).

Popular self-help discourses underwent another major shift between 2007-2008, as the global financial crisis ushered in an era of austerity and reduced economic opportunities (Nehring et al., 2016). Instead of emphasising far-reaching personal and professional success, self-help became about survival and "strategies for simply getting by, or surviving, or opting out of society's pressures all together" (Nehring et al., 2016, p. 4). It has been suggested that advice literature and other forms of "professional" guidance became more relevant as the traditional spheres of religion and the family became less so (Hochschild, 1994). There is also a connection to be made between the current self-help market and neoliberal capitalist societies which require their citizens to self-govern and treat human troubles as individual ones (Rimke, 2000).

Neoliberal Hegemony: Subjectivation, Self-help, Self-Governance

In *Neoliberal Culture* (2016), Jim McGuigan dissected the ideological and cultural features of neoliberalism and positioned them as the current iteration of global hegemonic capitalism. Neoliberalism was both a civilisational structure and a hegemonic ideology. To sustain itself, these ruling discourses operated at all levels of social life, from the philosophical and theoretical, to popular culture (McGuigan, 2016). Numerous scholars have studied neoliberal rationalities and discourse across cultural forms, such as: literature (Deckard & Shapiro, 2019; Huehls & Smith, 2017; Smith, 2015; Temelli & Bouchard, 2021); and the media (Leyva, 2020; Meyers, 2019; Phelan, 2014).

To consider how individuals adopt hegemonic neoliberalism, McGuigan used Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim's concept of individualization in combination with Michel Foucault's ideas about the fashioning of the self. Individualization was an institutionalised condition in which individuals were made increasingly responsible for themselves (McGuigan, 2016). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim did not regard this a consequence of neoliberalism. However, McGuigan maintained that the precarity inherent to neoliberal capitalism facilitates individualization. To this he added

Foucault's observation that economic rationalities, discourses around investment, costs, profits, and so on, were being applied to *social* relations such that individuals cultivated an entrepreneurial self.

Such self-fashioning was a part of Foucault's (1991) approach to government and governance. He argued that the government engaged in the "conduct of conduct" by dictating how subjects acted upon themselves and unto others (Rimke, 2000). Under this configuration, the individual was both an object of government intervention and its voluntary accomplice (Burchell, 1996). In neoliberalism, government justified its operations through an appeal to the "*artificially* arranged or contrived forms of the free, *entrepreneurial*, and *competitive* conduct of economic-rational individuals" (Burchell, 1996, p. 23-24, emphasis in original). Economic-rational individuals were encouraged to self-govern through techniques and discourses of self-transformation; a process called neoliberal subjectivation (Banet-Weiser & Bratich, 2019). Such subjectivation relies upon self-confidence, self-help, the expertise of so-called professionals and other pedagogical figures, plus a self-focused, self-managed entrepreneurial spirit (Banet-Weiser & Bratich, 2019).

The intersection between neoliberalism, self-governance and self-help discourse has been studied. Considering the relationship between the first two of them, Rimke (2000) argued that self-help literature relied upon notions of freedom, autonomy, choice, personal improvement, self-liberation, and enlightenment. Its hyper-individualism worked alongside the psychologisation of the self in everyday life, of which she writes:

> Rather than viewing individuals and individualism as the historical product of intersecting social processes and cultural discourses, proponents of the principle of individuality, which is crucial in self-help rhetoric, assume the social world to be the sum aggregation of atomised, autonomous, and self-governing individual persons. (2000, p. 62)

This logic is consistent with neoliberal ideology which positions individuals as entirely in control of themselves and their lives, undermining the sociality of being (Rimke, 2000). Rimke thus argued that self-help literature aided the "discursive production of 'self-helping' citizens" (p. 62). These citizens had to be self-reliant, reflexive, and flexible in accordance with the needs of market-led economies (Riley et al., 2019). Indeed, the connection between self-help and market economies is reflected in the prevalence of economic language within the genre (Riley et al., 2019). Its economic language and monetary metaphors encourage individuals to consider themselves as an "investment", and to become more "efficient" (Riley et al., 2019).

Individuals were not coerced into the project of self-improvement but encouraged out of a desire to better themselves. As Rimke observed, "the self-help genre presents individual 'development' and 'personal growth' as a free and ethical decision and as a 'natural' undertaking embraced by well-meaning citizens" (Rimke, 2000, p. 63). The ideology of individualism, couched in psychological language about self-realisation and self-actualisation, helped to construct the ideal subject position for late capitalist societies (Riley et al., 2019). That is to say, subjects who prioritised freedom, autonomy, choice, and internalised obligation and responsibilities. They attempted to

self-rule and become better, more productive, and so on (Riley et al., 2019). Self-help tended to obscure the broader institutional trends which encouraged individuals to transform – "inequalities around gender, race, class and sexuality; precarious working practices and tentative life narratives; and global geo-political uncertainty and its attendant risks and fear" (Riley et al., 2019, p. 6).

The neoliberal subjectivation explained above manifested variously in popular texts. Redden (2002) argued that the New Age milieu embodied a market logic consistent with privatist notions concerning self-care and personal responsibilities. He also found that the New Age ethos criticised social institutions as a hindrance to personal power. Philip (2009) considered self-help books about depression and argued that their instrumentalization of expertise authorised individuals to act in accordance with liberal values and with active citizenship. This threatened to impede debates about mental illnesses as it overlooked the social and political factors behind individuals experiencing depression (Philip, 2009). Lavrence and Lozanski (2014) analysed a Canadian athletic wear company and argued that the brand communicated a neoliberal hyper-independence which positioned health and wellness as a personal moral obligation. The brand conflated consumption and consumer choice with empowerment, and overall engaged in a project of healthism (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014).

In regard to self-care, self-help and the neoliberal governance of welfare and health, Ward (2015) connected these themes to common-sense ideas about individual choice, control, and empowerment. Because self-care exemplified the neoliberal economic imperative to position individuals as responsible for their welfare, this had the effect of "obscuring the collective responsibility of the state to provide adequately for its citizens" (Ward, 2015, p. 46). Related to this individualization, the self-help genre has been argued to cultivate a "thin" self, a "desocialised, atomised self, one struggling with purely personal challenges to accomplish purely individual objectives" (Nehring et al., 2016, p. 10).

Faced with the precarious material life of neoliberalism, the thin self and its improvement become the subject of continual attention (Nehring et al., 2016). Authors of self-help are implicated in the expansion of neoliberalism and self-governance as their advice purports to help users through personal troubles (Nehring et al., 2016). This is a financial endeavour, and self-help authors engage in "strategic self-promotion, self-branding, the creation of narrative authority through self-branding, and the pursuit of brand-based commercial success" (Nehring et al., 2016, p. 5).

Masculinity and Self-Help

Thus far, I have outlined the emergence of self-help in Western societies and connected the genre to neoliberalism. This section connects self-help and masculinity. The connection began with Samuel Smiles' self-help directed towards aspirational men, although this was subsequently inverted as the genre became heavily feminised and concerned with moulding feminine subjectivities (Riley et al., 2019). Following a brief description of the pathologisation of the feminine in self-help, the following

pages elaborate upon male self-help of the pre-Internet men's movements and contemporary online expressions.

Self-help directed towards women represented femininity as pathological, and reiterated long-held cultural beliefs that women were hysterical or in need of intervention (Riley et al., 2019). Of course, all self-help was predicated on the notion of a flawed individual, but women's self-help represented the feminine as a pathology to be tamed (Riley et al., 2019). It encouraged women to instead adopt traits associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as competitiveness and autonomy (Riley et al., 2019; Hochschild, 1994). But encouraging women to emulate men to gain access to respect and power was useless – it simply meant women were being taught to be "cooler", to have fewer needs, while men were not taught to be warmer (Hochschild, 1994). Instead of humanising men, self-help contributed to women being capitalised upon (Hochschild, 1994). And yet, this self-help was "feminist" in its articulation. It advanced the notion that women were equal to men but paired feminism with a commercial spirit, whereby capitalism was displaced onto intimate life. In Hochschild's (1994) words:

> the ascetic self-discipline which the early capitalist applied to his bank account, the late twentieth-century woman applies to her appetite, her body, her love. The devotion to a 'calling' which the early capitalist applied to earning money, the latter-day woman applies to 'having it all'. (p. 13)

In relation to self-help and men, the topic of sexual difference became a particular preoccupation of self-help during the last two decades of the twentieth century as Evolutionary Psychology (EP) and its narratives of natural differences between women and men were popularised. These narratives filtered into popular psychology and self-help, with texts such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (Cameron, 2007; Lancaster, 2006). This kind of self-help dealt less with the reasons behind the alleged differences between women and men, and more with the navigation of presumed sexual differences. Advice about bridging the gap between the sexes became a multimedia industry (Cameron, 2007). It acknowledged the feminist scepticism towards its notion of biological differences, and represented itself as challenging feminist orthodoxy and political correctness (Cameron, 2007).

In comparison to self-help sub-genres which were centred on women and the differences between women and men, men's self-help literature appeared limited. Indeed, research indicated that men's lower rate of participation in self-help and with professional guidance resulted from adherence to masculine norms (Berger et al., 2012; Seymour-Smith, 2008; Worthley et al., 2017). That said, self-help efforts were evident in the pre-Internet men's liberation and men's rights movements, from consciousness raising efforts to pick-up artistry. Relatedly, there was the short-lived mythopoetic approach instigated by Robert Bly in 1982. Here, feminism was condemned for inducing a male crisis in confidence by cutting men off from feelings and preventing them from being spiritually alive. In response, men needed to secure a sense of manhood. There was also Victor Seidler's *Man Enough:*

Embodying Masculinities, published in 1997. This self-help book claimed that masculinity was compromised under modern gender relations. Men were allegedly a unified group with shared experiences and interests, and victims of women's newly gained confidence and powers. It claimed that feminism was "another way of making men feel bad about themselves" (Seidler, 1997, p. 17).

Men's self-help mentioned above dealt with the notion of men being imperilled by feminism and changed gender relations. This preoccupation continues in the Manosphere, as its underpinning Red Pill philosophy ordains that the world is increasingly incomprehensible to men. Further, there is a palpable ontological insecurity and existential anxiety amongst Manosphere participants (Bujalka et al., 2020). This is seen to arise from the "sense that expectations or promised futures (often predicated on gendered assumptions) have been broken or undermined (perhaps through divorce or a man's inability to secure employment) and that, accordingly, masculinity is in crisis or under threat" (Bujalka et al., 2020, p. 3). To be clear, the insecurity felt by these men is real, but their discontents are again more attributable to capitalism than to feminism, women's social progress, and changed gender relations. Similar to what the radical feminist Carol Hanisch wrote of men's liberation discourse and male discontents in the late twentieth century, Bujalka et al. (2020) write that neoliberal capitalism facilitates:

> downward mobility, inflation, wage cuts, wage stagnation, underemployment, overwork and burnout, housing insecurity, the growing cost of education as well as the demand for increasingly skilled workers, increasing precarity and the outsourcing of labour, the privatization of health services, and the atomization of the individual who is compelled to spend increasing periods of time isolated and online. (p. 4)

In essence, the Manosphere hosts disaffected, insecure, and anxious men who do not feel as privileged as they are told they are. In seeking an answer as to why this discrepancy exists, women tend to be blamed (Bujalka et al., 2020; Ging, 2019). Though certain communities are nihilist and resist the possibilities of personal and societal change, other parts of the Manosphere adopt a self-improvement and motivational function. This is especially observed in the pick-up artistry community (Dafaure, 2022). The Manosphere provides "young men a tool for self-help, both as a community of like-minded and supportive individuals, and as a life philosophy designed to help make sense of a complex world" (Dafaure, 2022, p. 244). However, the self-help and self-improvement of Manosphere thought leaders obscures the broader system of capitalism (Bujalka et al., 2020). Further, the neoliberal precept of self-help worryingly overlaps with antifeminism, sexism, and misogyny.

Self-Help Podcasts in the Manosphere

In recent years, there has been an observed uptake in Manosphere-associated self-help podcasting. The term itself is a portmanteau of the words "iPod" and "broadcasting," and was coined by the journalist Ben Hammersley in 2004 to describe an emergent form of downloadable audio programmes (BBC, n.d.). Podcasting began the year prior, and enabled users to subscribe to audio content and

download files from the Internet. More pressingly, the format meant that anybody could be a broadcaster (Pinkston Institute, 2021). By 2005, thousands of free podcasts were being released on Apple iTunes, but it was in 2014 that the medium came to public prominence. This was attributed to the investigative podcast *Serial*, the first season of which re-examined the cold case of a murdered Maryland teenager and her convicted partner. It was the first podcast to achieve five million downloads and in the five years following its release, the number of monthly podcast listeners in the US doubled to 90 million listeners (Pinkston Institute, 2021). In 2021, Edison Research and Triton Digital found that of the US population aged above 12-years-old, 28 per cent were weekly podcast listeners, and 62 per cent were weekly online audio listeners (Edison Research, 2021). Just over half of the podcast listeners were white, though they were even across age, gender, and educational background (Pinkston Institute, 2021).

Though the US has the highest number of podcast listeners, podcasting is an international phenomenon. There are over five million podcasts in the world, more than 70 million episodes and 150 languages between them (Shewale, 2023). As of 2023, there are around 464 million listeners across the globe (Shewale, 2023). Countries where podcasts are popular include Sweden, where 47% of people claim to have listened to a podcast in 2022, and Australia, where 91% of the population above the age of 12 knew about podcasts (Shewale, 2023). Chile, Argentina, Peru, and China are also experiencing high growth in their podcast industries (Shewale, 2023).

As of 2023, the most popular podcast in the world is *The Joe Rogan Experience* hosted on Spotify. It claims the number one listenership in the US, UK, and Australia (Shewale, 2023). The podcast follows Joe Rogan in "neutral" conversation with people across the political spectrum, though he tends to pedal libertarian values, and right-wing humour and ideologies (Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2022). His podcast has attracted a demographic of politically disparate men who feel unrepresented by mainstream politics and thus covet his perceived transgression of partisan discussion (Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2022). Rogan's feigned neutrality and naiveté encourages "edgy, offensive and irresponsible theories that appeal to his audience's self-styled suspicion of authority" (Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2022, para. 14).

The continued growth of podcasts is, in part, attributable to the low cost of their production. A microphone, software to record content, and a graphic for an online thumbnail are its core requirements, and as such, podcasts are plentiful (Pinkston Institute, 2021). Their popularity has led to companies purchasing famous podcasts for advertising purposes. Their institutionalisation is expected to introduce a certain blanket quality to the genre, though it will not prevent niche podcasts from being created (Pinkston Institute, 2021). Indeed, there is a smattering of both established and niche Manosphere self-help contributions in this environment, which will be briefly outlined.

Walter Weekes and Myron Gaines

Founded in 2020 by the Miami-based business partners Walter Weekes and Myron Gaines, *Fresh and Fit* is a fitness and self-improvement service which claims to transform men from "simps[43] to pimps" (Freshandfit, n.d.). The platform invokes the Red Pill to sell men "the truth" about dating, women, and finance. The *Fresh and Fit* podcast, also launched in 2020, has 1.4 million subscribers as of October 2023. Its episodes feature the pair in discussion with guests. It gained traction upon the introduction of its "After-hours" episodes, which feature men debating women on topics such as patriarchal oppression. Its other guests have included Manosphere thought leaders Rollo Tomassi and Andrew Tate. Independent of the podcast, Weekes offers one-on-one coaching sessions to help men with dating, building Instagram profiles, attracting "girls", like-minded peers, potential clients, and networks (FreshPrinceCEO, n.d.).

Kevin Samuels

Kevin Samuels was an American Internet personality and image consultant who rose to prominence in 2020 for his YouTube and Instagram advice and discussions about modern relationships. The YouTube channel accumulated 1.4 million subscribers and his Instagram 1.2 million followers. Samuels favoured "traditional" gender roles in which men retained dominance, and he often criticised women for having unrealistic standards for the men they wanted to attract. (He would, for instance, scrutinise a woman's body and her economic situation, and then get her to rate her own "sexual marketplace value".) Samuels was identified as part of the Black Manosphere, in which Black men wield broader Manosphere ideologies around the Red Pill, male victimisation, and antifeminism. Malaise is directed towards Black women (and men) who transgress men's expectations (Fountain Jr., 2020). Samuels' uncritical censures of low marriage rates and high birth rates outside of marriage, and the Black Manosphere's demonising of Black women through slurs and narratives of dysfunctionality perpetuated misogynoir[44]. Samuels died in May 2022.

Rollo Tomassi

Rollo Tomassi was a long-time moderator and contributor to the Internet forum *SoSuave*, which hosts 88,000 members and 178,000 threads as of October 2023 (https://www.sosuave.net/forum/). Tomassi founded his blog *The Rational Male* in 2011 to compile the best of his contributions about "intergender issues" from *SoSuave* (Tomassi, 2011). His posts incorporate a litany of Manosphere concerns: the Red Pill, the Matrix, relationship game, sexual marketplace value, and so on. He exhibits a virulent antifeminism, claiming that social relations are gynocentric and that feminism

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[43] The term "simp" is an informal and often derogatory descriptor of a man who is submissive to a woman, or who pays a great deal of attention or deference towards a woman he is interested in.
[44] An anti-Black and racist misogyny directed towards Black women. The term was coined by Moya Bailey and Trudy in 2008.

directs women to "*never do **anything** for the express pleasure of a man*" (Tomassi, 2020, emphasis in original). It is unclear how many followers his blog has, but his YouTube channel of the same name attracted 217,000 subscribers as of October 2023. His podcast, also on YouTube, features hours-long episodes of Tomassi discussing modern gender and sexual relations.

Self-Help in the "Manconomy"

In the Manosphere, the likes of Kevin Samuels, Myrion Weekes, Myrion Gaines, and Rollo Tomassi sell the notion of becoming "Alpha men", alongside anti-women, homophobic, and transphobic ideas (Onibada, 2022). Part of their appeal to their respective audiences is their perceived transgression of the mainstream, despite normative gender roles and violence towards women being the cultural norm (Onibada, 2022). Their beliefs have been challenged, and subject to derision and mockery online. On TikTok, it even became a trend for women to parody Alpha male podcasters (Sung, 2022). However, derision does not remove the fact that there is a commercially viable audience for their content.

In direct opposition to the Manosphere lies what Spencer Dukoff (2019) terms the "Manconomy". In 2019, he observed a mushrooming of content aimed at making men better colleagues, friends, partners, and fathers. Hesitant about the commercialisation of male insecurities and the co-option of social causes such as feminism, Dukoff (2019) described this Manconomy as selling "wokeness and intentionality, self-awareness and feminism" (para. 1). Upon further inspection, he posited that the Manconomy was a response to the continued erosion of traditional gender relations, transformations in sexual politics, and hard-won advancements in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer rights. These developments complicated the perception and practice of masculinity. Men were evidently seeking positive self-transformation, and were being sold instructional materials, online groups, and products (Dukoff, 2019; Kyparissiadis & Skoulas, 2021).

Unlike the Manosphere, the Manconomy presents as profeminist and considers masculinity through the cultural perspectives of gender mainstreaming, gender equality, and the defence of marginalised groups (Kyparissiadis & Skoulas, 2021). Its popular figures and platforms include the actor and new masculinity speaker Terry Crews, the actor Dax Shepard, his podcast *Armchair Expert*, the blogs *Good Men Project* and *A Call to Men*, and the actor Justin Baldoni and his talk show *Man Enough*. The Manconomy sentiment can be partly gleaned from Baldoni's speech at the TEDWomen Conference in December 2017, in which he sought to redefine a normative masculinity which rendered men unwilling to be vulnerable. Baldoni put the onus on men to address their privilege and to reconsider what it meant to be strong, brave, and tough: "are you brave enough to be vulnerable? To reach out to another man when you need help? To dive headfirst into your shame? Are you strong enough to be sensitive?" (Baldoni, 2017, 13:03). He rearticulated what strength could mean, though he did not challenge the requirement made of men to "be strong". His criticisms of mainstream masculinity echoed pre-Internet men's liberation discourse. Unlike that discourse, he did not suggest

that men's problems with masculinity were equal to those of women under patriarchy. Rather, he positioned the harm of masculinity as the "surface here, because the deeper we go, the uglier it gets" (Baldoni, 2017, 15:27).

Though implicated in the expansion of neoliberal self-help and its preying upon male insecurities, the Manconomy has become a potentially progressive space for men to discuss "what it means to be a man" (Dukoff, 2019, para. 7). Its profeminist slant theoretically offers a constructive understanding of men and positive masculinities. If it retains the understanding that women and men's engagement with patriarchy are significantly different, and conducts an analysis of race and class in addition to its analysis of masculinity, it *may* redress restrictive masculinities. However, I am sceptical of this because the Manconomy still prioritises men's individual difficulties with masculinity and being men, over men's institutional and individual facilitation of patriarchy. Indeed, that Dukoff (2019) positions the purveyor of right-wing ideologies, Joe Rogan, as part of the Manconomy[45] reflects the potential thinness of its "progressivity".

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[45] This is because his podcast guests provide a "hodge podge" navigation of masculinity (Dukoff, 2019).

Chapter Four: Jack Denmo and Masculinist Self-Help Discourse

Preceding analysis established neoliberal self-help's connection with the Manosphere and Manconomy. It is within this context that the podcast *Good Bro Bad Bro* (GBBB) has emerged to offer men self-improvement advice. This chapter considers its creator, Jack Denmo, his media ecology, and the masculinist self-help discourse in GBBB.

Jack Denmo Biography

Jack Denmo, whose full name is Jack Densmore, was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1994. Little is known about the Densmore family aside from his mother also having a daughter and being a former teacher. In terms of schooling and profession, Denmo has a bachelor's degree in marketing from Mohawk College, in Canada. Between 2013 and 2017, he is said to have worked variously as a labourer, driller, firefighter, factory worker, and bartender. In mid-2017, Denmo created his first and self-titled YouTube channel, JackDenmo, through which he and his friends posted pranks, social experiments, pick-up lines, and interviews with college students on campus about sex-related topics. The channel accumulated 850,000 followers over its 230 videos (JackDenmo, n.d.). From there, Denmo eventually transformed into a self-described comedian, men's dating expert, and "content creator turned mentor" based in Toronto, Canada (Denmo, n.d.). His online presence consists of several YouTube channels, a Discord server, Facebook and Instagram profiles, plus a personal website through which he offers paid mentorship.

The Denmo Media Ecology

Denmo's first YouTube account, JackDenmo, described itself as a "man and his friends making funny videos" (JackDenmo, n.d.). Its content began with street interviews of university students, and the first video to receive 100,000 views was titled "Asking Girls Six Pack or Dad Bod?" (JackDenmo, 2017). Denmo filmed around Hess College campus at night, asking women whether they preferred men to have six-pack abs or the untoned "dad bod" (JackDenmo, 2017). The women were implied to be

drunk as the video described itself as "drunk people, dumb questions". Denmo edited in visual effects and clips that served as his reaction to the answers. When one interviewee answered that she preferred to focus on the heart of a person and not their body, Denmo inserted a movie clip of a man screaming "bullshit" (JackDenmo, 2017). Most of the interviewees preferred six-pack abs and though Denmo did not present an explicit opinion on this, it was implied that he thought men were subject to this beauty standard. The comments mocked the women involved or made unsubstantiated claims about their preferences, such as: "Dad bods are popular because it's easy to control a guy who's less attractive than you" (BulkBrogan, 2018). Denmo himself liked a comment that criticised one interviewee for having "a mom bod" with a small chest.

On top of the filming and posting of likely inebriated women, there was arguably a contemptible dynamic to Denmo making himself appear unthreatening, impartial, and even friendly in order to solicit answers from women. At the same time, he facilitated a comment section that reiterated Manosphere discourses of female hypocrisy, shallowness, and tough standards for men. But the "dad bod" video received over 460,000 views, and it led to similar videos, such as "Hot Girls on BIG D*CK or BIG WALLET?". In addition to interviews, Denmo posted pranks. He reportedly filmed across universities in Canada and the US, and complaints about disruptive behaviour during filming led him to be banned from Western University in Ontario, Canada in late 2019 (Allen, 2019). The YouTube channel last posted in mid-2022 as Denmo shifted to focus on several other channels.

From June 2020 to mid-2022, Denmo created the YouTube channel Denmo Social, which accumulated 21,000 subscribers and posted videos about male dating strategies, pickup, loneliness and gender. In June 2020, he also created the channel FAWKBOYS for his and his friends' pranks and behind the scenes content. By the end of 2020, Denmo had accumulated 4.5 million monthly views across his YouTube channels and established a dedicated fan base (BBTV, 2020). He was signed as a content partner with the media technology company BBTV in November that year (BBTV, 2020). In September 2021, Denmo created the Jack Denmo Podcast hosted on YouTube and Spotify. With just under 6,000 subscribers on YouTube, the podcast described itself as presenting "comedy, education and high-level achievers". Episodes featured Denmo chatting with invited guests about their work, life, and views (jackdenmopodcast9456, n.d.). He created the podcast because "young men need help and guidance, but they need it from somebody young" (jackdenmopodcast9456, 2021, 1:36-1:40). Denmo was self-admittedly inspired by the hugely successful podcast *The Joe Rogan Experience* and likewise intended to interview a breadth of successful guests (jackdenmopodcast9456, 2021). The inspiration indicated Denmo's attempt to appeal to a large and politically disparate audience of young men, like Joe Rogan. In one episode, he sat with Maxime Bernier, a Canadian politician and founder of the right-wing populist People's Party of Canada to discuss moving forward from "Shmovid"[46]. In another, Denmo sat with the co-founder and CEO of Red Light Holland, a recreational magic

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[46] A reduplication of "COVID". In this context, its use indicates derision, sarcasm, or skepticism towards the pandemic response.

mushrooms supplier based in the Netherlands, to discuss drugs, being a CEO, online cancel culture, and making mushrooms legal in Canada.

In February 2022, Denmo created the broader, self-improvement focused YouTube channel Denmosocial, through which he posts on money making, entrepreneurship, getting and "picking up college girls," and pranks. It has over 250 videos and 161,000 followers. The channel locates itself within the Manosphere, stating that it is "Helping young men drastically improve their lives. Bringing comedy to the red pill, black pill, blue pill and manosphere," (Denmosocial, n.d.). Moreover, its purpose is to "make you laugh and inspire you to be social, talk to strangers, and chase your dreams" (Denmosocial, n.d.). The YouTube channel also links to Denmo's coaching courses which are segmented into three main streams: dating coaching about approaching women, attracting, getting a girlfriend, and repairing a relationship. Also included is YouTube coaching about monetising content, scaling a platform, and creating traffic for a business. There is also general coaching addressing anxiety, confidence, mindset, productivity, and public speaking. The one-on-one mentorship is priced at $1997 for four 60-minute sessions with Denmo, as of November 2023 (Denmo.Social, n.d.).

Good Bro Bad Bro **(GBBB)**

In December 2021, Denmo created GBBB, hosted on YouTube and Spotify. On YouTube, the podcast hosted 9,000 subscribers[47] and 24 episodes. It described itself as:

> Improving your confidence. Improving your lifestyle. Building status and creating social circles. Getting higher quality girls. Getting multiple girls. Becoming high value. Starting a business. Working on yourself instead of hating on women. Are you a good bro or a bad bro? Welcome to the brotherhood. (GoodBroBadBro, n.d.)

Its episodes featured Denmo and an invited guest discussing men's self-improvement and contemporary dating relations between women and men. In one episode, Denmo shared that he intentionally titled episodes around "getting a girlfriend", or other aspects of dating, though the content itself sometimes de-emphasised the importance of a romantic relationship. The priority was to encourage men to improve upon themselves. Other titles evoked the Manosphere, evidently seeking to attract its participants, such as *How Tinder Blackpilled an ENTIRE Generation of Men* (GBBB, 2022e). There was also an indication of Denmo's disagreement with the Manosphere's Incels – as with the episode titled, *Why Some HATE Women & How To Stop! (INCELS)*. And yet, despite its description encouraging men to work on themselves rather than hating on women, and his intervention against Incels, GBBB garnered online controversy in March 2022, after Denmo asked whether women "actually had hobbies" (Condon, 2022). Other snippets of Denmo's beliefs and advice from the show, such as the importance of women keeping their bodies "in check" and the value of women who cooked, were also scrutinised. Denmo has since deleted the controversial episode, and

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[47] This is the most niche of Denmo's channels. In an episode of GBBB he shared that he did not cross-promote the podcast through his popular channels, instead wanting to see how it grew "organically".

the podcast was last posted in October 2022.

        The ambivalence of GBBB is what characterises the podcast. Evidently, Denmo is a part of a phenomenon identified in the previous chapter, male podcasters pedalling self-help and self-improvement advice to Manosphere participants. However, Denmo's controversial remarks about women lacking hobbies, while mildly sexist and flippant towards women's interests, does not contain the vitriol of the Manosphere. Nor does GBBB position itself as part of the Manosphere complex, though episodes reveal that Denmo uses the Red Pill as a metaphor for awakening men to the alleged Blue Pill lies around contemporary gender and dating relations.

Masculinist and Neoliberal Discourse in GBBB

I now proceed to explicate the masculinist neoliberal self-help discourses in seven selected episodes of GBBB. The episodes discussed focus on "how" particular configurations of heterosexual dating relations have affected men, and suggest "how to" address these relations. Episodes were primarily between 60 and 75 minutes long, and all feature Denmo in conversation with a different guest. They were primarily North American, men's dating coaches, and social media influencers, two of whom were women. Episodes are presented in the same chronological order as their release on YouTube, sectioned by subheadings (see Appendix). Each subheading is closely named after the episode being analysed. In relation to extracts, I have shortened quotes to remove repetition, filler words ("like", "you know?", "right?"), tangential remarks, and interjections ("yeah", "exactly") from conversation partners.

1. How to Know a Girl is Girlfriend Material

In the episode *How to Know a Girl is Girlfriend Material (Green Flags)!*, Denmo and Hunter Lewis identify their ten "green flags[48] in high quality women" (GBBB, 2022a). Lewis is a YouTuber and men's dating coach. He created the dating and men's lifestyle channel WingManPlus, and the personal travel channel HunterxLewis, both with over 20,000 followers. He and Denmo present the following as green flags in women[49]: being clean/tidy, never being on the phone, not posting on Instagram, nurturing feminine careers, exercising regularly, having a strong relationship with her family, having family members outside of the country, not needing validation from clubbing, losing track of time when together, and being unaware of "drama" and the news. Their intention is to advise men on the traits of a high quality woman. Denmo advances the discourse of male disadvantage in contemporary gender relations, alleging that "the basis of being a good, high-quality girl is just not having any red flags. That kind of shows how desperate guys are" (GBBBa, 2022a, 2:59). In contrast, he claims men

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[48] Positive attitudes or behaviours.
[49] Though the episode description disclaims that most of these green flags are also applicable to men, it does not clarify which ones, and the conversation focuses primarily on women's alleged behaviour.

must have "not only no red flags, but a fuck ton of green flags" (GBBBa, 2022a, 3:14). Using the language of the markets, he claims this results in a "big difference in value exchange" (GBBB, 2022a, 3:17).

The episode was released shortly after Denmo received feminist criticism and mockery online. Denmo references his alleged "cancelling"[50], and this informs his reflexive pre-empting of "flack" for certain comments. For example, after presenting being clean as the first green flag in women he claims, "you're gonna think [...], 'wow, Jack, you're basically reducing an entire woman's value into just cleaning up, and tidying up, and keeping a clean house' [...]. How dare I?" (GBBB, 2022a, 3:56). He clarifies that tidiness is expected of all individuals. However, his personal preference segues into an expectation being made primarily of women. Denmo says he wants a woman to "take care of [a man's] shit, as if it's hers" (GBBB, 2022a, 5:28). Lewis elaborates, "she'll empty all your fridge out, and clean up all the stains that you got in there, the microwave too" (GBBB, 2022a, 5:31). Denmo adds that, "there's an old saying, 'leave a place better than you found it'. A high quality girl will do that" (GBBB, 2022a, 5:35). In addition, Denmo alleges that a woman's willingness to clean is a metric for her interest in the relationship. He says, "if she doesn't fuck with you, she won't [...] clean up for you, she won't tidy your stuff up" (GBBB, 2022a, 5:44). The conversation culminates in the implication that it is primarily women's role to provide domestic and care-related labour. In Denmo's words:

> If she can take care of herself, she can take care of you. And, the household, if you guys do work out in the future, will be nice and kept. The last thing you want to do is date a chick and then everything's messy and dirty. (GBBB, 2022a, 6:18)

In response, Lewis shares an anecdote of a tidy male friend struggling with his girlfriend's untidiness. Denmo responds, "the only reason it got that far is because the guy green lit it from the start. [...]. It's all men's fault. Everything is men's fault. If a girl misbehaves, whatever, it's your fault" (GBBB, 2022a, 7:05). This statement is an example of dominative paternalism. It infantilises women as "girls"[51] who "misbehave", thus positioning men (note, not "boys") as administrators of women's admonishment and discipline.

Green flags also include that a woman is never on her phone, and never posts on Instagram. For Denmo, "if a girl [is] on her phone all the time, it's usually not because she's working or doing something urgent, it's because she has a low attention span, and she can be constantly stimulated by her phone" (GBBB, 2022a, 9:20). In addition, "never being on the phone basically goes back to discipline. She's disciplined, she understands that it's bad, there's a responsible amount of time to use it" (GBBB, 2022a, 10:53). He claims that phone usage makes a woman harder to please:

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[50] Internet slang for losing support, usually in reference to a prominent public figure or an idea. I would call Denmo's experience a controversy rather than a "cancelling". The latter implies the podcast to have had a greater public prominence than it did.
[51] To the point of infantilising language, Denmo refers to women as "chicks" twelve times, and "baby girl" eight times during the episode.

it's really hard to make a chick laugh that's seen everything, you know? It's really hard to compete with a girl's attention when she has a group chat from other girls, she has dudes constantly hitting her up. Basically, she's doing you a favour [by] saying, "hey, I'm a lot harder to please and [to have] focused on you than other girls would be". (GBBB, 2022a, 12:52)

In contrast, if Denmo feels the urge to check his phone while he is with a woman, "that girl isn't really worth your attention, is she?" The notion that, perhaps, he himself is not funny or not worth her attention does not appear as a possibility (GBBB, 2022a, 55:26). He warns that, "a lot of women out there are very boring, one-dimensional, [...] very predictable, you just don't like being around [them]" (GBBB, 2022a, 55:48). He advises men to find partners that interest them.

Denmo alleges that both women and men want social media validation through likes, comments, and direct messages from the opposite sex. He claims it is a green flag when a woman "doesn't post on Instagram [...] for validation" (GBBB, 2022a, 13:30). Lewis adds that, "if it's your girl, and she's posting on IG, and it's for the purpose of validation, why is she seeking validation from other people, specifically men?" (GBBB, 2022a, 14:52). Denmo clarifies that:

> If some girl is always posting pictures of cactus [*sic*], KFC, Chick-fil-A, or whatever, cool. But it would be a better flag, to me, if instead, she just did that but she didn't have to constantly share it with others, how about she just shows me the cactus? (GBBB, 2022a, 16:58)

In addition, he legitimates posting content as part of a business or for "motivational purposes", but censures "posting thirst trap photos all the time" (GBBB, 2022a, 17:31). Thirst[52] traps are content inviting "the viewer to gaze upon the subject, often in sexual, but almost always affective, ways" (Maddox, 2022, p. 17). Denmo thus censures women who post sexual images of themselves, or posts to Instagram in general. He claims this is because posting reflects "looking for attention, and that's not healthy, and it basically shows that there's a little void that's trying to be filled" (GBBB, 2022a, 17:31). He acknowledges that "this is all hypothetical". In all, the conversation implies that Denmo and Lewis would prefer a woman to be "validated" through her romantic male partner alone. Both of them construe the act of women posting on Instagram as the soliciting of male attention[53]. It culminates in the conjecture that women who do not seek social media attention are more stable. In Denmo's words, by women not posting:

> It's basically saying 'hey, I need less love than the normal person, which means my internal issues are more sorted out'. Which is good, because you want emotional stability when you date a girl. (GBBB, 2022a, 20:19)

His implicit differentiation between women who "need less love" and those who need more renders love a resource to be rationed.

Denmo considers women having a "nurturing, feminine job" as a green flag. The examples of jobs he provides are nursing, teaching, and doctoring. He claims:

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[52] The term "thirst" is Internet slang for over-eagerness, especially sexual over-eagerness (Maddox, 2022).
[53] Similarly, the Manosphere podcaster Myron Gaines claims that a woman having an Instagram account while in a romantic relationship is an act of cheating on her partner.

> We love our feminine women, nothing better than a woman that not only is very smart, intelligent, good-looking, but she plays into her natural advantages over men, which is being more emotional, being able to [be] more nurturing to people, especially children[54]. (GBBB, 2022a, 22:37)

He continues:

> last thing you want is a girl that's really feminine, but she goes into some fucking masculine ass field, like she goes into the trades where dudes are swearing, talking shit all day, she's out there in the sun working 15 to 16 hours days, like that's not the vibe that you want when you are looking for a girl to date. Right? The corporate world is cutthroat [...], guys fuck each other over all the time because they're looking at that bottom line [...]. So, when a woman does that as her job, if she's willing to fuck over a dude in the office, she's probably willing to be like that in a relationship. (GBBB, 2022a, 22:58)

In relation to the comment about women in corporate professions, Lewis claims to know some "killer queens" who are better at being cutthroat than men. Denmo responds that this is because men are "meant to treat women differently [...], be nice to them. [...] women will take advantage of that to an extent, because they know they can get away with more shit because they're women" (GBBB, 2022a, 24:09). Men are implied to have made the world easier for women, at men's cost.

Denmo's discourse about women's innate feminine characteristics, propensities for empathy, nurturing, and care-related labour, and his repulsion towards women in the "masculine" trade and corporate professions are sexist. They recall the patriarchal ideology that women are biologically geared to motherhood. He explicitly connects femininity to motherhood: "you want a girl that doubles down on, you know, those feminine qualities [...], that's what's going to end up being a good mom" (GBBB, 2022a, 24:26).

For Denmo and Lewis, it is a green flag when women have family overseas, by which they mean outside of North America. For Lewis, this is because dating a partner from a different national and cultural background broadens one's cultural experiences and perspectives[55]. For Denmo, it is because such women are more traditionally feminine, grateful, humble, and less sexually experienced. He says, "first-world countries, we have it really good here, and the fact that we've had it so good is kind of a double-edged sword, because it's made us soft, it's made us weak" (GBBB, 2022a, 40:09). Whereas, "people from other countries, they don't have as many options. [They're] very grateful, they have perspective, they're humble" (GBBB, 2022a, 43:49). In addition, Denmo claims that the white, European women he has dated were all "way more based[56], bro, way more simple [...], low kill counts[57], never on their phone, just very polite, love to cook, love to bake" (GBBB, 2022a, 42:13).

Lastly, Denmo and Lewis laud women being unaware of drama[58] and the news. In Lewis'

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[54] Denmo adds that "fields where there's [...] empathy, nurturing, taking care of people? Dominated by women" (GBBB, 2022a, 26:25). Though he is correct that care-related professions are dominated by women, this has to do with the expansion of the health system, women's increased access into the health profession, and an increased proportion of women in clinical and allied support roles (Shannon et al., 2019).

[55] He describes it as a "really cool cultural experience" which "challenges you and forces you outside your comfort zones" (GBBB, 2022a, 41:43).

[56] Internet slang for someone being themselves, being unconcerned about what others think, or the opposite of cringe.

[57] Internet slang for the number of people an individual has had sex with.

[58] By which they mean celebrity drama or the interpersonal drama of people in their everyday lives, as gleaned from their examples being the Kardashians and "Susie down the street".

words, it is a green flag when women do not know "every little social justice in the entire world going on right now [...] I'm not trying to hear about this all day, every day" (GBBB, 2022a, 1:01:26). Though Denmo and Lewis clarify that "there is a threshold" of awareness to be met, both implicitly connect women's knowledge about current affairs to unfun and nagging. Denmo then expresses the neoliberal discourse that individuals should focus on their individual self-improvement, rather than political happenings, let alone political activism. He says:

> …how much time do we waste thinking about shit that'll never affect us? For every headline about somebody that got shot, what about reading a fucking book about being healthier? What about reading a book about some crazy guy that overcame some incredible challenge, or climbed a mountain? (GBBB, 2022a, 1:02:37).

Troubling this perspective slightly, Lewis claims that:

> It's such a tough one because you want to be, like, aware, you want to have a worldview, you want to care about stuff, you want to be passionate right? It's so easy to go too far with it, where it's like you don't even have your own personal identity anymore. (GBBB, 2022a, 1:04:10)

The statement is individualistic and privileged. To position "news" and "social justice issues" as subjects one feels obligated to have an opinion on, rather than events with a material impact on everyday life, is not universally the case for men. It advances the neoliberal discourse that individuals must prioritise themselves, and adds that going "too far" with news erodes personal identity.

Denmo concludes the episode with an appeal to women who embody the green flags: "take pride in it, man. The feminists hate it when, you know, a woman is in a nurturing, feminine job, doesn't post on Instagram, is fit, cleans up, isn't fat, doesn't need validation" (GBBB, 2022a, 1:09:42). To which Lewis invokes the "ugly feminist" stereotype and jokes, "there's a reason there aren't any absolute rockets[59] duetting our TikToks" (GBBB, 2022a, 1:09:54). Denmo adds, "there's a lot of brutal looking feminists on there" (GBBB, 2022a, 1:10:10). Given that the episode was released shortly after his online controversy amongst feminists, I suspect these comments were intended to bait a feminist response. This tactic, called "rage bait", uses offensive content to prompt social media attention and engagement.

2. How to Stop Low Value Behaviour in Men

In *How to Stop Love Value Behaviour in Men w/ @CaseyZander* (2022b), Denmo and Casey Zander discuss the latter's business journey, the entrepreneurial spirit, and what constitutes "low value" behaviour in men. Zander is a YouTuber and the founder of HEADMAN, a male coaching service focused on "revitalising masculinity". He implies that the service helps men to establish the "masculine frame", the beliefs by which men live their lives (GBBB, 2022b, 53:42). He and Denmo articulate neoliberal discourses about individual responsibility, which Zander relates to the alleged male biological imperative of continuing their genetic lineage. Denmo asserts that:

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[59] Slang for an attractive woman.

the underlying theme [...] is that everything is a man's fault. If a girl doesn't like you, if a girl doesn't respect you, if you're unhappy, if you're out of shape, if you're broke, everything is your fault. It's not necessarily about getting the girls, or the validation, it's actually about improving your life and lifestyle. (GBBB, 2022a, 15:00)

He subsequently agrees with the "idea that men […] have to take accountability for their lives and think long-term, and improve themselves" (GBBB, 2022b, 15:54). Further, Denmo condemns men whom he perceives as not being hard at work, saying to Zander, "you probably are like me, when other people don't work hard, it makes you mad, like you almost can't empathise with [them]" (GBBB, 2022b, 13:26).

Speaking to their entrepreneurial journeys, Zander says that his own began with "scarcity", failing college, being broke, and not wanting "to sit in an office all day" (GBBB, 2022b, 18:58). To which Denmo responds that failing college was for the best, because passing may have "put [Zander] in a nine to five that [he] would have done for the next 30 to 40 years, and possibly led to some other problems" (GBBB, 2022b, 19:19). Zander, however, observes that "not everybody is going to be entrepreneurial" (GBBB, 2022b, 16:46). Further, "there's a certain cut of person that's an entrepreneur, and a person who's highly creative, highly intuitive" (GBBB, 2022b, 17:00). He differentiates between entrepreneurship as a specialised field, and its underlying premise – the potential to offer security and a sense of personal purpose. In his words, "as far as the underlying premise of [entrepreneurship], as a man, you definitely, 100 percent want to be in control of your income, right? Have vision and mission and principles that you live by" (GBBB, 2022b, 17:07).

The conversation above indicates discontent about the 40-hour week, income precarity, and a lack of meaningful labour – matters inherent to the capitalist system. Rather than consider the systemic nature of these discontents, men are encouraged to individually overcome them through personal success and a sense of purpose. Indeed, Denmo lauds "self-entrepreneurship, […] solving the problems in your own life" (GBBB, 2022b, 17:31). Denmo asserts that "the biggest problem I see with men nowadays is that a lot of them, because of both internal and external factors, are just checking out of society. They're kind of setting for less than they would be capable of" (GBBB, 2022b, 24:27). For him, the reasons behind "checking out" include a reduced attention span, distractions, and a lack of "actual focused energy" (GBBB, 2022b, 25:04). This leads the conversation to "high value" versus "low value" behaviours.

Denmo acknowledges that the term "high value" is associated online with "Alpha men" and male dominance, but asks Zander for his personal definition. For him, it means having "recognition at a trade or skill or industry […] and competence in a specific area where you're useful" (GBBB, 2022b, 30:57). Denmo says this involves having "status, experience in a certain field or niche, and [providing] value" (GBBB, 2022b, 31:18). Both statements imply that value is related to one's social status, profession, and job. Zander, however, disavows value being tied to "a [labour] marketplace" alone, because value can be provided beyond one's job or profession. He somewhat contradicts this standpoint by later claiming that a "low value" behaviour is "chasing some sort of career path [...] that

has no purpose" (GBBB, 2022b, 37:30). This is because "if you're working dead-end jobs, you don't have a pursuit or a goal, you start to accept life as it. There's no growth" (GBBB, 2022b, 37:34). Thus, Zander connects value to one's job, pursuit of a goal, and personal/career growth.

In relation to dating, Denmo claims that being high value correlates with having more "options" for potential partners. He claims that "a high value guy still doesn't have as many options as a low value girl does" (GBBB, 2022b, 32:11), advancing the Manosphere discourse of men's difficulties with dating as compared to women's ease. However, he faults men for this dynamic: "men are so competitive, and 'thirsty' so to speak, that we're willing to undercut, undermine, or overpay, over validate, [and] give too much attention to women" (GBBB, 2022b, 32:19). The implication here is that women are products in a marketplace whose value has inflated as male demand, and willingness to pay, has increased. Denmo also asserts that men "have to do work" (GBBB, 2022b, 33:53) to increase their value in dating, whereas:

> Women inherently are born with the value of how attractive they are considered to men. And yes, they can improve it a little – go up a couple of points, personality, and all that. But what's beautiful about being a man is [that] you could be short, funny looking, very awkward, not the smartest guy, but if you work hard […], you can actually surpass the natural advantage that many women are given. (GBBB, 2022b, 33:55)

He ties women's worth to their being considered attractive by men, and positions this as their "natural advantage" over men. Zander does not respond to Denmo's comments about women, but agrees that "if you work to improve, and you climb the ladder of whatever rank you're trying to contend in […], you can definitely have more options for yourself" (GBBB, 2022b, 35:08).

For Zander, the project of men becoming high value arises from genetic loyalty. He asserts that "every guy needs to fundamentally understand that you have a responsibility to your genetic legacy" (GBBB, 2022b, 40:48). In this context, there are only two markers of success. The first is survival value, the ability to provide shelter, food, and water. The second is "replication" value, the indication that "your genes are good enough to consistently carry on" (GBBB, 2022b, 41:26). He says, "I have a duty to my genetic legacy, and if I want higher quality options, and if I myself want to have high quality offspring, […] I myself must be high quality" (GBBB, 2022b, 41:54). Zander also later asserts that "breeding or mating with low level people" has become common (GBBB, 2022b, 46:00). His appeals to genetic legacies, the notion that "good" genes produce "quality". His latent problematisation of "low level" people "breeding" echoes eugenicist discourse. Zander connects this alleged reproduction to women's access to contraception, which he calls "a social safety net". He says:

> if you have safety nets with society, and you have safety nets with contraception, well, therefore you can make bad judgements. If I knew with business that all I had to do was go bankrupt, and then all of a sudden the next day, I could just take Plan B[60] and my cash reserves would recoup […], I would probably play it a little more risky. (GBBB, 2022b, 46:37)

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[60] Potentially a reference to the emergency contraceptive pill "Plan B", if not the eponymous idiom meaning an alternative method.

While not discouraging contraception, he alleges it enables women to be "less selective" about whom they have sex with. He inscribes reproduction with the logic of business, implying its "risk" (pregnancy) can be lessened with contraception, with no consideration of the physical, mental, and material costs associated with contraceptive options (or their varying degrees of effectiveness). He exhibits a neoliberal disdain towards "safety nets", which he implies have encouraged irresponsibility ("I'd play it more risky"), and made society "cushy[61]" (GBBB, 2022b, 45:55).

3. How to Turn Your Dating Life Around

In *How to Turn Your Dating Life Around with Relationship Coach @DavidMeessen* (GBBB, 2022c), Denmo and Meessen discuss the latter's dating coaching service, men's problems with dating, and the necessity of building a "masculine" core. Meessen is a certified life and executive coach, and the founder of Meessen Consulting. His Instagram has over 490,000 followers, on which he proclaims to "help men find their dream partner" (David Meessen, n.d.). His website asserts that he struggled with social anxiety, a lack of confidence, and communication problems before the personal development field helped him "overcome his insecurities, fear of loss, and [...] find the right partner" (David Meessen, n.d.).

Meessen is hostile towards non-hegemonic configurations of masculinity, namely "Betas". Asked by Denmo what prompted him to become a men's dating coach, Meessen jokes that he was the "biggest Beta male [...], and I cried myself to sleep regularly" (GBBB, 2022c, 3:08). He then distances himself from Betas by saying his decision was actually informed by his parents' unhappy marriage, his lacking a role model for relationships, inexperience with women, and first marriage. He says, "I was so deprived of female attention that anything and everything was amazing" (GBBB, 2022c, 7:23). Meessen calls himself a "simp[62], Beta piece of shit" (GBBB, 2022c, 9:08) for enduring what comes across as a marriage rife with power imbalance and emotional distress[63].

Meessen says that he met his former wife when he was 18-years-old, after she approached him at a karate event – she was eight years older. He shares an anecdote about being given the silent treatment for not putting on sunscreen. Instead of considering the power dynamic between a woman in her late-twenties and Meessen, Denmo says that their age gap and Meessen's comparative lack of romantic experience meant "she was able to [...] choose you, as opposed to the other way around" (GBBB, 2022c, 8:14). Instead of scrutinising her use of the silent treatment as potential emotional manipulation, Meessen says "I created that problem in the first place" (GBBB, 2022c, 10:05). Denmo affirms, "yeah, you entered as that [lesser] role in the first place, because you're inexperienced"

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[61] He earlier stated that "society is so cushioned" (GBBB, 2022b, 44:12), as compared to the time of our ancient ancestors.

[62] In usage, the term simp tends to mock basic politeness and respect towards women, conflating them with the erosion of masculinity and male independence. In this context, Meessen condemns his own lack of dominance, inadvertently insulating his former wife from due criticism.

[63] In Meessen's words: "We get married, and I suffer so tremendously emotionally, and I couldn't even explain it to myself" (GBBB, 2022c, 10:51).

(GBBB, 2022c, 10:10). Thus, Meessen's lack of dominance, unassertive nature, and inexperience was at fault. That he connects these characteristics with being a Beta reifies the masculinist discourse that men should exhibit dominance.

In relation to men's problems with dating, Denmo asserts that "people's expectations are higher than ever – like women's expectations, whereas men's expectations have always been pretty low" (GBBB, 2022c, 39:11). And, "guys are falling over themselves to get the approval of women" (GBBB, 2022c, 39:30). He does not elaborate on how, but it is gleaned that this involves trying hard to impress women during an approach. Denmo calls approaching "basically sales [....]. You're almost selling yourself as an interesting person, but also like trying to see if that person's a qualified buyer for you" (GBBB, 2022c, 17:35). He continues that, "one thing a lot of people go wrong with: they're trying too much to impress the other person, whereas you also want the dynamic of like 'hey, I'm interested, but not sold on you. Why should I be interested in you?'" (GBBB, 2022c, 18:02). Thus, Denmo applies the process of bartering, trade, and consumer choice to assessing a potential partner.

Meessen alleges that men face the problem of being demonised, which prompts a masculinist discourse that men need to build a masculine core. In Meessen's words:

> Men don't think they have somebody in their corner, because all of society said, 'men are pieces of shit', and I'm not one of those dudes who's like 'women are the enemy', no, I'm not one of those bitter dudes. (Meessen, 2022c, 46:10)

He alleges this sense of isolation makes men unmasculine:

> It is true that a lot of men don't feel like they have anybody in their corner, they're not allowed to be masculine, a lot of men are feminised, super feminised, they don't even know what it means to be a man. Even though there's different versions of being a man, there are some things that are universal. (GBBB, 2022c, 46:30)

Meessen adds that he has "a very strong feminine side [...], typical characteristics that are considered very feminine. Fernanda [his partner] calls them cute, I think she means gay. Like, when I watch *Interstellar*, at the end of the movie […], I cry like a little bitch" (GBBB, 2022c, 46:49). Thus, he claims to concur with the idea that men have feminine traits, but exhibits hostility towards emotional expression by calling it "gay" and an act of being a "little bitch". Further, he tempers his "feminine side" with an appeal to his stronger masculine side. He says, "I have a [...] strong feminine side to myself, but I also have a really strong masculine side" (GBBB, 2022c, 47:04). He claims that his masculine side is partly founded in his participation in martial arts. He does not elaborate on its other foundations. In his words, "when you physically fight, that builds masculinity, you know. And then, obviously you'd never want to transfer violence into real life, but it builds a masculine core" (GBBB, 2022c, 47:25). It is alleged the masculine core helps men to ask themselves, "what does it mean to have a relationship on an eye-level, where I don't disrespect her, but she sure as hell doesn't get to disrespect me?" (GBBB, 2022c, 47:36). Thus, being masculine is articulated as a method of curbing disrespect. This is where their discussion of masculinity ends, leaving it unattached to characteristics

beyond assertiveness, dominance, physicality, and an absence of disrespect.

This episode also advances the discourse of evolutionary biology. After Meessen mentions the "high" felt after kissing a woman, Denmo says: "I feel like there must be some kind of evolutionary thing […]. Your brain's like, 'hey, you did it, this is good' [...]. Your body must be like, 'these are skills that are going to lead to reproductive success'" (GBBB, 2022c, 23:52). Meessen agrees that "the brain must inherently know". In addition, he claims that, "there's two things we as men want to conquer in life: there's business and women" (GBBB, 2022c, 24:19). Feelings of attraction, connection, and pleasure are relegated to men's inherent conquering[64] mission, and reproductive success. Though Meessen identifies that there are facets of life beyond business and women, such as health and family, he returns to emphasise "career success, business success", "an amazing dating life", "finding a high quality relationship" (GBBB, 2022c, 24:25).

4. How to Approach Women & What Turns Girls Off

In the episode *How to Approach Woman IRL[65] & What Turns Girls Off (STOP DOING THIS)!* (GBBB, 2022d), Denmo and Serena Thompson discuss things men do which turn Thompson off. Thompson is a Toronto-based lifestyle influencer with close to 300k followers on TikTok and 100k on Instagram. She co-hosts the podcast *Send the Location*, which focuses on relationships, beauty and fashion. She and Denmo introduce her "icks[66] in men" (GBBB, 2022d, 7:52). Denmo proffers that "when somebody brings up politics", this constitutes an ick (GBBB, 2022d, 8:52). But for Thompson, icks include men having an unclean bathroom, being called "baby girl" or "babe" by men she has just met, male strangers skipping the "hello" to call her "hot", and men crying. Denmo agrees with her last ick, and says that "we're entering this weird era right now where people are encouraged to be kind of soft, and be soft to others" (GBBB, 2022d, 13:14). He adds that men "should never cry in front of a girl, you should never show extreme weakness" (GBBB, 2022d, 13:24). He implies that women lose respect for a man upon seeing him cry[67]. Denmo clarifies that men may cry in certain situations, such as after the death of a family member, or the birth of his child. His and Thompson's discouragement of male tears advances the masculinist discourse that men should be invulnerable, unemotional, and therefore "strong".

Denmo alleges that women and men have different roles in dating. For example, he says "exclusivity talk" is the woman's responsibility. In his words, "the girl is always the one who's supposed to bring it up" (GBBB, 2022d, 17:52). Men cannot initiate this talk "because that shows scarcity on his end" (GBBB, 2022d, 18:20). By using the word scarcity, Denmo appeals to the

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[64] Meessen does not use the word "conquer" again, though there is a conquering of women implied by his anti-Beta and "masculine core" discourses.
[65] In real life.
[66] Originating on the reality television show *Love Island* in 2020, the term "ick" is slang for an action which prompts a mild repulsion or disgust towards a romantic interest/partner.
[67] Evident in his asking Thompson: "How do you prevent him from [crying], so that you can maintain your respect for him?" (GBBB, 2022d, 16:20).

economic concept of resources being limited, and scarce goods as those in short supply and high demand. Thus, he renders potential female partners a resource to be accumulated or lost, with the latter implying a lack of options. Men must appear to have resources and be in demand.

Denmo considers men the instigators of break-ups. He alleges that women avoid breaking-up with men: "When a girl wants to get rid of a guy […] she won't be the one that does it, so what she'll do is she'll be such a bitch that he has to break up with her" (GBBB, 2022d, 19:35). He relates this to respect, claiming that a man who puts up with a woman's 'bitchiness' loses her respect, but a man who ends the relationship maintains it. Denmo alleges that this behaviour relates to women's calculatedness. He claims that women are:

> […] much more calculated [*sic*]. Like, men, we're very 'live and die by the sword swinging by the hip'. Risk it all. Think about investing, right? The wealthiest and smartest people in the world are men, but on the other hand, the dumbest and poorest people in the world are also men. (GBBB, 2022d, 21:15)

He continues that:

> Men's intelligence, investing, pretty much everything we do is on a huge spectrum – it's either at the very highest level, or at the very bottom. […] What happens is that women are actually better than men overall, because you guys do a lot more due diligence, you do a lot more research, you take minimal risk. (GBBB, 2022d, 21:31)

This is a sexist and unnuanced. It alleges that women are "better than men overall", but denies their becoming the "wealthiest and smartest" people. Women's "calculating" nature and aversion to risk ultimately relegates them beneath the smartest and wealthiest of men. Yet, evidence shows that women and men have similar attitudes to investment risk when economic status is controlled for (Williams, 2020). The gender investment gap that Denmo alludes to persists because women systemically earn less than men. In addition, that the wealthiest individuals in the world are men has to do with capitalism and patriarchy facilitating the accumulation of inordinate wealth. It is simplistic to suggest that men's intelligence is innately the "very highest".

Denmo then asserts that women's investment logic is applied to relationships. He says, "women are equally as calculated in relationships, they're thinking at all times, okay, well how does this person benefit me? What is my ROI[68] here? Is there a better investment opportunity in the future?" (GBBB, 2022d, 22:12). He adds that a woman will assess whether their potential partner is "gonna raise in value? Is he gonna stagnate at his current value? Or, is his value going to decline?" (GBBB, 2022d, 22:45). Though Thompson does not use market terminology, she also articulates a transactional approach to relationships. She asks herself, "what am I giving? What am I getting back? At the end of the day, is it worth it? Is it worth my time?" (GBBB, 2022d, 22:30)

In relation to men approaching women, Denmo again differentiates between women and men's roles:

> Women, how it works is you guys sit somewhere, you know, you look good, you smile, you make eye contact, and you basically signal that "hey, I can be approached". […] That's the role of women, and

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[68] Return on Investment.

man's role is to either assess like, hey, she's showing me signals that she's interested in me, or just jump in blind. (GBBB, 2022d, 52:54)

Thus, he positions women as the passive recipients of male attention. For Denmo, that the approach may not work out is "the onus of a man" (GBBB, 2022d, 52:57). Denmo then asks if Thompson thinks there is an "epidemic" of men being reluctant to approach women. She does not, but Denmo alleges that several internal and external factors are impeding men's approach, with the latter including women wearing headphones, appearing busy, and having a "resting bitch face" (RBF). The slang term RBF is predominantly used to describe women whose expression appears annoyed, angry, or blank. Its usage signals a contempt towards the idea that women might experience dissatisfaction. Women are expected to always appear friendly and happy (Camia, 2016).

Lastly, Demo makes individual men responsible for their personal failures. He pairs his assertion of men being at fault with an allusion to the Manosphere's Red Pill, stating that, "the earlier you swallow the pill that everything in life is your fault", the better (GBBB, 2022d, 17:13).

5. How Tinder BlackPilled Men

In *How Tinder BlackPilled an ENTIRE Generation of Men w/ @KevinRayWilder* (GBBB, 2022e), Denmo and Kevin Ray Wilder discuss men's contemporary issues and navigate the Red Pill, Blue Pill, and Black Pill ideologies. Wilder is a YouTuber and a fitness, self-development, and philosophy enthusiast. His self-named YouTube channel has over 21,000 followers, and he dedicates the channel to "the pursuit of meaning and living a great life" (Kevin RayWilder, n.d.). Wilder believes that men are "plagued" with nihilism and hopelessness, and that the works of philosophers such as Friedrich Nietsche can help the "modern man overcome his existential anxiety" (Kevin RayWilder, n.d.). He and Denmo contend with the nihilist tendencies of the Black Pill and Incels, while advancing the Red Pill and Blue Pill as analogies for the "truths" of the world.

The episode begins with Denmo contextualising men's contemporary issues. In his words, these are:

the overall decline of men in the West, men are having much less sex, men are more depressed, men are turning to video games, SSRIs, and all kinds of things, and also the Internet forum where they go, and they rant, complain, and just be bad people. (GBBB, 2022e, 1:20)

Thus, he expresses the pre-Internet men's rights movement and the Manosphere's ideology of men in decline, and his examples are similarly anecdotal. However, Denmo challenges the Black Pill and Incel communities of the Manosphere, claiming that the purpose of the episode is to convince participants to "stop this kind of behaviour and […], to improve your lifestyle (GBBB, 2022e, 1:51). Both claim that such disaffected men should ask for help with dating. Wilder states:

[…] every guy thinks that they know how to fuck and every guy thinks they know how to fight, most guys don't know either. We can't help but kind of grade our masculinity a bit based on those two

> things, so in terms of the dating side, it's embarrassing to say "oh, I need help with dating", because in a way, a lot of guys feel as if that's them saying "oh I'm not manly enough". (GBBB, 2022e, 5:17)

According to Denmo and Wilder, a part of men's disaffection with dating stems from the Blue Pill "lies" which have been "implanted" in men's heads[69]. For Wilder, they include the notion that each individual has a soulmate with whom they should have a monogamous relationship. Denmo identifies another "lie", claiming that films, television, and culture all encourage men to:

> put a woman at a higher level than you, because as a protector, it's your duty to protect women, which I obviously agree with, but like the idea is that they are something precious, they must be protected… and you almost have to look at them as if they're a higher level than you, have to win their approval, and you have to do things for them. (GBBB, 2022e, 11:02)

Denmo asserts that although male friendships involve helping one another out, women are more difficult because they "tell you what they think they want, but not what they actually need" (GBBB, 2022e, 11:32). In consequence, he claims that men:

> end up being too nice to women, you end up prioritizing them […] and you do all these gestures and nice things of appreciation which make you very predictable. Basically, if you treat her like a celebrity, she treats you like a fan as opposed to an equal. (GBBB, 2022e, 11:36)

This relates to Denmo's belief that "dating is not equal between men and women" (GBBB, 2022e, 12:07), by which he means that women have an easier time of it. He later adds that male desperation, "natural" competitiveness, and the use of dating apps combine to disincentive women from "develop[ing] these social skills, or knowledge of life [...] because they're so used to having everything being done for them" (GBBB, 2022e, 45:51).

Denmo's standpoint is ambivalent. He advances a sexist discourse of protective paternalism, which positions women in need of male protection. And yet, he disagrees with the implicit notion that women are precious and "higher" than men. He also exhibits disagreement with having to "win" women's approval, and "do things for them", indicating discontent at the labor involved in attracting and protecting women. In addition, his claim that men prioritise women and become "too nice" recalls the cultural adage that "nice guys finish last". This is a stereotype that women express desire for male partners who are kind and sensitive, but choose the unkind, emotionally reserved "macho man" over the nice one (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003). In men's relationship coaching, it prompts warnings against being "too nice", for it subverts men's romantic and sexual chances. Of course, men should not prioritise a potential partner at the expense of their own physical and mental health. But Denmo's message is that men should not do "too much" for the women they are interested in, lest they want to be treated as her fanboys, as lesser to her. It is a tacit advancement of the Red Pill ideology that modern gender hierarchies position men lower to women.

Wilder adds that another Blue Pill "lie" is the claim that women and men's dating motivations are aligned. He uses Evolutionary Psychology (EP) to assert:

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[69] Wilder asserts that some men present vitriolic lies (Blue Pills) as the (Red Pill) "truth". He refers to these Blue Pills as ideology, but does not consider his own complicity in such a process, nor his own ideological stance.

> Both want to be fulfilled, but obviously men and women tend to have different biological imperatives, right? A woman wants to have someone…like a monogamous relationship, because the point of sex is to have children, right? So, technically, just from a biological standpoint, it makes sense that she's just gonna focus on one guy and make sure he prioritises her […]. And then, from the guy's standpoint, you know, he just wants to spread his seed. (GBBB, 2022e, 13:24)

This statement excludes non-heterosexual partnerships, and individuals who cannot conceive or do not want children. The claim that having children is the "point" of sex excludes motivations such as connection and pleasure, rendering it a transaction concerned with continuing men's genetic lineage. Wilder and Denmo advise men not to hate women for this alleged dynamic, but "the game" – the Blue Pill lies and the EP which informs dating.

Denmo and Wilder discuss Black Pill nihilism, and provide descriptive accounts of men becoming disaffected on dating apps. Denmo claims that dating apps are "unrealistic" for men. They have "given women an incredible amount of options, but actually ends up making women unhappy long term" (GBBB, 2022e, 33:03). In relation to men, he explains that:

> [Even] guys that are seven or eights out of ten [...], they're completely failing on dating apps. Like, they're an above average looking person, if all they did was walk around in real life, they would have amazing results but on Tinder, they don't get any matches, nobody likes them, and that kills their internal confidence and actually puts them towards the Blue Pill and Black [Pill] area. (GBBB, 2022e, 33:16)

Denmo claims that "the apps are set up in an unfair way for the vast majority of men" (GBBB, 2022e, 33:45). This contributes to the discourse of women's dating ease. However, Wilder asserts that men are not entitled to women. He alleges that male entitlement stems from the combination of the Blue Pill preventing men from understanding that "dating is a competition", and a "participation trophy mentality" which rewards children with trophies whether they win or lose. There is a neoliberal aspect to both statements since human relationships are inscribed with competition. The tension between market supply and demand is also recalled. As Wilder claims, "there's a certain select amount [*sic*] of hot girls and all the guys want them, and [women] are only going to choose the ones they perceive to be the highest quality" (GBBB, 2022e, 29:32).

Wilder's point challenges the Black Pill and Incel ideologies which blame women for men's discontent. However, his ultimate purpose is not to dismantle male entitlement but to make men responsible for their dating failures. He mocks Black Pill and Incel men who are not succeeding on dating apps: "you look like a thumb. It's okay if you look like a thumb, but […] if you want to succeed on dating apps, go focus on your fitness, focus on your style, take better pictures, have a good profile" (GBBB, 2022e, 35:31). In another example, "mother-effer, you're overweight, you're broke, you're not interesting, you're not funny, so why would she swipe right[70] on you?" (GBBB, 2022e, 38:36). Denmo adds that attracting women also depends on factors which cannot be conveyed through a dating profile: body language, eye contact, conversational skills. These are factors which require approaching women. As for advice around approaching, Denmo likens it to eating vegetables:

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[70] Meaning to like a profile on a dating app.

"fucking sucks. Nobody likes vegetables, but if you cook them and you mix them in with other stuff, they're not so bad" (GBBB, 2022e, 41:40).

Near the end of the episode, Denmo proposes that:

> man's purpose has nothing to do, necessarily […] with acquiring the best woman. It's more [about] making a change in the world, being a firefighter, or being a novelist, or a doctor, or an accountant, finding a way to contribute value to others in society. (GBBB, 2022e, 49:09)

He encourages men to be "focused on your mission, and your purpose, whatever it is, and making society better. And then, as a secondary, the dating" (GBBB, 2022e, 49:49). He says that "hard work" which "benefits others and provides value to others" leads to likeable qualities, friendships, a support network and a community (GBBB, 2022e, 49:30). Though this encourages men to de-escalate their focus on women and partnership, it ultimately ties men's purpose to their job and profession. Further, he claims that these traits and their momentum lead to "having a good vibe, and that's what attracts women. So, if you're a loser in society, then you're going to be a loser in dating too" (GBBB, 2022e, 49:46). Thus, an individual's personal mission and purpose remains intertwined with partnership.

6. How to Approach Women with Female Dating Coach, Blaine Anderson[71]

In *How to Approach Women with Female Dating Coach @DatingByBlaine* (GBBB, 2022f), Denmo and Blaine Anderson discuss the dating coaching market, and men's difficulties with approaching and dating women. Anderson is a men's dating coach with over 428,000 followers on Instagram. Her coaching journey began at university, where she was confused by the perception that "the best guys had the worst luck with women" (DatingbyBlaine, n.d.). Denmo's introduction of Anderson stresses three times that she is a "female", offering the "female" perspective to men about dating women. He adds that there is a "massive" market for men's dating coaching, which he connects to:

> …an epidemic where men just have no idea really how to talk to women, how to date properly. It seems like, you know, what used to be a very evenly matched dating world […] it's leaning towards the favour of women. (GBBB, 2022f, 4:46)

Anderson disagrees that men need more help, saying that women's dating coaches often "feel like women have it worse. And the reality is, it doesn't really matter who has it worse" (GBBB, 2022f, 5:25). She says that expectations on both women and men's sides do not align with contemporary dating. For example, her clients complain about men 'having' to approach women. Her response to them is: "for many decades, women were taught that you were slutty or doing the wrong thing if you put yourself out there and pursued the man" (GBBB, 2022f, 6:16). Rather than engage with the social censure of female sexuality, Denmo relates men's approach to evolution. He says:

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[71] Though similarly titled, this episode is distinct from the earlier episode, *How to Approach Women IRL & What Turns Girls Off* (GBBB, 2022d).

> …on the evolutionary level [...], the vast majority of wildlife including humans, like it's basically the man's role to be the approacher [*sic*]. For women, oftentimes it's more so about being approachable, being, you know, receptive, reactive, and putting themselves in a position where they do get approached. (GBBB, 2022f, 6:50)

He adds that dating apps enable women to have more "options", while allowing them to remain shy, introverted, and online. He relates this to men's worsened position in dating, because "if you're a guy, if you go on dating apps, and you're […] below a seven out of ten looks-wise, status-wise, I mean it's a really uphill battle" (GBBB, 2022f, 8:15). He claims that "men just have to be better than past generations of men because the standards are so high now" (GBBB, 2022f, 8:40). Anderson contends that dating apps should not be men's "primary means of meeting women, because [...] they're a crutch" (GBBB, 2022f, 9:22).

Denmo and Anderson both express brief disagreement with the "very flash, very manipulation-based stuff" of the Red Pill-related Pick-up Artists[72]. However, Denmo advances the Red Pill as a representation of the truth. He claims that most men are 'Blue Pilled' into the idea that:

> Everybody should get a participation trophy. From a young age, men are taught, like, just be yourself, just be nice to people, go get flowers and be nice to her, and even though you're a 5"2 toad, she's gonna go to prom with you. (GBBB, 2022f, 18:14)

In addition, "men are taught from a young age to pedestalize, and basically not take themselves as seriously in value as they do women, to put women at such a higher level than themselves" (GBBB, 2022f, 18:59). Anderson responds that men should not put women up on a pedestal, because it implies that women are dating beneath themselves. She says that "everyone wants to date up. Just like you don't want to date somebody you perceive to be less fun, less smart, less cool than you, neither does she" (GBBB, 2022f, 19:18). Her advice is "always first up-level [*sic*] yourself. Get to the point where you think you're rad, and that you have a ton going for you" (20:02).

In advising men to approach women, Denmo and Anderson both emphasise communicating well. Denmo stresses the importance of "tonality", a lack of stuttering, the correct speed of speech, flirtatiousness, and confidence. In contrast, Anderson emphasises confidence and recognising the signs that a woman is interested. She says, "look for affirmative responses, is she asking you a question back? Is she laughing at what you said?" (GBBB, 2022f, 35:32). Where Anderson emphasises the relational nature of conversation, Denmo renders it a skill to be mastered and conveyed[73]. He authorises Anderson's emphasis on confidence with an appeal to evolution. He speculates that, "on a biological level, [confidence] probably makes you feel safe, right?" (GBBB, 2022f, 33:45). He relates this to another piece of advice: men should talk to women as if they already know them, because "there's the old saying, 'women love to be led', right?" (GBBB, 2022f, 34:45).

Denmo adds that women and men's attractiveness to the opposite sex peak at different ages.

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[72] Anderson says that her "methods and the Red Pill pick-up artist community don't have a lot of overlap […]. That's not to say that can't work." (GBBB, 2022f, 16:40).

[73] This echoes pick-up artistry coaching, which presents an approach as a series of behaviours and rules.

He says: "as shitty as it sounds, to a certain extent, men consider women beauty objects, and women can consider men success objects[74]" (GBBB, 2022f, 40:10). He ties men's position as success objects to biology, stating that women evolutionarily prefer men with resources. He also claims that women "are much more intelligent at a younger age than men […]. I would argue that women are just naturally better at dating, they're more self-aware, and I think that's because on a biological level, they have to be" (GBBB, 2022f, 50:32). This is because women risk getting pregnant, and thus have to be selective about their partners. He later condescends that "women generally are more smarter [*sic*] and more intelligent than men, but the absolute smartest people in the world are men" (GBBB, 2022f, 1:04:59).

Denmo later states that a man should "take care of himself", by which he means exercise. He claims:

> When men are working out regularly, it increases [...] testosterone and there's a certain scent in men and it's very subtle but women can actually pick up on it, they can detect when men are confident, have high testosterone, and are healthy. (GBBB, 2022f, 47:04)

He adds that women are likelier to engage in casual, short-term sex and "be more promiscuous" at different stages of their menstrual cycle. Anderson disagrees that women freely engage in casual sex, citing they "face much higher consequences for getting pregnant" (GBBB, 2022f, 48:11). If her point was that the burden of an unplanned pregnancy potentially curbs women's participation in casual sex, Denmo misses it entirely. In an echo of the early men's rights complaint that women control the reproductive arena, he says that "men, we're kind of programmed to spread out seed as much as possible [...], because we don't control the birth, women have complete control of the birth" (GBBB, 2022f, 48:23).

The episode ends with a generalisation of what women find attractive. Here, a masculinist neoliberal discourse connects attractiveness with economic success, job success, and male provision. Anderson claims:

> Women need to see that you have a trajectory […]. It goes back to the status thing, you don't need to have the perfect job today and you don't need to be able to provide for her in a family today, but she wants to see that that's like an aspiration of yours […] and you have to be good at what you do […]. That doesn't mean you need to be a doctor or a lawyer, maybe you run an awesome food truck, but she doesn't want somebody who's just complicit with like flipping burgers in the back at McDonald's. (GBBB, 2022f, 1:00:58)

She distinguishes between labour considered admirable (doctoring, lawyering, running a business) and labour considered to lack aspiration (being employed at McDonalds), a distinction imbued with prejudice towards low-waged jobs. Denmo again connects this to women's supposed biological imperative to be provided for. In addition, he claims that, "the absolute smartest people in the world are men, but also the absolute dumbest [...]. That's why guys are way more likely to be homeless, to

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[74] As discussed, this argument was first articulated by the author Herb Goldberg, who believed male privilege to be a myth. It was extended by Warren Farrell to equalise women's institutional, economic, and social coercion into marriage and dependence on male provision, with men's dissatisfaction with resultant expectations.

gamble, to be addicted" (GBBB, 2022f, 1:05:03). He attributes male unintelligence and risk-taking to male biology and a desire to attract women. Lacking here is the realisation that homelessness is caused primarily by a lack of affordable housing and liveable wages. To express that the individual is at fault for their circumstance alone is a neoliberal precept.

7. How to Get a Girlfriend – Breaking Down our Past Relationships

In *How to Get a Girlfriend – Breaking Down our Past Relationships* (GBBB, 2022g), Denmo and Brendan Quinn dissect their past relationships to convey the importance of location, status, physical appearance, occupation, and purpose in finding a partner. Though not introduced as such, Quinn was a contestant on the 17th season of the dating reality show, *The Bachelorette* (2008 - present). During the show, Quinn amassed an Instagram following of 45,000. Denmo claims that men who are not ready for relationships end up "settling with somebody less than they could potentially get" (GBBB, 2022g, 1:49). He says that, in general, people tend to date people "around equal value to [them]. If you're low value, you're going to attract a girl that's low value" (GBBB, 2022g, 1:55).

Denmo uses the concept of "marketplace value"[75] to allege that women and men's "options" peak at different ages. He says that although individuals should not be objectified into distinct values, "if you just look at it economically, as far as values and trades [...], what one person will pay, how many options a person has, there is a metric, there is a score" (GBBB, 2022g, 37:42). Women are alleged to peak at 23, and men at 36. He claims this is because women are at their "prime physically" during their mid-20s, which is what men desire, whereas "women value experience and resources" (GBBB, 2022g, 40:55). He continues that most men are "simpler, and some would say, I guess, superficial, but we want just a pretty girl that's cool, smart, and complements our life. Whereas women they want like a great leader" (GBBB, 2022g, 41:01). In addition, Denmo claims that individual "value" shifts as one's circumstances do. For example, he claims that his value was "average" when he approached a woman at a coffee shop because he had recently dropped out of school, was working on his business, and "dressed as a bum". In contrast, his value was "high" when he was a bartender and able to show women his leadership position and social skills.

Denmo then differentiates between women he considers "wifey material" and those he "hooks up" with. The latter are women with "a long history of people they've been with, or they've participated in activities that are frowned upon, like drugs, parties, stuff like that. They don't necessarily have a plan. They don't have a career" (GBBB, 2022g, 42:18). He continues:

> the difference between a girl you just hook up with, versus a girl you want to date, is [...] she's more intelligent, she has a degree, a career plan, she's much more feminine, and she takes on the qualities that a good mother would take on [...]. She caters to people, doesn't use dating apps, hasn't been with a lot of guys. [...] men like women who preserve their value, so to speak, but women like men that create value. Men that have, like, the experience, the money, the resources. (GBBB, 2022g, 42:57)

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[75] Though Denmo is ambivalent towards calculating an individual's value, his use of "marketplace value" recalls the Manosphere's sexual marketplace and sexual market value.

In addition, Denmo claims that while women prefer men to have some sexual experience, "guys like girls that aren't as experienced, because another thing [...] with experience is that you get more disagreeable, and being disagreeable favours men because [of] entrepreneurship, corporate, standing up for yourself" (GBBB, 2022g, 54:54). Denmo thus censures women who are "experienced", by claiming they become "disagreeable". He says that "disagreeable" qualities, by which he means standing up for oneself and presumably being assertive, are favourable for men, because they are associated with entrepreneurship and corporate life.

In relation to occupational environments, Denmo and Quinn discuss their opposition to the dating of coworkers. Quinn says that there will be a "sticky situation" if it goes wrong, because people spend more time with coworkers than with a significant other with another job. He says, "you spend eight, nine hours out of your day at work. Then you rest, you go home, eat, and then pass out, and get back to work the next day" (GBBB, 2022g, 24:30).

Lastly, Denmo and Quinn advise men in a romantic relationship not to deprioritise their friendships. They stress that men should have lives beyond their partners, and they consider men responsible for establishing this dynamic in their partnership. Denmo takes this further, claiming that it is always a man's fault if he prioritises his relationship. He says, "I feel like every relationship, it's always the guy's fault. I feel like [...] it's the guy's responsibility to steer the ship, he's the one, he's the captain" (GBBB, 2022g, 35:35).

Chapter Five: Discussion

I now proceed to discuss the keywords and phrases of the analysed episodes. My argument is that the structure of discourse contributes to a neoliberal *doxa* which preserves the sanctity of markets and objectifies the individual self and self-responsibility.

Key Words, Phrases, and Ideological Themes

In six of the episodes analysed, the term "value" is used to invoke an individual's worth and usefulness to a marketplace, whether to the sexual marketplace or to the economic markets and labour force (GBBB, 2022b). Multiple episodes use the terms "high value" and "low value" to advance the view that humans have a commensurable individual worth in the sexual marketplace. This worth is alleged to be contingent, variously, on physical attractiveness, career choice, work ethic, intelligence, humour, personality, and market contributions. A calculable understanding of human characteristics is further reinforced by Denmo and his guests describing men's status and attractiveness through a scale of one to ten (GBBB 2022e, 2022f). Further, they use the term "options" or "scarcity" to quantify the number of "high quality" potential partners an individual has (GBBB 2022a, 2022b, 2022d, 2022e, 2022f, 2022g). Men are positioned as having to "pay" for women's attention (GBBB, 2022b, 2022g). The criteria of an individual's marketplace value is employed to identify the ages at which women and men allegedly peak (GBBB 2022f, 2022g). Women are said to engage in a cost-benefit analysis when assessing men as partners (GBBB, 2022d, 2022f).

The term "responsibility" is a keyword. Thus, men have a "responsibility" to their genetic lineage (GBBB, 2022b), a responsibility to advance their careers and improve their resources or capacity for provision (GBBB 2022b, 2022f), and a responsibility to be the "captain" of the relationship (GBBB, 2022g). Denmo also describes men as being at "fault" for their adverse circumstances (GBBB, 2022a, 2022b, 2022d, 2022g). He even conflates responsibility and fault (GBBB, 2022b). To the men who are not respected by women, disliked, unfit, unhappy and moneyless, Denmo says "everything is a man's fault" (GBBB, 2022b). He wants such men to be "self-entrepreneurial", and to be always "solving the problems in [their] own life" (GBBB, 2022b).

"Competition" and "competitiveness" between individual men is invoked to support the recurring discourse of men's hardship and women's alleged ease in contemporary dating. Men are positioned as competing for women's attention, and this is attributed to: men's "natural" competitiveness (GBBB, 2022e); women's increased options as compared to men (GBBB, 2022b, 2022e, 2022f); the scarcity of "hot girls" whom all men desire (GBBB, 2022e); women's attention being diverted from men through their phones; the belief that men have to adhere to higher standards

than the men of the past (GBBB, 2022f); and that "dating is a competition" (GBBB, 2022e).

That Denmo describes men as naturally competitive arises from his dependence upon evolutionary biology and psychology. Denmo appeals to the "evolutionary level" to explain why men should be the ones to approach women (2022f). He terms it an "evolutionary thing" that a man feels good after successfully flirting with a woman, and suggests that the brain identifies the potential for reproductive success (2022c). One guest claims it is men's "biological" motivation to spread his seed (2022e), and another claims responsibility to their genetic lineage (2022b). One guest suggests that men inherently desire to "conquer two things: business and women" (GBBB, 2022c), inadvertently explicating the interaction between capitalism and patriarchy.

In relation to how women are described, an infantilising cluster of keywords emerges: "baby girl", "chick", and "girl" are routinely employed whereas men remain "men" or colloquially "guys". Sometimes gendered slurs operate, with women said to act like "bitches" to manipulate men into breaking up with them, and some described as having a "resting bitch face" (GBBB, 2022d). In addition, a man self-described as strongly feminine calls himself a "little bitch" for crying (GBBB, 2022c). Once, Denmo used the word "thot" to joke that a guest, Serena Thompson, was perceived as a thot by some men (GBBB, 2022d). The term thot is Internet slang for a woman considered a slut. Though Denmo uses it in jest, the "joke" is that Thompson was mistaken for one, reinforcing that other women may be thought of, and called, thots/sluts.

Denmo also censures women whom he considers to have slept with too many men by praising women with fewer sexual experiences[76] (GBBB, 2022a, 2022g). This is part of his overall discourse endorsing traditionally "feminine" women (GBBB, 2022a). The term feminine is invoked alongside the terms "emotional", empathy", "nurturing", "care", and "mom" when Denmo describes that men "love our feminine women" (GBBB, 2022a). In addition, Denmo considers a woman dateable if she is "more feminine, and she takes on the qualities a good mother would take on" (GBBB, 2022g). This qualification is used to differentiate a dateable woman from a "girl you just hook up".
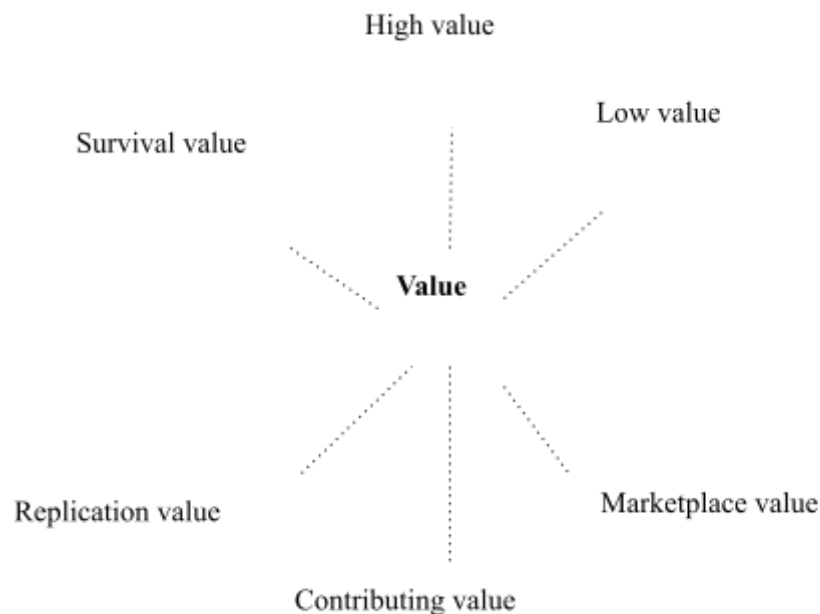
Denmo and his guests do not assert outright that men should embody traditional masculinity. Rather, masculinist discourses together enforce the ideological hegemony of traditional masculinity. These discourses invoke: male softness and tears as weaknesses (GBBB, 2022a, 2022d); a "masculine frame" recognising men's responsibility to their heirs (GBBB, 2022b); a "masculine core" premised in physicality, leadership and dominance in relationships (GBBB, 2022c); men's role as the protectors of women (GBBB, 2022a); and, as the providers of "value" and "resources" (GBBB, 2022b, 2022e, 2022f). In addition, there is a palpable contempt towards subservient masculinities ("Betas" and "Incels"), and towards non-dominant men, or "simps" (GBBB, 2022c, 2022e).
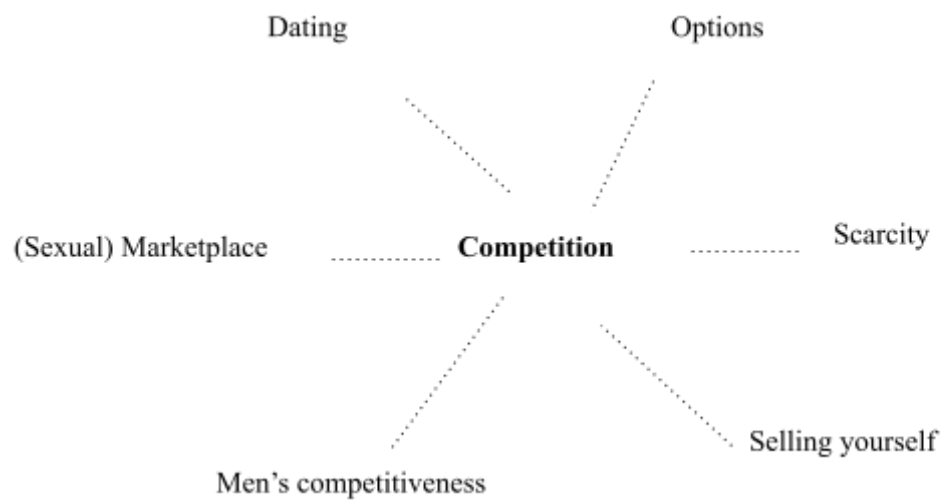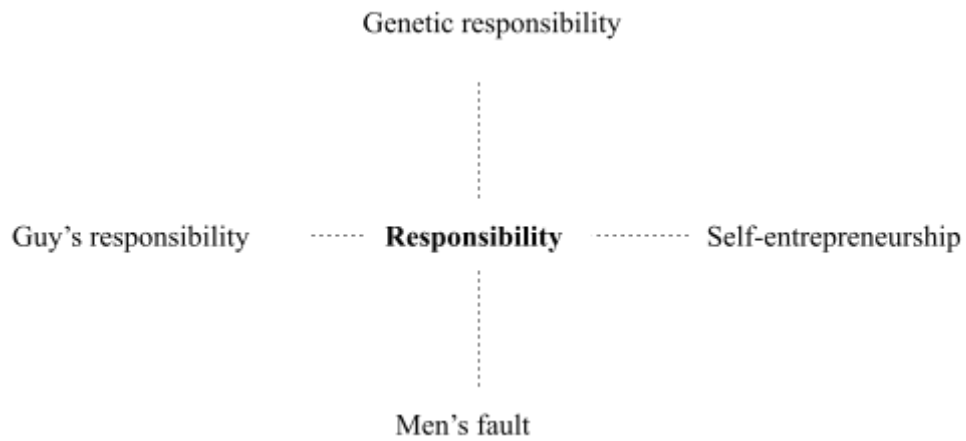
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[76] The discourse about sex is dissonant. In one episode, the sole "point" of sex is to have children (GBBB, 2022e), but other episodes reference casual sexual relationships, indicating that sex is also for short-term connections (GBBB, 2022c, 2022f, 2022g). Further, men are alleged to prefer women with fewer sexual experiences, but also to have a biological imperative to "spread their seed" through multiple sexual partners. Meanwhile, women are to "preserve their value" by not sleeping with many men (GBBB, 2022g).

The terms Betas, Incels, and simps, are part of a larger cluster of keywords and phrases related to the Manosphere. The podcast refers to the Manosphere's Red Pill philosophy, which claims that men can be awakened to the truth of male subordination and female dominance. Associated keywords include: "Red Pill", "Blue Pill", "Blue Pill lie", "truth", and "swallow the pill". However, Denmo and his guests do not advance the discourse of male subordination in society. Their focus is not social or institutional relations, but men's allegedly adverse position in contemporary dating. On this matter, Denmo alleges that men are, individually, wholly responsible for their lifestyle and their economic, romantic, and social success. Indeed, he claims that men represent both the "smartest" and "dumbest" of the world's individuals. He alleges that innate male intelligence and propensity for risk culminates in the wealthiest and smartest individuals being men.

The structures of discourse concerning neoliberalism and masculinist gender essentialism are outlined below.

Genetic responsibility

Guy's responsibility ------- **Responsibility** ---------- Self-entrepreneurship

Men's fault

Dating   Options

(Sexual) Marketplace .... **Competition** .... Scarcity

                                                      Selling yourself

Men's competitiveness

Listed below are, firstly, the keywords and phrases common to gender binary essentialism, and secondly, phrases which exemplify the overlap between neoliberalism and the masculinist gender binary.

Gender Binary Essentialism: Keywords and Phrases

Men		Women	
Positive	**Pejorative**	**Positive**	**Pejorative**
Assertive	Beta	Emotional	Bitch
Captain	Incel	Empathetic	Disagreeable
Leaders	Simp	Caring	For hook-ups only
Protectors	Soft	Feminine	Seeks validation
Providers	Tears	Good mom	Thot
Masculine	Weakness	Good mother	Ugly feminists
Masculine core		Low kill count	
Masculine frame		Nurturing	
Men's responsibility		Wifey material	
Genetic responsibility			
Risk-takers			

Phrases common to neoliberalism and the masculinist gender binary

Everything is a man's fault

Everything is men's fault

Everything is your fault

Man's role is to be the approacher

[Men do not want] a girl that is feminine, but [works] in a masculine field

Men consider women beauty objects, and women can consider men success objects

Men like women who preserve their value

Men have a responsibility to [their] genetic legacy

Women like men that create value. Men that have the experience, the money, the resources.

The Neoliberal *Doxa* and GBBB

Denmo's emphasis on individual marketplace value, status, competition, and appropriated forms of evolutionary biology and psychology reifies the neoliberal *doxa*. The word *doxa* originates from an ancient Greek word meaning "opinion" and "what is said of things or people" (Plantin, 2021, para. 1). The *doxa* correlates to commonplace, generally accepted, and sometimes ambivalent beliefs (Plantin, 2021). It may be assigned the meaning of ideology (Plantin, 2021). The French sociologist Bourdieu conceptualised *doxa* as "pre-reflexive intuitive knowledge shaped by experience" (Deer, 2014, p. 114). It refers to shared and unquestioned perceptions and options which appear natural but were, rather, intimately informed by an individual's habitual thoughts, actions, and social interactions.

Bourdieu avoided using the term "ideology", partly because he disagreed with the Marxist emphasis on consciousness. For Bourdieu, "the social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices, mechanisms and so forth" (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1991, p. 113). That said, Terry Eagleton suggested that Bourdieu's concept of *doxa* may be considered a theory of ideology. This is because by invoking *doxa*, Bourdieu identified that individuals accepted a great deal of beliefs without knowing it, "and that is what is called ideology" (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1991, p. 113). Thus, in referring to the "neoliberal *doxa*", I refer to Denmo's intuitive, ambivalent, and commonly-held beliefs which naturalise neoliberal ideology.

Under neoliberalism, economic language and market terms are often incorporated into self-help (Riley et al., 2019). This is a prevalent feature of the analysed episodes, as keywords relate to value, options, competition, and scarcity. This brings individuals and their relationships into the domain of the markets, which reinforces the neoliberal precept that life be arranged in accordance with market economies (Harvey, 2007). In connecting an individual's value and "status" to their market contributions, Denmo and two of his guests exhibit the neoliberal *doxa* of contempt towards "dead-end" (GBBB, 2022b) and "complicit" (GBBB, 2022g) labour. Dead-end jobs are those with a limited scope for career development and advancement. A job which stagnates is said to inhibit "personal growth", the ability to provide for a future partner, and to denote purposelessness (GBBB, 2022b, 2022g). Denmo also expresses a lack of sympathy with men he perceives as not working hard (GBBB, 2022b). That Denmo connects men's value to their generation of experience, money, and resources affirms the neoliberal *doxa* that one should focus "on self-entrepreneurship and the obsessive acquisition of resources" (Pendenza & Lamattina, 2019, p. 100).

Denmo also assesses women in relation to their career and its advancement. He distinguishes a marriageable woman from an unmarriable one: the former has a "a degree, a career plan" (GBBB, 2022g). Women's value is also alleged to reflect their traditional femininity, and it is here that Denmo's neoliberal discourse intersects with sexist discourses about women's supposed biological imperative to find a monogamous partnership. This imperative is said to explain women's calculating, risk-averse natures, as well as their propensity for empathy, nurturing, and the provision of care. In addition, Denmo censures women who have had multiple sexual experiences, and inversely correlates their number of sexual partners to their value. Men are said to prefer women who "preserve" their value – that is, have fewer sexual experiences.

The term options is used to denote the number of quality potential partners an individual has. The surrounding language is somewhat ambivalent. The discourses that men have to work hard to increase their options, and that women have more options than men, are evident through all analysed episodes. However, the purpose of increasing one's options is unspecified, though one guest articulates that he must advance his genetic legacy (GBBB, 2022b). That same guest shares that he knows many men that have "invested" in pick-up, with plenty of sexual experience, who "don't feel

good" or "feel sad from it" (GBBB, 2022b, 50:41). Thus, happiness and pleasure, though motivating factors, are not the guaranteed outcomes of increased options. In another episode, it is implied that options will combat the perception of scarcity, and to communicate that a man is romantically "in demand" by the opposite sex. This connects to the notion of competition.

The neoliberal *doxa* is synonymous with competition. It asserts that individual liberty is preserved through competitive markets, in which individuals freely choose their economic participation (Bettache et al., 2020; Harvey, 2007). In GBBB, competition is internalised and applied in various contexts. In regard to relationships, "dating is a competition" in which men compete for women's attention and high quality female partners. More broadly, society is presumed to be dog-eat-dog, indicated by Denmoand his guests' ambivalence towards "social security nets". These are alleged to make individuals "soft", "cushioned". That is, unfit to survive. As well as in Denmo's comments about the "cutthroat" corporate world (GBBB, 2022a), and his appeals to Evolutionary Psychology (EP).

Denmo and several guests appeal to a bastardised form of EP. I use this term because contemporary research in the discipline does not consider human behaviour to be exclusively biologically motivated. Rather, it considers whether certain human-psychological mechanisms have adapted to changing environments and endured over time (Buss & Schmitt, 2011). Such adaptation is said to apply to women and men, even in the domain of sex (Buss & Schmitt, 2011). The biggest difference, of course, is in the domain of pregnancy and childbirth. In terms of monogamy, both women and men can desire, and struggle to find long-term, committed partners (Buss & Schmitt, 2011). Crucially, the discipline of EP asserts that human behaviour is flexible, inextricable from social and cultural factors, and not bound to biological whims (Buss & Schmitt, 2011). Denmo and his guests' crude interpretations are consistent with the unsubstantiated just-so stories popularised during the 1990s, and progressed by the Manosphere. Its latent ideological function is to naturalise neoliberal competition, social Darwinism, and biological essentialism.

Under neoliberalism, "personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, [and] each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being" (Harvey, 2007, p. 65). This neoliberal *doxa* underpins GBBB, as Denmo and his guests make men responsible for their lives, with minimal consideration of the social, economic, and political contexts which influence everyday life. That said, there are sometimes vague references made to "society" at large, in which men are said to be in "decline" (GBBB, 2022e). Denmo also claims to observe men "checking out of society" (GBBB, 2022b). For him, "checking out" leads men to "settle for less" than they are otherwise capable of achieving for themselves. He says phones distract individuals, reduce attention span, and thus, the time men spend working on themselves. Thus, men's disaffection is also a personal fault. That the neoliberal political economy is at fault does not appear as a possibility, even as Denmo and his guests condemn structures inherent to the capitalist system. For example, they wish to avoid the 40-hour work week, office jobs, and labour which does not provide them with a sense of

personal meaning (GBBB, 2022a, 2022b). This informs their emphasis on entrepreneurship, which is alleged to provide income security, flexibility with one's hours, creativity, and purpose.

Ultimately, Denmo and his guests encourage men to find personal liberation within the conditions of neoliberal capitalism instead of contending with the system itself. Consequently, Denmo's podcast shares an ideological function with vitriolic online seduction discourse. Both "provide men with a way to avoid challenging their firmly ingrained neoliberal beliefs and assumptions, while still accounting for apparent economic problems" (Van Valkenburgh, 2019, p. 3). In using the individual as the unit of analysis and making personal freedom as paramount, GBBB is similar to the self-help of the pre-Internet men's movements. Its neoliberal individualisation involves the objectification and commodification of the individual.

Karl Marx argued that, under capitalism, commodities were fetishised so that the value of commodities appeared inherent to the products themselves. Labour power was obscured such that commodities were not recognised as the products of social labour, and the exploitative relation between labour and capital was veiled. By extension, Weekes (2005), writes "everything can be commodified, including sexuality" (p. 132). Many have argued that the conditions of late capitalism have drawn sexuality into market relations, such that "the lure of the exotic is deployed to sell everything from motor cars to exotic holidays, while sexuality is locked into fetishized images of what is desirable" (Weekes, 2005, p. 132). Denmo is engaged in a form of commodity fetishism. He obscures social relations, fetishising women and men as isolated individuals with calculable, conditional value in the sexual marketplace. There occurs a two-fold objectification. The first sense relates to treating individuals as objects, or object-like (Keller, 2021). Indeed, Denmo himself claims that, to an extent, women can be considered beauty objects and men as success objects. The second objectification relates to heterosexual male desires and their projection onto women, so that "one then think that women *are* the way one sexually desires them to be. What was formerly subjective desire becomes about objective reality" (Keller, 2021, p. 27). Thus, objectification and subjectivity fetishism overlaps with masculinism. Denmo's subjective desire of a traditionally feminine woman is universalised, such that all men are said to "love feminine women". Simultaneously, men are directed to be "masculine". Women's value is assigned primarily to her physical attractiveness to men, and men's value to their accumulation of resources and performance in the markets. Under these configurations, women and men are simultaneously objects *and* self-maximising market-beings seeking relationships with men deemed high value.

Conclusion

This thesis analysed the masculinist and neoliberal discourses of the male self-improvement podcast *Good Bro Bad Bro* (GBBB), in relation to the online Manosphere. It found that the episodes and their host, Jack Denmo, advance neoliberal *doxa* which overlaps with masculinist biological gender essentialism and sexism.

The patterns of language in GBBB objectify, commodify, and fetishise humans and heterosexual relationships such that individuals are positioned as competitive units in a sexual marketplace. Success in this marketplace is alleged to be contingent upon calculations of "value". This is an ambivalent, variously understood concept. Podcast guest Casey Zander, in one episode claims that value entails "recognition at a trade or skill or industry [...] and competence in a specific area where you are useful" (GBBB, 2022b). In another episode, Denmo claims that an individual's "value" depends on their location, physical appearance, style, employment, and social skills (GBBB, 2022g). Thus, value is always somewhat connected to one's job, profession, and market contributions. In this regard, Denmo and his guests condemn "dead-end" jobs, laud entrepreneurship, and condemn "social security nets". This implies that individuals must be entrepreneurial, self-sufficient, and engaged in continual professional and personal growth. Overall, Denmo advances the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism that the ideal individual is entrepreneurial, competitive, and affects a "cool" disposition in response to stressful social conditions (McGuigan, 2014). In addition, he positions the individual as a project in need of continual attention and improvement – a precept of self-help under neoliberalism (Nehring et al., 2016).

In GBBB, value is a gendered concept. Women's value is contingent primarily upon their physical appearance and adherence to traditional femininity. Men's value is contingent primarily on their market success and accumulation of resources. In differentiating between women and men's roles and value in the sexual marketplace, Denmo's neoliberal *doxa* overlaps with gender essentialist masculinism. Denmo's gender essentialism relies on a bastardised Evolutionary Psychology (EP) which rationalises sex differences to ordain patriarchal gender norms. Denmo lauds women who are traditionally feminine, and have the qualities associated with "good mothers". His use of EP embodies the neoliberal precept of competition such that men are alleged to compete amongst themselves for women's attention, driven by the biological imperative to continue their genetic lineage. Women are alleged to desire a monogamous relationship, due to the investment and risk that pregnancy entails. They are said to conduct a cost-benefit-analysis of potential partners. Thus, business logic is applied to reproduction (Connell, 1995).

That Denmo attempts to explain women and men's social behaviour in accordance with the reproductive arena embodies hegemonic, patriarchal approach to gender relations. Under patriarchy,

women are defined as reproductive bodies for male gratification, and the provision of heirs. In addition, women are considered to require male protection, due to their innate weakness compared to men. This latter ideology is evident in Denmo's discourse about men having a "duty" to protect women. However, his standpoint is ambivalent. He agrees with this being men's duty, but disagrees with the implication that women are more precious than men. Another patriarchal ideology is that men provide for women. Historically, women were barred from the labour market. While some were allowed to work certain jobs, these tended to be low-waged and precarious. Thus, women were coerced to depend on the men in their lives for their own livelihood. EP rationalises this arrangement by claiming it harks back to the hunter-gatherer nature of ancient societies. Relatedly, Denmo claims that women assess men for their resources and ability to provide. That said, he puts the onus on men to accumulate resources without denying women's participation in the labour force. In general, he embodies a masculinist neoliberalism which enables women to be labourers, but expects them to eventually become mothers.

To inform analysis of GBBB, I mapped the development of the Manosphere, and identified its evolving communities, prominent figures, ideology and discourse. I also detailed its prefiguration in men's response to the United States' women's movement during the mid-to-late twentieth century. Men's reaction to this period of women's rights exemplified the transition from a pro-feminist men's liberation project to an anti-feminist men's rights movement. This transition can be attributed to: the situation whereby a liberal feminism predicated on equal treatment between women and men struggled to mandate equality within the unequal social conditions of patriarchal capitalism. Also important was the declining efficacy of radical feminism due to its leaderlessness, structurelessness, and alienation of certain groups of women due to its assumption of universal sisterhood. Male consciousness raising as means for collective action became a mechanism for men's personal liberation from the burdensome male sex role. I found that these developments occurred alongside the expansion of a therapeutic popular culture and the self-help genre. The individualising function of self-help correlated with the deradicalisation of feminist consciousness raising.

I then traced the emergence of the self-help genre in Western nations, and argued that it reinforces neoliberal individualism. It induces individuals to position themselves as atomic, isolated beings, who are responsible for their own welfare and success. Meanwhile, the decline of social welfare spending, suppression of trade union power, wage stagnation, and increasing wealth inequality produce economic crises, social precarity, and austerity. In the Manosphere, the ontological insecurity induced by neoliberalism leads to an emphasis on self-help and self-improvement. "Thought leaders" (Bujalka et al., 2020) emerge to spread the discourse of men in plight and in need of their self-improvement advice. One such thought leader, Andrew Tate, encourages maliciousness towards women and hegemonic masculinity. One can argue this endangers the development of a healthy masculinity for his young male followers (Verma & Khurana, 2023). Jordan Peterson is another prominent figure. His self-help encourages an ascetic and conservative Christian lifestyle for

men, and ordains social hierarchies through appeals to religious myths and Evolutionary Psychology (EP). In addition, there is a smattering of Manosphere-associated male self-improvement podcasters: Myron Gains, Rollo Tomassi, Walter Weekes, and the late Kevin Samuels. It is within this broader social and online milieu that GBBB emerges.

I found that the podcast advances certain aspects of Manosphere ideology and discourse. These include the use of the Red Pill analogy as a metaphor for awakening men to Blue Pill "lies", the emphasis on Evolutionary Psychology (EP), and the concept of the sexual marketplace. Denmo somewhat troubles the latter. He removes the word "sexual" from the term, and indicates some aversion to the calculation of an individual's sexual marketplace value (SMV). Nonetheless, he uses the concept to convey that women and men's "options" peak at different ages. Another instance of ambivalence is found in his approach to Incels. Denmo and his guests censure Incels, the nihilistic Black Pill worldview, hating on women, and male entitlement towards women. Encouraging men to not hate women or think themselves entitled to a sexual partnership is a renunciation of the Manosphere. However, the podcast ultimately redirects male hatred away from women as such, and towards Blue Pill lies and EP. This naturalises the latter two discourses. In addition, Denmo and his guests' disparagement of Incels, contributes to the hegemonic condemnation of masculinities deemed subordinate and effeminate. In my view, Incels and the Black Pill worldview necessitate critical but sympathetic intervention, not "lookist" derision which threatens to further alienate them. Troubling the Manosphere further, Denmo does not blame women for men's alleged difficulties in the sexual marketplace. The Manosphere scapegoats women, but Denmo faults men. In his words, "everything is men's fault". This is, ultimately, regressive. It makes individual men hyper-responsible for their social position, value, and market success. It relates to his masculinist discourses that men are the leaders of women, the captains of their partnerships, and thus, responsible for themselves and the behaviour of their female partner. It again renders men as isolated, individual units, and universalises their capacity for social mobility and success.

Overall, Denmo's podcast is characterised by an inbuilt neoliberal *doxa*, sexism, and an ambivalence towards the Manosphere. Using Kate Manne's (2017) definition of misogyny as the successful policing of women's behaviour, GBBB is misogynistic to the extent that it succeeds in getting women to adhere to restrictive, traditional femininity. Given the niche audience of GBBB, the podcast may instead remain a kitsch, sexist artefact. That said, kitsch and niche does not signal irrelevance. Rather, Denmo and his podcast are cultural signifiers of a wider culture of male ontological anxiety and reinvigorated masculinism. Such ontological anxiety stems from the erosion of their hegemonic status and their economic precarity under neoliberalism (Faludi, 1992; Hanisch, 1975; Meszaros, 2021; Van Valkenburgh, 2019). This has resulted in the perception of male crises – variously articulated as the crisis of men, crisis of intimacy, men in plight, men in decline. And, in Denmo's words, a "male epidemic" in dating protocol. Where the Manosphere reacts to male crises with vitriol towards women, Denmo responds with censures of men who do not work hard enough to

succeed within adverse social conditions. The former seeks a reassertion of patriarchal social relations, the latter articulates patriarchal ideology through a masculinist neoliberal *doxa*. Both are problematic. The dual structures of patriarchy and capitalism afflict men, and women more so. For men, the privileges promised by the former cannot be realised under the conditions of the latter. Nor should they be. Rather, as socialist feminists acknowledge, there must be a structural challenge to capitalism alongside liberation from patriarchy. Faulting individual men for felt anxieties reproduces the societal conditions which facilitate discontent.

Appendix: List of Analysed *Good Bro Bad Bro* Episodes

Good Bro Bad Bro. (2022a, March 17). *How to know a girl is girlfriend material (green flags)!*

    [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/1uk8zxLY7zk?si=KzEWx4rVeqJ2mUO9

Good Bro Bad Bro. (2022b, March 24). *How to stop low value behaviour in men w/ @CaseyZander*

    [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/xA6F1044ssU?si=at2X3OogErm3cG3F

Good Bro Bad Bro. (2022c, April 6). *How to turn your dating life around with relationship coach*

    @DavidMeessen [Video]. YouTube.

    https://youtu.be/PjxBQ-HHKUg?si=r0V9yoWx0dRV9lV_

Good Bro Bad Bro. (2022d, April 28). *How to approach women IRL & what turns girls off (STOP*

    DOING THIS)! [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/Jeeiok2FNS0?si=sMVGnJ3uEZOuKJNp

Good Bro Bad Bro. (2022e, May 5). *How Tinder Blackpilled an entire generation of men w/*

    @KevinRayWilder [Video]. YouTube.

    https://youtu.be/JpDNcSm9Gx0?si=JdRC66_h_Bthji3r

Good Bro Bad Bro. (2022f, May 26). *How to approach women IRL with female dating coach*

    @DatingByBlaine [Video]. YouTube.

    https://youtu.be/X2a7HXsLNiU?si=DfCS68xF2kMbSdM_

Good Bro Bad Bro. (2022g, June 2). *How to get a girlfriend – breaking down our past relationships*

[Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/UIbyR7D2Gh8?si=i2-rUsdjwzMP0KFy

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