

Getting Out the Vote on Twitter With Mandy Patinkin: Celebrity Authenticity, TikTok, and the Couple You Actually Want at Thanksgiving Dinner . . . or Your Passover Seder

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The research offers a critical examination of the social media activity of Mandy Patinkin and Kathryn Grody, the unexpected celebrity activist couple driving the effort to get out the vote during the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Documenting the performed authenticity and intimacy of the couple's Twitter feed, the analysis focuses on the couple's ability to create a multisocial, engaged relationship with their followers, capitalizing on a platform collapse across various social media accounts. The couple's advocacy is designed to encourage connective action and reflects a more democratic turn in celebrity engagement, where the boundaries that separate fan from star are diminished thanks to the affordances of social media platforms like Twitter and TikTok. A discussion of the subcultural Jewish political and cultural community Patinkin and Grody cultivate is advanced along with the couple's status as America's preferred relatives whom you would want at your Thanksgiving dinner or, for some, your annual Passover seder.

Keywords: celebrity, get out the vote, mobilization, Twitter, TikTok, authenticity

Each election cycle, a chorus of celebrity advocates jumps on the get-out-the-vote (GOTV) bandwagon urging loyal fans, followers, and average American citizens to get out and exercise their political power at the ballot box (Austin, Van de Vord, Pinkleton, & Epstein, 2008). In a typical election year, YouTube music videos, direct calls to action via social media, and celebrity campaign appearances at large rallies abound (Garthwaite & Moore, 2013; Pease & Brewer, 2008; Thrall et al., 2008; Wood & Herbst, 2007). Of course, 2020 was not a typical U.S. presidential election year given the reality of COVID-19 (Becker, 2021c). In the same vein, this election cycle's celebrity GOTV advocates were a somewhat unexpected pair: the singer/actor Mandy Patinkin and his writer/actress wife Kathryn Grody. Known for his cult classic performance as Inigo Montoya in the 1987 film *The Princess Bride* (Reiner, 1987) and for playing the role of CIA operative Saul Berenson in *Homeland* (Gansa & Gordon, 2011), Patinkin and to a lesser extent Grody have actually used Patinkin's social media accounts to advocate for preferred political causes such as the refugee crisis since 2017 (Ehrlich, 2020; Yapalter, 2020). Shifting in Summer 2020 to address the George Floyd killing, racial injustice, and the upcoming 2020 U.S. election, Patinkin and Grody's intense focus on GOTV efforts and support for Democratic candidates up and down the ballot garnered considerable mainstream media attention and encouraged significant fan engagement (Zilinsky, Vaccari, Nagler, &

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Tucker, 2020). In the end, all of the media attention and online connection with fans meant that Patinkin and Grody ultimately served as this election cycle's quintessential—and surprisingly viral—online celebrity political couple (Ehrlich, 2020).

Focusing on encouraging connective action rather than collective action, first across Twitter and then Instagram, YouTube, and finally TikTok, Patinkin and Grody used their public personas to build a multisocial election cycle relationship with their fans and followers (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Patinkin, n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c, n.d.d). Offering a critical examination of the Patinkin/Grody phenomenon and its reach across multiple social media platforms, the present research documents the performed authenticity, displayed intimacy, and identifiable nature of the politically engaged couple, reviewing their development of a subcultural Jewish cultural and political identity and following, which in the end makes them the celebrity couple followers want to invite to their Thanksgiving table or, for some, their Passover seder.

Analyzing the full text of the couple's social media posts from April to November 2020 across multiple platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok), the research offers a critical examination of the content they share that then comes to define their political brand: a mix of outrage, genuine enthusiasm, and optimism. Reviewing media coverage of the couple's social media engagement, the research then considers Patinkin and Grody's ability to foster multisocial connective action among a growing group of followers across an ever-expanding list of accounts, capitalizing on the technological affordances of social media. COVID-19 affords the celebrity couple the ability to form a long-term, election-cycle relationship with fans and followers. In some respects, this parasocial relationship stands in for real relationships with extended family members. Finally, the research considers Patinkin and Grody's ability to form a subcultural community given their focus on the intersection of Jewish identity and politics and their appeal to viewers who also connect their Jewish identity with their political values. Ultimately, although the couple is presumably driven by a desire to generate maximum exposure for good causes given their media comments about their past use of social media (Tolson, 2016), the ensuing mainstream media attention afforded the couple also speaks to the success of their celebrity advocacy campaign (Rojeck, 2004) and their distinct role as the Twittersphere's celebvocate political couple of Election 2020 (Tasliski, 2016).

Patinkin and Grody as a Consumable, Intimate, and Presumably Authentic Pair

During the early stages of the COVID-19 shutdown, Patinkin and Grody, with the help of their son Gideon Grody-Patinkin, used their Twitter feed to engage followers with a series of short video clips centered on their limited knowledge of pop culture, their inability to use technology with ease, and the story of their 40-year marriage (Yapalter, 2020). Writing about the Patinkin Twitter feed in the *Los Angeles Times*, culture critic, Mary McNamara (2020) notes,

But there is one irrefutable, inarguable good thing that has come out of the coronavirus lockdown: the Mandy Patinkin videos. To be more precise, the video series featuring Mandy Patinkin and Kathryn Grody, married these 40 years, as they shelter in their fabulously homey cabin with their son Gideon, who interviews them on camera and then posts the clips on Patinkin's Twitter feed. . . . Patinkin and Grody appear to actually be experiencing the shutdown the same way many of us are. Hanging out in comfy clothes, eating too many carbs, playing with the dog, yelling dumb non-sequitur questions across the room to each other and letting their kid make weird videos of them. (paras. 4 & 9)

Likely, it is the couple's discussion of how being together all the time during the COVID-19 quarantine has impacted their marriage, their abysmal knowledge of popular culture in which Mandy Patinkin suggests that TikTok is an app for setting the time on your watches in which you enter your zip code and someone comes to fix your time pieces, and their inability to play the compliment game against each other without criticizing one another that catches the attention of viewers and mainstream news outlets (Patinkin, 2020g). Their apparent ability to be honest with one another about their relationship, the similarity of their experience with the COVID-19 shutdown and the average American's lived experience, and their love for one another including Patinkin's (2020b) "Alphabet Part 1" song, where he describes Kathryn as "adorable, beautiful, cute, deliciously delectable . . ." reflects an endearing if performed intimacy that keeps viewers engaged as they go down the Twitter rabbit hole, scrolling through pop culture video quiz parts 1 through 9 (McNamara, 2020; Patinkin, 2020b, 01:26; Yapalter, 2020).

Reflective of the democratic turn in celebrity politics (Turner, 2016) that sheds many of the usual boundaries and power differentials separating celebrity from fan, Patinkin and Grody's social media feed represents a presumably sincere and authentic exchange between the couple, their son Gideon behind the camera, and their growing throng of Twitter followers. Given its participatory nature as a media platform, Twitter affords Patinkin and Grody the ability to present a mediatized view of their lives, displaying a curated performance of mundane activities of their day-to-day COVID-19 routine (e.g., sweeping the porch, walking the dog, preparing meals; Patinkin, 2020g) as well as their intimate thoughts and feelings about one another and their unabashedly engaged and enraged point of view toward the 2020 election (Marwick, 2016). It is through this display of their everyday lives and their personal politics on social media that viewers see a seemingly sincere, authentic, and identifiable pair whose public personas have become inherently consumable (Turner, 2016). Twitter followers keep returning to the feed for the latest two-minute-plus video clip from the couple, whose performed intimacy with one another seems anything but performed, but rather refreshingly authentic (Marshall, 2010). In essence, their private lives have become their public lives, with little distinction or separation between the two on Twitter and other social media platforms. Aware of the camera's ability to play to audience expectations, the couple is also cognizant of audience reception and their ability to exert editorial control over what pieces of their performed authenticity and intimacy are shared with fans and followers.

In an October 2020 interview with *The New Yorker*, Patinkin notes that at first, the video series was all his son's idea:

He asked us a question, and the question had to do with the anniversary or something, and then Kathryn started saying something. We were standing in front of the forsythia trees on the road and he taped. Then a few days later, he says, "This was really something I liked." And she said, "Can we put it on your social media?" So he posts it and it gets this crazy amount of attention. And he's like, "Dad, people just want more of this." (Syme, 2020, pp. 2–3)

The couple's display of their relationship, which comes across to viewers as very honest and authentic, was likely the biggest draw for followers. In fact, when asked by journalist Rachel Syme whether the videos displayed an accurate picture of his relationship with Grody, Patinkin noted, "It's a hundred percent accurate. The kids would always say over the years, 'The two of you, you ought to be a TV show.' We'd say, 'Oh, shut up'" (Syme, 2020, p. 3).

Celebrity Authenticity, Sincerity, and Sharing on Social Media

Like other celebrities sharing content on social media during COVID-19, part of what makes Patinkin and Grody's feed engaging for viewers is that it feels sincere and appears to be an outwardly honest representation of their true selves (Marwick, 2013). What Patinkin and Grody share on their social media feed, although curated in part by their son, feels like an unpolished and ostensibly sincere representation of their everyday life. Popularized in relation to celebrity culture by Trilling (1971), the discussion of celebrity sincerity has in many respects been supplanted by a discussion of celebrity authenticity and the ability of audiences to recognize what is sincere versus what is constructed, curated, or fabricated to appear as sincere or authentic (Gamson, 1994; Marshall, 2014). As Harvey (2017) notes,

According to Alice Marwick, authenticity is not exactly the same as "sincerity." Authenticity has to do with uniformity of presentation: comparing current actions against past ones for consistency, while at the same time displaying one's "hidden inner life," a projection of "honesty without pretense," which connects celebrities with audiences. In the case of celebrity, authenticity includes the connection between a celebrity's "art" to an expression of his/her inner emotions, feelings, and personality. While the public has felt more jaded about public officials, the authenticity discourse may have created an opening for the public to feel less jaded about the intentions of entertainers. (p. 56)

In fact, part of what makes Patinkin and Grody's Twitter feed stand out as sincere or authentic is its connection with past efforts to share politically oriented content (albeit issue- rather than election-based) and that their personality and style displayed at home in their COVID cabin reflects the same behavior, demeanor, and appearance that has been so central to Patinkin's persona in his constructed characters on shows like *Homeland* and *Criminal Minds* (Davis, 2005; Gansa & Gordon, 2011). In effect, Patinkin and Grody's intentions are not to be fully questioned, because they appear as an authentic extension of who they are and who they have always been; the presence of their son Gideon as cameraman and his positive reaction to the couple further reinforces perceptions of their authenticity. The consistency of the content over the course of Spring and Summer 2020 further speaks to the couple's perceived authenticity and sincerity.

Of note, the couple's successful 40-plus-year marriage has been discussed in the press prior to 2020 as has their work for refugees. Thus, their focus on further displaying their relationship and their passion for politics, in this case with getting out the vote for the 2020 election, feels like just a COVID-19- induced extension of who they already are as celebrities and individuals with low-profile yet still visible public personas. In truth, even if the couple's latest foray into social media advocacy is not entirely authentic or true to the nuances of their day-to-day life, it at least projects an air of authenticity, making it appealing for social media users who crave content that seems on-brand or true to one's public self (Duffy & Hund, 2019; Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2016).

In effect, Patinkin and Grody's behavior advances a level of authenticity or "the perception that a celebrity behaves according to his or her true self" (Moulard, Garrity, & Rice, 2015, p. 175) that has been echoed by other celebrities who have worked to engage with audiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, John Krasinski's *Some Good News* YouTube series represents yet another example of a celebrity trying to authentically engage with fans and followers (Moss, 2020). In Krasinski's case, he is trying to appear as America's dad or everyman, capitalizing on his well-known role playing Jim in *The Office* while bringing upbeat, positive news to viewers on YouTube (Bean, 2020; Daniels, 2005). In a similar vein, Josh Gad spent the early days of the COVID-19 lockdown reading children's books to Twitter followers, a seemingly authentic extension of his Olaf character, America's beloved snowman from Disney's *Frozen* (Harmata, 2020).

Importantly, authenticity is not a concept that is uniquely applied to a self-proclaimed "liberal snowflake Hollywood elitist" like Patinkin or even celebrities like Krasinski and Gad (Patinkin, 2020h). Authenticity has been applied to popular music performers in work by Marshall (2014), influencers participating in celebrity advertising and branding efforts (Ilicic & Webster, 2016), and even Republican politicians like Donald Trump given his social media engagement with *Saturday Night Live* (Michaels, 1975) during the 2016 election cycle (Becker, 2021a). Recent research has shown that viewers who were exposed to *Saturday Night Live* and Trump's hostile reaction to the humor on Twitter were more likely to rate Trump as authentic as his social media reaction aligned with his combative political character and on-brand display of insults directed toward others (Becker, 2018; Francia, 2017; Scacco, Copeland, Becker, & Berger, 2020; Szalai, 2016).

What Technology Offers: A Confusing Yet Useful Tool for Connection

Moving beyond authenticity, it is also important to consider how the technology Patinkin and Grody are using to connect with fans offers an opportunity or affordance for celebrity and fan connection that is relatively democratic in nature, mediated only by platform (Marwick, 2016). By using Twitter first and foremost to communicate with fans about the importance of voting, Patinkin and Grody are minimizing the social distance between themselves and their followers (Duffy & Pooley, 2019; Marwick & boyd, 2011b). By replicating the same content across YouTube, Instagram, and finally TikTok, the couple effectively further extends their reach and public appeal, increasing the opportunities for connection between celebrity and fan (Marwick & boyd, 2011a). This platform collapse allows the celebrity couple to spread their GOTV message more widely, while the ability to communicate across multiple social media accounts simultaneously serves as further self-promotion of their image as America's preferred politically engaged and technologically challenged pair (Duffy & Hund, 2015).

Importantly, so much of what Patinkin and Grody share comes in video form and, at least early on, focuses more on the couple's relationship and personality quirks than their politics (Abidin, 2018). Although references to Patinkin's career certainly abound in the more professionally produced content that is shared closer to election day, he becomes more notable for his personal life—his comfortable khaki pants, health drink smoothie, and his political philosophy—over his classic characters or prior fame (Turner, 2016). Given that these videos focus more on the couple's quirks than anything else, authenticity seems to trump self-promotion or personal politics (Abidin, 2018).

Ironically, it is the couple's discomfort around technology, behavior that is parallel to the lived experience of other noncelebrity senior citizens, that is a real part of the consumable Grody/Patinkin persona as well (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). As Syme (2020) notes in *The New Yorker*, "Gideon asks Patinkin and Grody about popular Web acronyms; LMAO, Patinkin guesses, stands for 'let me alone, oaf'" (p. 2). Patinkin is quick to note that given his discomfort with technology, his social media activity was handled for him prior to COVID-19 (Yapalter, 2020). Now, he is sharing content on his own and, setting aside the occasional technical assistance from his son Gideon, Patinkin has effectively removed the intermediary, lowering the boundary between celebrity and citizen, engaging in a direct relationship with fans (albeit mediated through Twitter and other social media platforms) on his own accord (Becker, 2018; Marwick, 2016; Tasliki, 2016).

Grody, who is slightly more comfortable with technology than Patinkin, performs better on Gideon's pop culture quizzes. She is also more animated in her frustration with the current state of U.S. politics. She often seems more willing to be more intimate and on full display with their Twitter followers at least with respect to her political beliefs, even as the less well-known spouse. It becomes clear after watching the way that Patinkin and Grody interact with one another that she is a driving force in their relationship and, in many respects, Patinkin's artistic and political muse. In his CNN Opinion column published on October 16, 2020, Patinkin notes,

My wife has been my north star in so many ways. She is always right, with very few exceptions—mostly relating to the inner workings of our appliances (and even there she's rapidly gaining knowledge and is on track to outpace me by 2022). (Patinkin, 2020f, para. 5)

Convinced as a child that his parents' political parties were the synagogue's sisterhood and men's club, Patinkin attributes his political awakening to his early days with Grody and credits their strong marriage for encouraging his continued civic engagement.

Part of the appeal of the Twitter feed for fans is the enduring nature of the Grody/Patinkin marriage and the universality of their banter. They are the elderly parents we want to have or as BuzzFeed notes, Patinkin has become "Hollywood's grandpa" (Yapalter, 2020, para. 1). As their son Gideon Grody-Patinkin noted for *Rolling Stone*,

The biggest comments we get are, "Will you adopt me?" and "They're exactly like my parents except they're not black or Indian or. . . . I thought every Jewish parent in the world was exactly the same but it's more universal than that," Gideon tells *Rolling Stone*, explaining how the first video he shot was his parents walking down a country road, discussing their first date—April 16th. When the video got a huge response—it currently has more than 400,000 views—they kept posting: Patinkin deleting his wife's spam email, the duo trying to floss and Grody thrashing Patinkin again and again while playing Gideon's "Pop Culture Quizzes." (Ehrlich, 2020, para. 2)

In many respects, fans and followers have come to develop a multisocial relationship online with Grody and Patinkin parallel to their real or, in some cases, idealized or imagined relationships with their own relatives, whether they be parents, grandparents, or a great aunt and uncle (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011; Hills, 2016). Given the length of the COVID-19 pandemic, Patinkin's Twitter followers are effectively involved in a virtual long-term relationship with the bickering couple. As the focus of the Twitter feed shifts to address George Floyd and racial injustice and then quite significantly morphs into a coordinated, multiplatform get-out-the-vote campaign, fan engagement increases alongside a real call to connective and personalized political action.

Engaging Fans in Connective Action to Get Out the Vote

Patinkin started his Twitter feed in 2017 to promote his creative endeavors (e.g., a new season of *Homeland*; Gansa & Gordon, 2011; or a concert performance) and his work with the International Rescue Committee; however, his social media feed has now shifted to focus on U.S. electoral politics. Not concerned with its impact on his celebrity brand because election activism has now become Patinkin's brand during COVID-19 (Becker, 2013; Patinkin, 2020f; Street, 2012), Patinkin's feed increasingly calls for followers to engage in connective rather than collective political action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Tasliki, 2016).

After an August tweeting about the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the various organizations that Patinkin and Grody are donating to in an effort to promote greater racial equality (e.g., Black Feminist Project, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Don't Shoot PDX), the couple shifts around the start of September to focus first on voter registration and encouraging younger citizens to volunteer as poll workers. At first the conversation is informal, noting advocacy groups such as MoveOn, Indivisible, and Swing Left that are organizing GOTV campaigns.

The couple quickly gets involved with writing letters to voters with Vote Forward, encouraging their followers to do the same. By October 3, 2020, they noted that they had written 250 letters, helping Vote Forward to reach their first goal of 10 million letters, with another 5 million before October 17, 2020. The candid and intimate videos of the couple writing letters together encourage viewers to connect and engage with their personal narrative (Nisbett & Schartel Dunn, 2021). They talk about their marriage, use funny accents, and participate in the #TheBigSend on October 17, 2020, mailing their letters in a video on Twitter that by the end of October had close to 180,000 views.

Fans respond on Twitter, sharing pictures of their letter stacks, selfies at the post office, and more, highlighting their own involvement with #TheBigSend campaign and their engagement with connective political action. By the end of October, Patinkin's The Big Send Twitter video post had close to 700 comments, 3,000 retweets, and 13,500 likes (Patinkin, 2020g). Patinkin can be seen responding to fans on Twitter, retweeting their original tweets, and liking their posts to encourage even greater connection and activism. What results is a personalized exchange between celebrity advocate and Twitter fan base. As election day approaches, Grody and Patinkin's efforts become both more organized and more targeted, as various GOTV organizations start to recognize the couple's ability to foster connective action and engagement with fans online, trying to capitalize on and expand the couple's viral social media success and electoral impact.

Ultimately, Grody and Patinkin become the celebrity spokespeople for a range of GOTV organizations, producing more professionally polished videos for groups including Swing Left and The Last Weekends, working with producers like Adam Wachter and Ewen Wright. Together, the couple shares phone banking tips in support of Swing Left and despite their technological challenges, gets involved in text banking as well. They call Senator Elizabeth Warren in a fit of election anxiety, who gives them additional instructions on how to support the Biden/Harris ticket and engage in further phone banking and campaigning for U.S. Senate candidates.

Expressing their frustration with the Trump administration, Patinkin and Grody work together to make their own campaign video ad for The Last Weekends, piecing together clips of the Trump administration. Posted on October 6, 2020, at first Grody interrupts Patinkin for the negativity and anger in his ad voiceover, telling him it is "too much. It's all this fear and scary . . ." explaining that part of the problem is the "disgust at the extreme" (Patinkin, 2020d). They then continue the ad and Grody gets animated talking about Senate races, state legislatures, Biden, and

getting past COVID responsibly, fixing the economy for the working class and the middle class, and the Supreme Court, and immigration, and racial justice, and climate change, my God, the frickin' world is at stake here. Literally the actual Earth we are standing on. If we do not act now, Ahh! (Patinkin, 2020d)

Patinkin then yells at her for "doing exactly what he was doing" (Patinkin, 2020d). They work through a calm rendition of why voting matters, before Kathryn suggests at the end that if people don't vote, "it's just going to be more fucking chaos" (Patinkin, 2020d). By the end of October, the ad had more than 6 million views on Twitter and over 80,000 retweets.

The October 6, 2020, ad is actually just one small piece of their expanding social media campaign. The couple begins to solicit donations for a range of Senate candidates in swing states or in races that have the potential to go blue for the Democrats. On October 15, 2020, they focus on 13 important Senate races in a "Preaching to the Choir" video produced for The Last Weekends (Patinkin, 2020e). The couple focuses on encouraging followers to get out the vote for candidates like Mark Kelly in Arizona and Jamie Harrison in South Carolina. They use props like an astronaut, lobster stuffed animal, and even a plush poop emoji (to refer to Lindsay Graham). The couple then discusses taking power away from Mitch McConnell (using a turtle puppet and gavel) and tries to educate viewers on the legislative responsibility of the Senate, their

fast-tracking of the Supreme Court nomination for Amy Coney Barrett, and how hard it would be to get things accomplished in a Biden administration with a Republican-controlled U.S. Senate. The couple ends up in the shower wearing rain gear complaining about being covered in manure. They end the ad by encouraging viewers to donate to Democratic candidates up and down the ballot.

Throughout the month of October, Grody and Patinkin then focus on fundraising for key U.S. Senate races. For each candidate, they encourage fans and followers to donate and then to comment with their donation confirmation. Ten lucky fans then receive a personalized song in response from the couple on Twitter—expanding the connection between celebrity and fan—and thus encouraging even more individualized, connective action. The songs are highly improvised and engaging, yet also incredibly personalized to mention the Twitter handle of the follower.

Over the course of October, the get-out-the-vote pleas from Patinkin and Grody not only become more personalized, but the calls to connective action become more prominent as followers are encouraged to share content beyond Twitter, across multiple social networking platforms. In fact, recognizing their viral reach and level of engagement with fans, Grody and Patinkin expand their social media engagement across platforms, encouraging a platform collapse for their audiences who are encouraged to connect via Instagram (Patinkin, n.d.a) and in the Instagram Live sessions Grody and Patinkin host for a range of candidates in contested races (Marwick & boyd, 2011b). Effectively flattening multiple audiences into one across a variety of social media platforms, Grody and Patinkin share the same content on YouTube, Facebook, and even migrate to TikTok as @tiktokinpatinkin (Patinkin, n.d.c) with their first get-out-the-vote dance video posted on October 13, 2020 (Marwick & boyd, 2011a). By November 2, 2020, the short dance video had more than 1 million views, and “Mandy Patinkin and Kathryn G” had close to 750,000 followers and 6 million likes (Patinkin, n.d.c).

Fan engagement on TikTok garners attention, first with an October 16, 2020, video responding to questions from @Rossissugarbabies that had 1.1 million views as of November 2, 2020 (Patinkin, n.d.c). Patinkin even engages in a twerk challenge on October 22, 2020, showing off his ability to twerk in his kitchen with a skeptical Grody looking on (Patinkin, 2020d). They ask TikTok musicians to supply a backing track for #AltRocktober on October 23 and are overjoyed on October 24 when follower @Onlyoliana makes them into stickers based on the graphics from their TikTok videos (Patinkin, n.d.c).

One of the couple’s last major videos before election day is an October 31, 2020, banjo beat dance video with music from Banjo Baby. Shared on Twitter and TikTok, fans see Patinkin and Grody dancing, flipping a shoe, and suddenly they are transformed head to toe in Biden/Harris gear, dancing with their banjo, a keyboard, and multiple Joe Biden “Truth Over Flies” fly swatters (Patinkin, 2020i). The video ends with the couple kissing and then a message about voting, voting early, a link to joebiden.com/call, and the tagline “The Power Is in Your Hands” (Patinkin, 2020i). By November 9, 2020, the Monday after election day, the video had been viewed more than 1.8 million times on TikTok and was shared widely by fans and followers. The increasingly viral nature of the content the couple shares, measured by the exponential growth of views, resharing, and commenting by fans, serves as concrete evidence of the couple’s reach and impact on the audience as election celebrity advocates. The level of audience engagement speaks—albeit

indirectly—to the couple’s perceived authenticity, sincerity, and the intimate connection they create with fans who feel inspired to engage in further connective action as election day approaches.

On October 31, 2020, Patinkin appears solo in a video filmed for Swing Left that begins with him sitting in an easy chair reading *Grandma Doralee Patinkin’s Jewish Family Cookbook* (originally published in 1997). He introduces himself as “Mandy Patinkin, superstar of the stage and screen” (Patinkin, 2020h). He gets up and walks around and notes,

Now that I’m also a mega influencer on the World Wide Internet for computers, you probably think it’s all pretty carefree for me around here. And while it’s true that I’m extraordinarily blessed with talent and an astonishing sense of fashion, it’s not all champagne and private jets. You see, in addition to being the Michael Jordan of Broadway and the Wayne Gretzky of TV, I’m also a liberal snowflake Hollywood elitist. And so, living through the hellscape that is 2020 has been a giant pain in my ass. (Patinkin, 2020h, 0:13)

Patinkin goes on to talk about “why he gives a shit,” noting his role as a father of two boys who want to make him a grandad, he speaks of his care for the environment, his hope for human decency and the survival of democracy, and for all the people “literally dying” in the United States (Patinkin, 2020h). The ad is anti-Trump and a call to vote for Biden/Harris, but it is also about getting out to vote as an individual, calling friends, and motivating followers to connect with others in the same pursuit. Patinkin concludes by dancing in front of an American flag with an Emmy award on full display. The video, written and produced by Ewen Wright, concludes with a screen that says, “The power is in your hands,” thus stressing yet again a call to connective political action (Patinkin, 2020h).

Patinkin also calls on specific celebrities to engage in connective action during the final days of the general election cycle. His #3people challenge with Grody on October 28 results in a song that gets a response on Twitter from Stephen Colbert, thus showcasing Patinkin’s ability to reach everyday citizens and fellow celebrities alike (Patinkin, 2020g).

On election day, Patinkin and Grody round out their GOTV efforts with another video, encouraging fans to continue to make calls for the Biden campaign and Swing Left. True to their online personas, the couple displays their intimacy with Patinkin grabbing Grody’s hand to start, noting, “Yeah I want to hold your hand” (Patinkin, 2020k). They then dive in by thanking their fans for their hard work, their support to stay positive, and their ability to get people out to vote up and down the ballot. They also provide fans with a guide to watching the election results, suggesting that it will take days to know the final result given the wealth of mail-in ballots this year. While they’d love a landslide, they urge patience, calm, and for people to rely on accurate, reliable news sources. They also talk about Trump’s potential forthcoming untrue narrative and caution viewers not to get caught up in the drama, reminding fans that we often don’t know the results on election day. Patinkin concludes by noting that “if the next few days are really tense, we’ll probably do something embarrassing for your entertainment. . . . Thank you all so much. We will see you soon.” Grody adds, “Thank you from the bottom of our mutual hearts” (Patinkin, 2020k).

Patinkin and Grody do thank their fans on TikTok for getting out the vote and for encouraging their parents and grandparents to vote blue on Sunday, November 8, with a TikTok dance (Patinkin, 2020d). On Twitter, the couple is back to their usual banter, with a video that has Patinkin napping outside with Becky the dog while Kathryn talks with her cousin, suggesting that the video Gideon shares should really be relegated to “the family archives” (Patinkin, 2020i). The video then reflects on the pop culture videos with the couple eating matzo, Grody’s shirt, and the usual banter that exists in the regular day-to-day experience of the Grody/Patinkin family (Patinkin, 2020i). In many ways, the couple has come full circle from celeb-vocate Twitter couple of the 2020 election to the regular old married couple stuck together given the reality of COVID-19. They are back to being an authentic American elderly couple who bickers, struggles with technology, and plays with their dog.

Munching on Matzo and Blowing the Shofar: Subcultural Celebrity Identity and Fan Engagement

While Grody and Patinkin achieved a viral reach and large fan following with their Twitter video calls to get out the vote, their pop culture quizzes, and their day-to-day banter, they simultaneously created a subcultural celebrity identity that connected not only with fans who knew Patinkin from his movies, music, and his television characters, but who also connected with Patinkin and Grody given a shared cultural, political, and religious Jewish identity (Hills, 2004; Marwick, 2016).

According to *The Forward*, “Mandy Patinkin and Kathryn Grody continue to be quarantine’s most-loved Jewish parents—at least on Twitter” (Grisar, 2020, para 1). In fact, much of Patinkin and Grody’s social media feed touches on their connections to their shared Jewish identity, religion, and culture. The couple’s Jewish identity is present as a component of Patinkin’s Twitter feed and public social media profile—from Patinkin’s support of the American Jewish World Service in early September to Patinkin’s public mourning of the passing of Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, to his shofar blowing, “A Tekiah Gedolah so that your wishes and prayers can be heard,” on Twitter on September 28, 2020, to close out the holiday of Yom Kippur (Patinkin, 2020c).

Patinkin’s Jewish identity also shapes his politics, from his November 2, 2020, retweet of Bend the Arc Jewish Action’s video on hopes for 2021, with the comment, “this Jewish voter can relate,” to his advocacy video for the Jewish Democratic Council of America released on October 23, 2020, to his shofar blowing on MSNBC to honor Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s dying wish that her successor be chosen after the election (Kampeas, 2020; Patinkin, 2020j). As Patinkin noted in an October 24, 2020, interview,

My values are led by Jewish ideas. My whole life was *tikkun olam*, to repair the world. I learned from a dear rabbi friend that at the end of creation, there was a shattering and it was the kabbalists who came up with the notion that they took those shards and began to put them back together, which is where *tikkun olam* along came from. And there are shards everywhere. There has been a shattering of our lives, of our souls, of our economy, of our environment, of our educational system and, and certainly of trust and truth and everything that I care about. (Kampeas, 2020, para. 9)

In truth, Patinkin and Grody are not the first Jewish celebrities to connect their faith, religion, and culture with political engagement. Sarah Silverman's *The Great Schlep* campaign urged other fellow young Jews to call and persuade their Florida grandparents (e.g., their bubbes and zaydes) to vote for Barack Obama in Fall 2008 (Itzkoff, 2008). More recently, Sacha Baron Cohen, known for his characters Borat, Ali G, and Bruno, has been more vocal and public about the ways in which his Jewish identity influences his satire (Becker, 2019, 2021b; Dowd, 2020; Saunders, 2008).

Although Patinkin and Grody's Jewish values are certainly a big part of their political and personal identity as individuals and as a couple, it is their cultural display of their Jewishness that helps to encourage greater subcultural celebrity identification, and fan engagement. They are, in effect, the Jewish grandparents you can't see because of COVID, the Jewish parents not unlike your own, or the older Jewish aunt and uncle that you actually would want to sit down with at your Zoom Passover seder. As McNamara (2020) so casually but emphatically notes,

But the best and most viewed videos are a series in which the two calmly crunch their way through a box of matzo, while Gideon asks them to define various pop culture terms—TikTok, meme, Becky with the good hair—with which they are mostly unfamiliar. . . . This arc ends with the couple attempting the dance move known as flossing, which may be the high point for many. For me, however, it was the matzo. For one thing, Grody somehow manages, while talking, to spread butter, in small but expert dabs, over an entire cracker that she is holding in her outstretched hand. Without breaking it. At all. Patinkin, meanwhile, never stops chewing. Seriously. It is seven minutes' worth of serious matzo eating like nothing you have ever seen. (He too manages to spread an entire cracker without damaging it but he has to lay it down first, unlike his wife whom—and I really must repeat this because it is *phenomenal*—does it while holding the cracker in the air.) . . . Watching them each shake salt over their buttered matzo makes it literally impossible not to go out and buy at least two boxes yourself. Manischewitz, whose logo is prominently displayed, should write them a check. (paras. 12–14)

In becoming the Twitterverse's most memorable Jewish grandparents, parents, or aunt and uncle, Patinkin and Grody not only create a broader multisocial engagement experience for followers frustrated with the Trump presidency, COVID-19, and U.S. politics, but they create a subcultural community of young Jewish fans who identify with the couple both politically and culturally.

Falling in Love With Grody and Patinkin . . . and American Democracy

The Twitterverse's affinity toward Patinkin and Grody began with the April 17, 2020, video their son Gideon shared in which the couple reminisces about their first date 42 years before (Patinkin, 2020a). Their very honest discussion about how the secret to the success of their 40-year marriage has been spending a fair amount of time apart and how being constantly together during COVID-19 has its emotional ups and downs, all of which seem to be remedied with Patinkin's famous "Turkey Bolognese," resonates with viewers because of the couple's perceived sincerity, authenticity, and intimacy (Patinkin, 2020a). Fans return to the Twitter feed as the duo shares stories about their relationship, eats matzo while struggling

with Gideon's pop culture quizzes, and expresses their own frustration with the challenges of the COVID-19 lockdown. As the feed becomes more political, focusing first on refugee issues, then the George Floyd killing and systemic racism, and finally a call to vote for Biden/Harris and Democrats up and down the ballot, fans remain. Over the course of Fall 2020, the couple's follower count continues to grow, and fans and the celebrity couple engage in even more significant displays of connective political action.

The mainstream media pick up on the perceived authenticity and intimacy of the couple's Twitter videos, in the end bringing maximum attention to their cause to get out the vote (Syme, 2020; Tasliki, 2016; Thrall et al., 2008). Along the way, Patinkin and Grody expand across multiple social media platforms and showcase their talent as activist celebrities in the most traditional sense (Becker, 2012; West & Orman, 2003), establishing a multisocial relationship with their fans. Reflective of the democratic turn in celebrity politics, Patinkin and Grody serve as the archetypal example of celebrity get-out-the-vote advocacy during the 2020 election cycle thanks to their Twitter feed, level of connective fan engagement, and their ability to dance on TikTok (Austin et al., 2008; Marwick & boyd, 2011b; Turner, 2016).

Patinkin's final pitch in his October 16, 2020, CNN Opinion column emphasizes the strength of his relationship with Grody and the reality that their love for each other fuels their passion for politics:

Kathryn and I have been married for 40 years. You can imagine how often we've disagreed. What's kept us together hasn't been fighting—it's been listening, learning from one another and having faith and optimism that we could get through anything together. . . . Now is the moment for us all to do the same: if we're going to fall in love with one another again, as Americans, then this is the time to show up, to commit and to make the right choice for our future. (Patinkin, 2020f, paras. 19–20)

After election day, while the couple's social media feed returns a bit to capturing and displaying the day-to-day banter of their 40-year marriage, their social isolation, and their lingering discomfort with and lack of understanding of technology (e.g., "'TikTok makes Twitter look like Shakespeare'—Kathryn Grody," is the text of a November 9, 2020, tweet), their focus on politics continues with a spotlight on the U.S. Senate runoff elections in Georgia slated for January 5, 2021, and of course, a few new dance moves for TikTok (Patinkin, 2020m). As this research critically and carefully documents, reflective of a democratic turn in celebrity politics, Patinkin and Grody's newfound status as the celebrity couple of the 2020 election has earned them a strong social media following, full of individuals eager to engage in connective political action and take comfort in a new TikTok dance, pop culture quiz, or display of longstanding affection. Even after election day, viewers return to engage with the celebrity couple online, ever appreciative of their perceived authenticity and sincerity, the lack of social distance between celebrity and fan, and their intimate display of their relationship, Jewish cultural identity, and their passion for politics. This critical examination of Patinkin and Grody's authentic social media display, Election 2020 celebrity advocacy, and call for connective action advances our understanding of the role of celebrity influencers in U.S. electoral politics and sheds further light on the ability of Twitter, TikTok, and other social media platforms to collapse the boundaries separating fans and followers from famous advocates, allowing for direct engagement, interaction, and greater participation in democracy.

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