

The Manosphere, International Dating and the Crisis of Access

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Abstract

In this study, men participating in the international dating industry, also known as the ‘mail order bride’ industry, demonstrate a shared worldview of intimate relationships with men who identify as part of the online manosphere. Men in both the online manosphere and international dating industries complain about their loss of hegemonic status as middle-class men in the U.S. as economic precarity continues to grow. For non-hegemonic middle-class men, the international dating industry provides them with a market based solution to their frustration with the lack of attractive women available to them locally. Men in the manosphere and international dating industry term this a ‘crisis of intimacy’, but in fact are discussing a crisis of access to women’s bodies.

Keywords: Intimacy, Mail Order Bride, Manosphere, Masculinity

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. The real problem with this new reality however [of unregulated female sexuality], is found in the hordes of thirsty young men who fall outside the fortunate group at the top. The reality can no longer be ignored that the deregulation of the sexual marketplace has disenfranchised millions of young men across the western world. Elliot Rodgers¹ is merely among the most extreme examples. One can also see how this crisis of intimacy has divided the male community. (Thomas Hobbes, Return of Kings blog from 2014; a Pick Up Artist Blog).

1. Introduction

The *Return of Kings* is a notorious Pick-Up Artist website started by the controversial Roosh Valizadeh in 2012 that advocates “red pill”² theories of masculinity, questionable strategies for having sex with women, and the view that feminism is behind the decline of Western Civilization. As an extreme example of the content available within the larger manosphere, which includes the online communities of Men's Right's Activists, Pick Up Artists/Seduction Community, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and Involuntary Celibates (Incels), the *Return of Kings* blog was highlighted by numerous media outlets and the Southern Poverty Law³ center for its misogynistic content. It shut down in 2018, but this particular quote by the blogger “Thomas Hobbes”, a clear reference to the deep libertarian ideologies underlying red pill philosophies (Ging 2019; Lilly 2016), highlights what he calls a ‘crisis of intimacy’ and draws attention to men's increasing frustrations with their loss of power within the intimate sphere of their lives, as well as the economic sphere.

¹ Elliot Rodgers, a self-identified Incel, is known for committing the Isla Vista massacre, attacking young women outside of sorority homes in Santa Barbara, CA.

² Red Pill is a reference to the film *The Matrix*, which provides the main character with the choice of taking a red pill and awakening to the realities of living in the Matrix, or to take a blue pill and remain asleep to the realities. Red pill theories center on men awaking to the fact that Western society has become misandric.

³ An American non-profit legal advocacy group for civil rights and public interest litigation

This study examines the overlap in ideologies between the manosphere and the international dating industry, also commonly referred to as the ‘mail order bride’⁴ industry, to show how ideologies from the manosphere permeate to men that do not necessarily identify as part of the manosphere communities. The international dating industry commodifies access to contacting women in other countries through websites, romance tours, and matchmaking and has been selling men a version of the red pill theory⁵ since the 1970s’ with the introduction of pen pal catalogs in Asia. Through utilizing empirical data drawn from a multi-sited ethnographic study of men participating in the international dating industry, this study aims to show how red-pilled theories about heterosexual intimacy and access to women are not contained to the manosphere and are reproduced by men searching for wives abroad.

Men participating in the manosphere and international dating industry blame feminism for a perceived ‘crisis of intimacy’, as feminism creates a scarcity of attractive women in the West⁶, where the majority of women are characterized as unfeminine, fat and unkempt (Constable 2003). Beyond a shared disdain for feminism, men involved in the international dating industry adopt the same market based logic that various manosphere communities apply to intimate relationships with women. However, the men involved in both the manosphere and the international dating industry are not actually discussing intimacy with women, but are instead discussing their lack of access to desired women’s bodies when they reference the ‘crisis of intimacy’, much like Thomas Hobbes in the beginning quote. While the numerous communities of the manosphere provide men with a variety of solutions for dealing with a lack of access to desired women, such as avoiding marriage (MGTOW) or learning ‘game’ to have sex with women (Seduction Community), this

⁴ I find the term ‘mail order bride’ to be problematic, as it implies that people are purchased in this industry, which is not the case.

⁵ Most older men do not directly identify with red pill theories, but the anti-feminist premise of the international dating industry is a form of being ‘red-pilled’.

⁶ I recognize the problems surrounding the term ‘West’ and its colonial context. However, men in the manosphere and international dating industry use this terminology and so I use it in this study for consistency.

study examines the international dating industry as a commodified space that allows men to apply market based solutions to the problems of access they perceive within intimate relationships in the West.

2. Applying Market Logics to ‘Intimacy’

For men participating in the international dating industry, the 1950’s in the U.S. still serve as the pinnacle of white middle class masculine success. Most middle class men could afford to support a family on their wages, as well as buy homes and consumer goods, and they maintained a largely unquestioned hegemonic position in society (Gilbert 2005; Savran 1998). However, the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Movement began to challenge white men’s hegemony and many men view themselves as the victims of the economic progress made by various minority groups (Kimmel 2013; Savran 1998). At the same time, market liberalization, the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs abroad, and the erosion of the welfare state significantly impacted white middle class men’s abilities to support a family on a single income (Harvey 1989). Within the U.S., middle and working class incomes have become largely stagnant in comparison to the rate of inflation for the past forty years (Leicht and Fitzgerald 2006).

The neoliberal structural changes in the economy towards increasing flexibility, entrepreneurship and consumption have also dramatically impacted people’s social lives. At its core, neoliberalism encourages the art of self-governance, or governmentality (Foucault 2008), and equates consumer choice with freedom (Grewal 2005). Within the manosphere and international dating industry, men equate the concept of ‘rights’ with access to women’s bodies and ‘freedom’ as the freedom to exercise consumer choice within the sexual market place. Most of the men participating in the international dating industry are far from the hegemonic ideal of masculinity in the U.S. (Connell 1995), as they are typically small business owners or middle management instead of wealthy corporate leaders. In order to reassert their masculinity and move more towards the hegemonic ideal, men participate in the international dating industry and utilize market logics to access the idealized woman that is unavailable to them in their local dating markets, which is defined in terms of emphasized femininity (*ibidem*): young, thin, and attractive.

In a time of increasing economic precarity for much of the middle class, “love is only slightly less contingent than work” (Berlant 2011, 185). Thus, men struggling in the economic sphere are looking towards the intimate sphere of their lives as a space for ‘upgrades’ (O’Neill 2018) through accessing attractive women’s erotic capital (Hakim 2011). Men within the international dating industry seek trophy wives that provide them with a boost to their masculinity amongst other men (Author 2017), demonstrating the importance of the homosocial hierarchies (Bird 1996) existing between men, based upon their access to women’s bodies. For economically stagnant men, investing in a young and attractive foreign wife is a more attainable status symbol than many luxury material goods, as well as a longer lasting investment. Increasing numbers of people are turning to a variety of intimate industries (Parreñas, Silvey and Thai 2016) and using neoliberal market logics to find intimacy, sex, and romance.

Gill (2009) finds in a study of women’s magazines that intimate relationships and sexual subjectivity are increasingly presented in the media as a site of labor and self-investment. The author identifies the discursive themes of ‘intimate entrepreneurship’ and ‘men-ology’ in women’s magazines focused on ‘pleasing men’, which encourage women to remodel how they think about their bodies, their desires and sexual behaviors, and the types of intimate relationships they decide to engage in with men. In these magazines, women are repeatedly told to ‘work’ on a sexual skill set and ‘invest’ in their looks. O’Neill (2018) builds upon Gill’s conceptions of intimate entrepreneurship in her study of British Seduction Community⁷ boot camps where men are sold the skills to attract and have sex with desired women, known as ‘the game’. Seduction coaches sell success with desired women as an attainable goal that men clients can reach through personal investment and labor.

Previous studies of the international dating industry have documented American men’s desires to date and marry younger and more beautiful women than those who are accessible to them in their domestic dating markets (Constable 2003; Schaeffer 2013). Men participating in the industry often define beauty in terms of thin bodies, feminine clothing, makeup, and “taking care of their appearance” (Osipovich 2015). Within the international

⁷ Also known as the Pick Up Artist community and part of the larger manosphere.

dating industry, men are willing to pay for the service of introductions to beautiful women outside of the U.S. in order to exert more choice, based on the scarcity of attractive and younger women available to them in their domestic dating markets. Thus, industry participants' adoption of a market orientation towards their intimate lives reflects Zelizer's (2005) findings that intimate and economic considerations are not separate and hostile to one another, but are instead deeply intertwined throughout all forms of relationships.

3 'Hot' Women as Enduring Status Symbols of Masculinity

Men's performance of masculinity within a group has been characterized as a homosocial enactment, in which manhood is performed in front of, and granted by, other men (Calzo 2014). Homosociality refers to same-sex focused social relationships and Bird (1996) argues that homosocial interactions between men contribute to the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity in three ways: by encouraging emotional detachment, competitiveness, and the sexual objectification of women. The competitive nature of men's social interactions creates a 'pecking order' and women's bodies provide an important arena for establishing this order.

To improve their status within the hierarchy of masculinity, individual men try to achieve markers of hegemonic masculinity, such as sexual achievement, wealth, and power. Connell (1995) argues that men's objectification of women, as well their competition for these same objectified women, is the essence of what hegemonic masculinity means in society. As numerous scholars have noted, heterosexual sexual experience is an important route towards establishing masculine status among male peers (Flood 2008). Therefore, patriarchal heterosexuality can be understood in terms of the 'traffic in women' (Rubin 1975), as women's bodies are used to cement the intimate bonds between heterosexual men (Sedgwick 1985).

Scholarship surrounding commodified intimate labor (Boris and Parreñas 2017) highlights the important role that women's intimate labor and emphasized femininity play in men's cultivation of their masculine identities. Discussions of intimate labor within sex tourism (Brennan 2004; Cabezas 2009; Hoang 2015; Kempadoo 2004), strip clubs (Frank

2002), and hostess clubs (Allison 2009; Choi 2018; Parreñas 2012) highlight the importance of intimate industries (Parreñas, Silvey, and Thai 2016) that commodify women's intimate labor as providing men with boosts to their masculinity.

The men in O'Neill's (2018) study of seduction boot camps argued that the attractiveness of a man's sexual partner determines his value and worth in society. Both Ward's (2020) and O'Neill's (2018) studies of seduction trainings highlight men's desires to be more selective and 'upgrade' the types of women available to them by applying market logics to their intimate lives. Ward (2020, 81) quotes a trainer that affirms the importance of sexual choice, "Men want to be able to choose, not settle for the low hanging fruit." O'Neill (2015, 65) quotes a seduction trainer advertising men not to settle for average women, "If you're getting with girls who are not at the level you want, you're settling. And settling is the worst thing you can do. Because every time you see a guy with a hotter girl, you think, "I wish I was him"". The focus of men in the manosphere and the international dating industry is capturing the masculinity boost that comes from accessing 'hot' women's erotic capital. The constant striving for higher quality of women to date within the global dating industry, as well as the seduction community and other manosphere communities, highlights a techno-mediated culture obsessed with 'upgrades' (Gregg 2013, 309), where sex is considered a consumptive rather than relational act (Gilbert 2013, 13).

When sex is viewed as a consumptive act, accessing the 'best' product becomes an important goal. Rivers Moore (2013) theorizes in her study of sex workers that the labor of being beautiful is a form of affective labor in order to show how beauty has value, is something that circulates, can be exchanged, and is relational. Rivers Moore (2013) argues that what drives the sex tour industry versus local red light district sex work in Costa Rica is the intangible, but highly coveted, sense of self-esteem that men receive from dating a younger, beautiful woman. Mears's (2020) study of models partying in the VIP lounges of clubs shows how club promoters use their access to models' beauty in order to make money from wealthy club patrons, who also want to be seen with the most beautiful women in the world for a boost to their masculinity.

4 Methods

In order to collect data to answer the research question of how manosphere ideologies overlap with the international dating industry, this study incorporates a variety of ethnographic methods within a global, comparative setting (Appadurai 1996; Burawoy 2000; Marcus 1995; Tsing 2011) of the international dating industry. The study is multi-sited, with data collected in three key sites for the industry; Colombia, Ukraine, and the Philippines. I chose to follow romance tours in these three countries, as they are the most popular sites in their respective regions. Ukraine is the A Foreign Affair's (AFA)⁸ most popular destination of all, with the Philippines a close second. For this study, I followed romance tours staged by AFA between 2011 and 2013, remaining in the field for six non-continuous months with additional fieldwork completed in the summer of 2016. I was able gain entrée into attending AFA's romance tours as an observer by attending an open house informational session that AFA provided. AFA is based out of Phoenix, Arizona but the company hires a number of local and affiliate offices in each country they host tours in.

I entered the romance tours in each country as a known researcher, and participants were asked for their informed consent to participate in the study. I observed men as a researcher by attending social events with them, accompanying men on dates with their permission (as well as their date's permission), and spending time with them in the lobby of the hotel, debriefing after their various dates, and gathering both informal and formal interview data from over fifty men. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured recorded interviews with thirty agency employees, ten in each country, including local office managers, translators and local agency owners affiliated with AFA, and I observed them on a tour in to understand how they perceived the industry. During my time in each site, I took every opportunity to conduct both formal⁹ and informal interviews with agency employees study participants while sitting in their offices for my observations.

⁸ AFA has been featured on Dateline, Our America with Lisa Ling, and in the documentary Love Me, demonstrating that they are open to scholars and the media.

⁹ Interviews typically ranged between thirty and ninety minutes and were tape recorded with each participant's permission.

Beyond observing romance tours, I spent five years following the international dating industry in general, attending a number of IDate¹⁰ industry conferences to meet with other agencies and matchmakers, as well as hear the business concerns shared within the industry. In addition to my time following AFA tours, I have interviewed seven clients of smaller boutique matchmaking agents, as well as other romance tour providers like Dream Connections. Most of the men I interviewed are white, over forty years old in age, divorced and hail from the U.S., Australia, Canada and the U.K. All names of participants involved have been changed for their privacy, as have been any identifying details. However, I do have express permission from A Foreign Affair, Marriage by Natali and Dream Connections to include their organization by name.

5 Dating Abroad, Exercising Choice

During my time following a boutique matchmaking agency, Marriage by Natali, based in Kiev, Ukraine, I interviewed a Canadian man, Rick, while he was working with Natalia to find a wife. Rick mentioned a young friend he met on a romance tour in Ukraine, Nikola, and how Nikola identified as MGTOW. I asked Rick for Nikola's contact information as I was curious to talk to an international dating industry participant who also self-identified as part of the manosphere ideology. During my time researching international dating blogs and websites, I often found numerous overlaps with ideologies expressed in various manosphere communities.

Nikola is a unique case, as he is relatively younger than most men participating in the industry at 31 years old and much more in tune with red pill theories and the manosphere than the older men I typically interview in the industry. Nikola realized his young age and interest in international dating made people judge him as a loser:

So I came to Ukraine as a younger guy, it's a big deal. Not only do we get feedback from friends, we have to put up with our family also. They are going to say what the

¹⁰ IDate conference is the Internet Dating and Dating Industry conference that brings together app developers, payment operators and matchmakers.

hell is wrong with this guy? How is that he couldn't hook up with a local girl. And he has to go over there [Ukraine].

Despite his family's judgments, Nikola continues on his quest to move to Ukraine in order to constantly have the option of beautiful women available, even if he ends up divorcing his wife.

In addition to being younger, Nikola is also Mexican-American, challenging the perception that only white men participate in international dating or the manosphere (even though the majority of men participating are white men in the international dating industry¹¹). Nikola told me about a woman he was obsessed with during his twenties, and how she was this hot, rich stereotypical Los Angeles woman that brushed him off for his lack of money and his ethnicity. His experience from this rejection shaped his interest in the red pill communities and international dating industry. Nikola explained to me that at first he considered himself an Incel, angry at all 'hot' women that seemed out of his reach but shifted towards MGTOW by bowing out of the Western dating market. However, Nikola, like many participants in the manosphere, counters many of the MGTOW principals by still wanting to marry a woman from Ukraine or Russia.

Nikola's interest in the international dating industry focused on what he perceived as the stiff competition in the dating market for the 'hot' women he wanted to date in L.A.,

People say go to match.com, search everything out and put exactly what you want. And yeah we can do that but you are not anticipating that the girl I am going to message is attractive and probably she has got 20 thousand emails from thousands of guys trying to hit on her. I want to find a girl without so much competition, without so much problems.

Nikola agrees with the red pill philosophy in that he sees feminism as having created problems in heterosexuality and men's gender roles,

¹¹ From my own data and observed by Scholes (1998)

We [his tour mates] thought similar, like, feminism has raised up a very toxic culture. And it's been very toxic that straight men are now in a sense losing their position in society... as a man like, you can't even behave like a man. You are immediately judged, you are immediately humiliated as a characterless person.

He refuses to enact the 'sensitive man' version of masculinity, as he believes that being a blue pill 'cuck' gets him less sexual attention from women and more abuse.

While Nikola directly referenced the various manosphere communities and the red pill ideology in our interviews, most of my other participants did not. They did, however, share a similar ideological outlook to the red pill philosophy. A number of men I interviewed mentioned feeling unappreciated and ignored by a lot of American women whom they were interested in dating within their local dating markets, which were often younger women. Manny, a 48 years old truck driver, felt invisible to women in the U.S.,

I'll tell you what. I live in a town of 100,000 people and 20 miles away is another 100,000 but I work in North Dakota and where I work is a town of 12,000 and there's probably 50,000 there now. That's a lot of women. I can't even get a woman to look at me in the United States. Not the ones I'm looking at.

Even if women would show interest in him, he believed they would be too demanding, like his ex-wife. Based on his failed marriage, Manny claimed,

We [his brother Tommy] were just talking about that yesterday. American women want it all. Nothing you ever do is enough. You don't work enough, you work too much. You're not here enough, you're here too much.

Thus, Manny reiterated common discourses by claiming that American women dominate the heterosexual intimate relationships and that Western society largely caters to women's demands.

His brother Tommy explained to me that younger women in America whom he finds attractive look at him with disgust,

I mean, I go to a 7-11 or a convenience store and there's a girl there, 26, cute girl. I try to make conversation with her and she looks at me like I'm a freaking pervert. I might not be dressed like it right now but I'm a fucking millionaire. And you know what? This girl at the store, you look at me like I'm beneath you.

Despite Tommy's wealth and success, younger women in the U.S. are not interested in dating him and even look down on him. Like many of the participants in the manosphere, Tommy feels unjustly rated low in terms of sexual market value by local women (O'Neill 2016; Ward 2020), despite his financial successes.

Therefore, Tommy blames feminism for ruining heterosexual women's relationship expectations in the U.S. by telling women that they could have it all,

Well, they've been told so long they can have everything, you know that they can have the career, they can have the family. And then they're working on their career real hard to be successful, which everybody wants to be successful. Then they get that and at 40 they want to start a family. It's bullshit. You've missed your window of opportunity on the way up as you're looking for it on the way down, and they're dating 27 year olds and they're 45. Then you got the high school sweetheart and prom queen and all she ever liked was the bad boy football player or the motorcycle rider and now she's got 3 kids and he's off doing whatever or in prison or something. Now she's looking for a good guy to be a provider.

In accordance with red pill theories, Tommy argues that women are interested in the 'bad boy' alpha male instead of the stable, good provider like himself. He explains that the most beautiful women during the age of adolescence, such as the prom queen, aim for the alpha males and end up regretting it later in life when the alpha bad boy abandons her. In Tommy's opinion, these women should have chosen a good guy that provides (or a beta man) instead of the sexually appealing alpha bad boy.

Despite Tommy's financial success, he feels ignored by the women he is interested in dating in his local dating market. Much like red pill rhetoric, Tommy's claims about

women in the U.S. belie his belief that women have the upper hand in the sexual marketplace. He further points out that most of the men involved in the industry are financially successful but have difficulties finding women interested in them in the U.S.,

You see the guys here on this tour. They are successful. I mean 25-35% of them have a net worth of a million dollars. And that's what women say they want, and none of the guys here can get a date for one, the worst thing about being a man my age is the women.

Thus, a subsection of financially successful men within the U.S. feel like they are no longer pillars of hegemonic masculinity as providers in society anymore. Tommy's quote reflects red pill theories that state women want a hot alpha male when they are young and attractive, only to become interested in beta provider men when they are older and desperate.

Thus, Tommy uses language similar to the red pill philosophy by claiming, "We unplugged from the Matrix. The matrix that we are all supposed to be the same thing." Instead of buying into the evolving gender role expectations within heterosexual relationships in the U.S., men within the manosphere take the red pill and challenge what they view as the gynocentric and anti-men values of Western society. However, Tommy points out that there are serious consequences for unplugging from the Matrix, such as losing social networks. He argued,

If you bring one of these girls home to the U.S., you're shunned. I mean friends, close family, stuff like that. You ain't gonna get invited to anybody's swimming pool party or nothing. Women don't want their husbands to know that they can dump their fat ass and come down here and have a 28 year old. They don't like that.

Much like the manosphere's revulsion of having to deal with entitled, fat Western women, Tommy blames these same women for stigmatizing an industry that provides them with competition.

Juan, a Puerto Rican man living in Charleston, explained to me his interest in dating Colombian women as a result of the sexual market dynamics present in the U.S. and other

Western, wealthy countries. He argued that American women are valuable commodities and that in rich societies in general, women are viewed as more valuable commodities than men. Thus, to Juan, women in the US have their choice of men, and American men are constantly rejected by attractive women. However, in poor countries, men are the valuable commodity instead and that was one of the main reasons Juan cited for his interest in the global dating industry and finding a wife in Colombia. Paul, a white bachelor in his mid-fifties from Boca Raton, Florida, explained to me his interest in the global dating industry in Colombia in terms of traditional societies and gender roles. Paul explained to me,

In Colombia, the society is traditional. They value men. Women value men and their contributions to the family. It's totally the opposite in the U.S., where its women who have all the power.

Thus, Paul and Juan's rhetoric mirrors that of various online manosphere communities regarding women's dominant position in the Western sexual market. In addition, Paul's comment points to the fact that women abroad still appreciate men's role as providers, whereas being a provider is not enough to attract the 'hot' desirable women in Western society.

As demonstrated in numerous studies regarding online dating and men's preferences regarding women's age (Rudder 2014), men prefer to date women younger than themselves, and that trend increases as men get older. Men's preference for younger women also extends to the international dating agency, as most of the participants are above forty years old and want a significantly younger mate. For instance, Jeremy, a 56 year old restaurateur whom I met on tour in Colombia, explained to me that older women only care about uninteresting things, like children and grandchildren,

As far as my opinion of American women, as wrong as it probably is, ask anyone we know if I am wrong. They're spoiled, they are way too career-driven when they are young and when they are older all they want to care about is children and grandchildren and you know I tried dating some women my age, fifty to 55 years old, and we

had nothing in common; I have no children and I certainly don't have any grandchildren so their conversation revolves around their grandchildren and that's all they can talk about. It just seems like they have no other interests.

Jeremy, based on his bachelor lifestyle, claimed he had nothing in common with women in his age group in the U.S., as all they cared about was children and grandchildren. Due to his disconnect from having children, Jeremy argued that,

I feel in America, for the most part, the man on the priority list of the woman, moves way down the ladder, and continues to move down the ladder as life goes on.

Thus, he started to look for women abroad and actually ended up married to younger woman from Vietnam six years after we met during his tour in Colombia.

His friend Tim, a 55 year old divorced rancher, agreed that dating in the U.S. is difficult, as he does not have much in common with women in his age group,

The women that contact me on match.com, they're fifty years old, or more. They tell me I think we have a lot of common and we should talk and I think what in the hell would we have in common? (Laughs). The quality of women I really like is mid 30's but very few of them out there, really, they like me because I got money, that's the way I see it.

Thus, Tim utilizes a discourse of gold-digging to characterize younger women that would potentially be interested in dating him within his local dating market. Like much of the manosphere, Tim assumes that women are interested in dating him as a form of hypergamy, based on his higher income, but he is not interested in what he considers 'gold diggers'. He wants an 'authentic' connection, devoid of economic considerations, echoing the common sentiment that separates the intimate realm from the economic.

Many men in my study expressed the fact that in general, men are undervalued in greater American society, and particularly in the sexual marketplace. Men often explained to me that women's lack of appreciation for men is supported in the larger media and

culture, and that masculine role models in the media no longer exist. Manny explained to me that the male role models highlighted in the media are a mockery of real masculinity,

Yes, watch tv. What's going on there are buffoons. All the men are buffoons. The only strong male role model on tv for me is Charlie Sheen¹². And he was just doing what Charlie Sheen was doing. If you know another one, please tell me.

In addition to lamenting the media's poor portrayal of masculinity, a number of men over fifty years old referred to the tough realities of being an older white man looking to date women they are attracted to in the U.S.

Global dating agencies create an empowering narrative for men that feel like victims by portraying them as desirable suitors that many young women are looking for in foreign countries. Peter explained to me that he felt he finally had choice, which is how he characterized women's position in the U.S. dating market,

The analysis that I see is that what attractive American women go through on a daily basis of being inundated by men perhaps when they go to a bar and meet, that's what I am experiencing here. So, it's different. Like there they can say, I don't like this one, I get to choose. I have the ability to choose here.

Many men complained that women held the power in the U.S. dating market, but that the roles were reversed in countries like Ukraine, Colombia, and the Philippines. Men felt desired by young and beautiful women, reaffirming their masculinity as hegemonic in the global order. Sixty-year-old Morty felt like he was a show dog in the Philippines, and that local women would flaunt older white men as dates in public, "I mean these girls are proud to be with me. I feel like a top prized show dog every time I am in the Philippines and it feels great." For men over fifty years old, the romantic attention they receive in the global dating industry is very different from their experiences in the domestic dating market.

¹² An actor known for his love of partying and women.

Many agencies and men referred to the fact that men must become “deprogrammed” or “unplugged from the matrix” in order to recognize that men’s sexual market value increases in a different cultural setting. I met Matt at a social event in Kiev, Ukraine which he attended on his own and not as part of the AFA tour. Matt was doing business in Ukraine and had spent many years observing and participating in the global dating industry. He explained to me that the first step towards finding success within the international dating industry is deprogramming oneself from the sexual market dynamics prevalent in Western countries, where women have an advantage. According to Matt,

And so it’s taken me couple socials, which is good about the social part, to start to re-evaluate where you are at. So if you have Stockholm syndrome, you actually have to de-program those people. And we don’t blame those people for Stockholm Syndrome. In fact we say it is this syndrome and we are okay with that. But what about the dating part? No one calls that Stockholm Syndrome. That should be a chapter of your book, that’s really what it is. We have been so grooved, and the women have been so grooved in the United States, they have the same thing, so there’s that filter. Anna [Nicole Smith], you are too good looking for the guy [older husband in Texas]¹³ in there so we know that can’t be real, so we file a lawsuit because we are the children. They haven’t taken into consideration her [Anna Nicole Smith]assets that she bought to the relationship and they think, oh he’s [her 89 year old husband] got to be in dementia. Maybe he wasn’t. So when I get here, I have to deprogram. You know what deprograms me? It’s the women here. It’s funny, I went downtown and had to ask for directions from these Ukrainian men. I guess that’s a lie, I actually went to pick a girl up and realized she was married. They were the wedding ring on the opposite hand. I didn’t know that. So anyway, I didn’t pick her up, I was talking to her, but the point is. Even if you are really young, and I offer to buy you breakfast tomorrow, that’s all I want: good food and good conversation. But here, young women feel like I am constantly picking them up, because of the age discrepancies. I feel that I am not a threat to you, and you are not a threat to me. That’s the way it works, so I am trying to un-program and get used to this new paradigm.

¹³ Reference to the Anna Nicole Smith’s marriage to an 89 year old wealthy man and his children’s lawsuit against her for his inheritance.

Numerous men explained to me that their first few trips abroad to meet women on romance tours or through matchmakers broke them 'free from the matrix' of women's domination in the sexual market, and they had to reprogram their mindsets to believe that much younger and beautiful women are interested in dating an average Western guy.

Matt realizes that men involved in the global dating industry are increasing their sexual market value when they travel abroad looking for potential partners. He argues that men who have not had luck in their local dating markets in the West can go abroad and find successful long-term relationships,

But it is a general statement I think a lot of people come here [Ukraine] because of the fact that they haven't had that luck at home [U.S.] wherever their home may be and they come here and they see... they get refreshed being here. They can have long term relationship, I think which they can't...I think in America.

Matt explained to me that Western men's sexual market value jumps dramatically when they travel abroad, and they begin to receive large amounts of sexual attention from women that they are not used to receiving. At times, he argues men can get competitive with one another during romance tours, but that it is unnecessary based on the amount of female attention available,

But what happens with this competition thing, is that these guys have never seen a twenty year old look at them, much less a forty year old. And now you have all these young women approaching you, asking to sit down next to you, to talk to you with pretty good English, some of them. They're trapped. They never experienced that in 20, 30, 40 years if ever. Since college or high school, they haven't experienced that. There's somebody that pretty, intelligent, and so know the ideas they have set in America are wobbling so hard that they don't realize that the 19 or 20 year old is really interested.

In this way, once again, Matt tells me that Western men have to unplug from the rules in Western society for courtship, dating and sexual market value and recognize that abroad, they can attract quality younger women that are genuinely interested in dating them.

One of the few men who differed in his viewpoints was Charles. I met Charles during my time on tour in Davao, Philippines, and we met as he was there to pick up his fiancé and fly back to Hawaii with her. Charles is, like Nikola, a younger client than most others but he does not share the same obsession with finding the ‘hottest’ woman available to him. Instead of attending a romance tour, Charles planned a scuba trip to the Philippines and began corresponding with one woman he was interested in meeting, his fiancé (and now wife). For Charles, the romance tour set up did not appeal to him at all,

I mean I looked, I saw they [AFA] offered it [romance tour] and I just thought it wasn't for me. I'm more of an independent traveler, don't really do group tours. It's just not my thing. So yeah, I'm a little different. Even Helia [office manager] was like you are one of the first guys to not want things. The usual thing is to have them do everything for you. And yeah, the first time I came if I and Brenda [fiancé] didn't hit it off, I don't think I would have used the office to find any other girls.

Charles traveled to Davao to meet Brenda in particular and was not interested in pursuing other women, let alone participate in the intensity of a romance tour,

I mean, I'm sure it's a fun time but if I was truly looking to meet somebody and have a serious relationship, I wouldn't expect it to happen. I'm not saying it can't happen, obviously it can happen but the social thing, is just too many girls. You don't really get a chance to know anyone. So that's why.

Charles characterized the romance tour as overwhelming and was not interested in a large number of women.

Unlike most of the men I conducted interviews with, Charles did not denigrate women from the U.S. when I asked him about what drew him to finding a potential wife abroad he answered:

I was trying online dating and it's kind of how I got involved in this. I got interested in Filipino culture through a girl I met in the U.S. and I dated her for one or two years. And after I dated her, I kinda figured I would pursue finding another Filipino. And outside of that, obviously I am attracted to Filipinas. Physically, I am just attracted to Asian women. And yeah, so I just thought I would give it a shot. I've been engaged before, when I was 24. It didn't work, whatever happened and we didn't get married. Obviously, I was only ever dating women in the U.S. and it wasn't really working, so I tried and thought I would give it a shot. And see what happens.

Again, unlike most of the other men I talked with, Charles characterized his interest in Filipina women independently of defining feminism and women in the U.S. as problematic for intimate relationships. The only comment Charles had in comparing women in the U.S. versus women in the Philippines was the issue of maturity, which he ultimately linked more to the poverty conditions in the Philippines rather than innate traditional traits,

I will say that, one thing I will say about Filipina girls versus American girls, is that she at 23 years old is way more mature than 23 years old you would meet in the U.S. She's more mature than half the 30 year olds I know. Just because I think they have to deal with some much more real life stuff, being poor.

Charles is one of the few men I met participating in the industry that chose not to denigrate feminism or have very rigid expectations of his wife's future 'traditional' behavior in the U.S.

6 Conclusion

In this study, men participating in the international dating industry demonstrate a shared worldview of intimate relationships with men that identify as part of online manosphere. Men in both the online manosphere and international dating industries complain about their loss of hegemonic status as middle class men in the U.S. and the impact feminism has on intimate relationships. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, men define

their masculinity in terms of access to desired women, who are defined as thin, attractive and young. For non-hegemonic middle class men, the international dating industry provides them with a market based solution to their frustration with the lack of attractive women available to them locally. Ideas of applying market logics to intimate relationships with women is a common thread in numerous manosphere communities and red pill theories as well.

Similar to men who adopt red pill theories from the manosphere, a number of men I interviewed participating in the international dating industry often referenced ideas related to being “deprogrammed”, “unplugged from the Matrix”, or a victim of “Stockholm Syndrome”, which reflect ideas from red pill theories that utilize similar terminology to describe men’s awakening regarding the misandry of Western society. Men that referenced a form of deprogramming when they traveled abroad to meet women felt that they could exercise increased sexual choice, based on their boost in desirability as Westerners in non-Western spaces.

As economic precarity continues to grow for middle class men in the US, increasing numbers of these men are becoming frustrated with their loss of status and hegemony in both the economic and intimate spheres of their lives. Men in the manosphere classify their frustrations with women’s increased sexual market choice and freedom as consumers as a ‘crisis of intimacy’. However, men in the manosphere and the international dating industry are actually discussing a crisis in access to women’s bodies for the average ‘nice guy’ in the U.S. Neoliberal economic reforms have not only changed the economy, but they have also impacted society by infusing cultural norms and practices with economic undertones. Freedom is now the freedom to consume, and choice has become the ultimate right of a consumer.

Thus, the international dating industry provides frustrated men with a market based solution to their lack of choice in local dating markets. By adopting market based solutions to solve the perceived ‘crisis of intimacy’, men participating in the international dating industry are paying to access attractive women’s bodies, which become valuable currency in building men’s masculinity towards the hegemonic ideal. Thus, globalization allows the patriarchy to strike back by providing men with the option to access women’s bodies in less economically secure locations.

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