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Conversations with other (alt-right) women: How do alt-right female influencers narrate a far-right identity?

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Abstract
In the process of shifting far-right ideas from the fringes to the centre of the political spectrum, the alt-right has infiltrated online spaces to mainstream extremist ideas. As part of this process, female alt-right influencers have emerged within various popular social media platforms and fringe outlets, seeking to build credibility for the movement with new audiences. Contrary to previous assumptions about women as harmless adherents of far-right ideology, alt-right women are emerging as "organic intellectuals", influential in the formation of everyday beliefs and principles in congruence with the tenets of far-right ideology. Their narratives strategically weave far-right ideological discourses, such as the imminent crisis of white identity, with topical matters on lifestyle and well-being. This article examines the rhetoric of online influencers as they shape an ideological space which is contributing to the normalization or mainstreaming of far-right ideas. In doing so, it addresses two questions: How do alt-right female influencers narrate a far-right identity? How do they mainstream white supremacist ideas online? Drawing on new empirical material from a series of far-right podcasts, this article demonstrates that alt-right women strategically construct a "liberated" female identity rooted in femininity, traditionalism and gender complementarity, and problematize feminism and women's emancipation as constitutive of the crisis facing the white race. It further identifies the presence of an elaborate cultural narrative around white victimhood which alt-right influencers use to mainstream their ideology. To counter the perpetuation of far-right ideas in society, women's participation in shaping far-right ideology should not remain unaddressed. This article sheds some light on how a small but highly visible group of influencers are actively working to promote a dangerous far-right ideology.

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Introduction

In 2017, at the Ninth Identitarian[2] Ideas Stockholm conference, Lana Lokteff declared: "It was women that got Trump elected and, I guess, to be really edgy, it was women that got Hitler elected!" (Darby 2017). As the only female speaker at this gathering of alt-right

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[2] The Identitarian movement is a pan-European movement of white nationalists which originated in France and spread across Europe after the 2015 refugee crisis. It has significant ideological crossovers with different groups in the American alt-right movement which campaigns around the preservation of white identity (Starzmann 2019).

activists and ideologies, her appearance was notable amongst the male-dominated far-right scene (Mattheis 2018).

The alt-right movement gained prominence after the 2016 election of Donald Trump (Miller and Howard 2020). This movement has sought to popularize far-right ideas by distancing itself from an overtly white supremacist agenda and infiltrating online spaces to mainstream the notion that white identity and culture is under attack by a multitude of actors: liberals, feminists, multicultural forces, migrants and the global elite (Ganesh 2018; Miller and Howard 2020). As part of these efforts, female propagandists and ideologues have emerged online as "organic intellectuals" influential in the formation of everyday beliefs and principles (Worth 2021). On the face of it, there appears to be an inherent contradiction in the advocacy of women for a movement strongly associated with hyper-masculinity – which warrants control over women and their sexuality and denounces women's emancipation as an attack on the white race.

Feminist scholars have noted women's participation in the promotion and dissemination of far-right ideology ever since the 1990s (McRae 2018; Blee 1996); yet their contributions are only now being recognized in mainstream research and popular opinion (Prithvi and Shruti 2021; Eksi 2021). In an effort to identify the mainstreaming strategies of alt-right women, this article draws on 40 hours of interviews from a far-right podcast to interrogate the following two questions: How do female far-right actors construct an alt-right identity through their online activities? How do far-right women mainstream white supremacist ideas online?

While there is a focus on far-right female activists as subjects of analysis (Darby 2020; Bowman 2017; Love 2020), their activities remain widely understudied (Alexander 2019). Three related factors explain the lack of attention devoted to this phenomenon: First, women's contributions within the movement have been seen as subordinate to men's (Blee 2007) and largely insignificant (Bacchetta and Power 2002; Lokmanoglu and Veilleux-Lepage 2020). Second, women's agency is routinely dismissed as they are seen as having "internalize[d] misogyny" (Provost and Whyte 2018) or performing "intellectual contortions … to justify participating in a movement so hostile to their freedom" (Darby 2017). These conceptions stem from the prevalent misogyny of the white nationalist movement, which in part strives to retain their construction of European heritage and whiteness by controlling white women's

sexuality (Daniels 2009; Mattheis 2018). Lastly, pervasive gender stereotypes often paint women as "harmless victims" of male-instigated violence rather than as instigators or perpetrators themselves (Alexander 2019). In addition to this framing as either insignificant, lacking agency or victimized, female extremists are also routinely presented as either atypical, abnormal, unnatural, or deviant (Sternadori 2007; Corcoran-Nantes 2011; Gentry and Sjoberg 2015). Ultimately, this has created a gap in the literature on how and why women participate in far-right propaganda.

This research investigates Radio3Fourteen – an online podcast where far-right vloggers discuss and affirm racist and nativist ideas (Radio3Fourteen n.d.). Its host is Lana Lokteff – the most prominent woman in the alt right movement (Mattheis 2018). Lokteff and her guests represent a growing group of activist women who openly support anti-immigrant, nativist, racist, and xenophobic ideas (Miller-Idriss and Pilkington 2019; Provost and Whyte 2018).

Two key findings emerged from this research: First, far right women activists construct a narrative in which women find liberation in a committed, inspired and harmonized alt-right identity which encapsulates femininity, traditionalism and reverence for gender complementarity. Women's emancipation is presented as unnatural and constitutive of the crisis facing the white race (see Mattheis 2018). Second, alt-right women mainstream racist rhetoric by creating a narrative around white victimhood and extolling the preservation of a white majority in Europe and North America countries as a way to achieve intercultural harmony. Consequently, this research contributes to the ongoing debates over the gendered dynamics affecting both violent extremism and terrorism, specifically how they shape women's motivations and participation; increasing our understanding of gendered variations in participation in extremist movements, and showing how female influencers can serve as vectors that frame and reinforce gendered practices. This has significant implications for gender-neutral deradicalization and disengagement techniques. We contribute to a better knowledge of how women navigate agency in the movement, the impact of alt-right female ideologues and influencers, and we debunk misconceptions that women in extreme groups are more often passive participants bound to traditional roles.

This article begins by surveying the literature on both the alt-right movement and women's involvement in the far-right more broadly. This section argues women have come to

play an important role within the alt-right movement as ideologues and influencers as part of a concerted effort to make the far-right more palatable to a wide audience by emphasizing a perceived existential threat to western civilization. Furthermore, in doing so, alt-right women are departing from the narrow confines of far-right activism to which much academic scholarship had previously relegated them. The following section lays out the methodological approach which uses Frame Theory to analyse 11 episodes of the far-right Radio3Fourteen podcast in which Lana Lokteff interviews female guests. The analysis section begins by detailing how Lokteff and her guests construct feminism as a destructive force for women themselves, their partners, families, and society as a whole. They call for a return to traditionalism as a form of liberation from this perceived oppressive liberal ideology. Finally, this paper outlines how Lokteff and her collaborators have sought to mainstream racist tropes and ideas by advancing a narrative of white victimhood and calling for creation of white ethnostates as a means of ensuring not only the physical and financial security of white people in Europe and North America but also their identity security in an increasingly globalized world.

Alt-right Ideas and the Women who Mainstream them

In response to the delegitimization of racist ideology worldwide in the second half of the 20th century, the alt-right movement organized itself online around issues of white identity and Western civilization (Winter 2019). The movement gained prominence during the 2016 Presidential election when the US media depicted it as the obscure source of Trump's support, (Kelly 2017; Winter 2019).[3] Since then, the movement has evolved, and scholars have identified multiple drivers to explain its rise (Esposito 2019; Gallaher 2021; Ganesh 2020; Kelly 2017; Love 2020; Nagle 2017; Phillips 2015; Vandiver 2020). While these accounts explore its various ideological strands, there are two overarching cornerstones which pervade the majority of alt-right discourse: (1) a realization that white identity is undergoing a crisis – which often includes discussion of an imminent "white genocide," (Charles 2020; Esposito 2019; Ganesh 2020; Vandiver 2020) and; (2) rejection of feminism and women's

[3] The term alt-right was coined by Richard Spencer who launched a blog in 2010 in an effort to oppose contemporary establishment conservatism and its emphasis on 'liberty, freedom, free markets and capitalism' (SPLC 2021).

empowerment (Bjork-James 2020; Kelly 2017; Lyons 2017; Vandiver 2020). While white men have been instrumental in spreading these ideologies (Kelly 2017; Vandiver 2020; Kutner 2020), this article explores how alt-right women weaponize femininity against feminism and construct a case for the decline of white male power.

Additionally, this article illustrates the ways in which the alt-right has sought to make itself more palatable to a wider audience. The most notable feature of the alt-right is its ability to provide "a rhetorical bridge between white nationalism and mainstream public discourse**"** (Hartzell 2018, 6; also see Charles 2020; Esposito 2019; Gallaher 2021; Ganesh, 2020; Hawley 2018; Miller-Idriss 2018; Mudde 2019; Phillips 2015; Vandiver 2020). The movement has been particularly successful at transmitting its messages online by creating sub-cultures of racist and anti-feminist activists (Gallaher 2021; Phillips 2015; Hartzell 2018; Heikkilä 2017; Whitney Phillips 2015). These efforts have led to the conceptualisation of the alt-right as a social movement engaged in promoting a white identity by fostering commitment to a common cause – preserving the white race and mobilizing adherents on the basis of a shared set of values and beliefs (Hodge and Hellgrimsdottir 2019; van der Vegt et al. 2021). This article explores how women from the movement construct racist and anti-feminist identities while mainstreaming white supremacist rhetoric for susceptible inididuals online.

Up until the 1980s, women and gender were largely absent in extreme right scholarship (Blee 2020). Due to overarching gender stereotypes about women as non-violent, heteronormative caring wives and mothers, they were seen as "harmless" participants of the extreme right (Bacchetta and Power 2002; Blee 2012; Deutsch and Blee 2012; Pilkington 2017). Initial academic inquiries into the women who partake in contemporary far-right parties, organizations and networks tended to describe their roles as supporters; as campaign organizers, and primarily to support a (male) significant other (husband, relative, good friend) who was already active in the party (Deutsch and Blee 2012; Félix 2015; Lesselier 2002). Based on these inferences, they were conceptualized as "second order" activists within scholarship as their participation was mainly driven by close relationships, not by ideological convictions (Erzeel and Rashkova 2017). However, more recent scholarship has identified that despite the rigid power hierarchies which persist among the conservative spectrum, there have been instances of women in leading positions both online and offline (Blee and Linden

2017; Félix 2015; Pilkington 2017). Their presence was viewed as a mobilizing factor for other women to join (Félix 2015) resulting in a shift of attention toward the myriad contemporary public outreach roles that women occupy such as public speakers, vloggers and talk show hosts. Worth (2021) calls these women "organic intellectuals." These intellectuals, rather than leading political parties, have become influential in areas of everyday life and normalize the ideas and principles of the far-right across civil society at large. They are distinguished by their tools of communication, using mainly popular media outlets to spread their message (Worth, 2021). Indeed, their content is mainly seen on mainstream social media platforms such as Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, which are used as a gateway to more independent and unregulated websites.

Some authors have used content available online to analyze the unique role of women in the construction and perpetuation of alt-right ideology (Blee 2020; Darby 2020; Love 2020; Mattheis 2018). As public faces of the movement, these women appear to play an essential proselytizing role: "red-pilling" their audience,[4] and thereby "awakening" them to the belief that "feminists, Marxists, socialists, and liberals have conspired to destroy Western civilization and culture" (Ganesh 2018). Furthermore, women's ability to soften white supremacist rhetoric is noted as being particularly crucial to recruitment and the recent mainstreaming of white supremacist, xenophobic and racist views (Darby 2020; Mattheis 2018).

The conclusion thus far is that women use their gender to spread racist ideology by placing rhetorical emphasis on relationships, motherhood, children, parenting and families – topics that disguise racism, suggesting this is a conversation on lifestyle and well-being. Far from being "second order" activists, women play an important role as "organic intellectuals" in the creation of unique narratives. They shape the ideological space of the extreme right for other women and spread their message by placing rhetorical emphasis on topics traditionally associated with lifestyle and well-being. By shaping the ideological space for other women, they become useful propagandists of white supremacist views. Far-right recruitment campaigns also strategically tap into women's anxieties and grievances about safety and security (Mattheis 2018). Blee (1996, 2009) notes that unlike men who enter supremacist

[4] 'Red-pilling' is the process in which one gains awareness that there is a crisis of white identity, culture and/or an impeding 'white genocide' (Ganesh 2018).

movements in order to feel empowered, women come to perceive their racist activism as a way to protect their children and themselves from a troubled society.

The factors that initiate female participation in contemporary far-right movements therefore are related to issues that reflect their place *as women* more broadly within society. Through their activism, these women proselytize the performance of a gendered role as a way to achieve security in a fast-paced, unpredictable and racialized world (Campion 2020). Essentialist conceptions of men and women are therefore crucial for the propagation of far-right ideology. While men are constructed as commanders of the family and the nation, white womanhood is also appropriated as a rhetorical vehicle of white supremacy (Bacchetta and Power 2002; Blee 2009; Félix 2015; Hartzell 2018).

Methodology

The method used to research this article was a qualitative interpretative approach. In this approach, the research goal is to understand the contextualized meaning-making process of respondents. In line with this interpretive approach, and the use of framing theory more broadly, an abductive method was used for both data gathering and data analysis. This is an iterative process of evaluating primary source data obtained during the research and returning theoretical propositions to explain patterns in the data (Lynch, 2014; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). We used a single case study to analyze the online podcast Radio 3Fourteen, a podcast series hosted by anti-Semitic conspiracy theorist and white supremacist vlogger Lana Lokteff who is regarded as one of the most prominent women in the alt-right (Darby 2017; Mattheis 2018). In the podcast, Lokteff interviews rising far-right personalities of whom approximatively 40% are women. As of 2021, a total of 60 hours of interviews (53 episodes 1h to 1h30 minutes long) were conducted between 2012 and 2019 with prominent female figures from the movement.[5] Lokteff's podcast provides a remarkable starting point to interrogate the experiences of far-right women within the movement and their links to far-right ideologies.

According to Lokteff, she finds participants for her show online, by discovering profiles which espouse similar ideas as herself. The interviewees in her show therefore

[5] The podcast is available online, and on iTunes.

constitute self-proclaimed alt-right members. This research drew on 11 episodes from 2016 to 2020 which were selected based on the public profile or prominence of the guests. As most of Lana Lokteff's guests are active online, case selection involved seeking out respondents the largest follower bases in their primary outlets on Google, Twitter and Youtube.

This research used Frame Theory for the data analysis (Entman,1993). This is an agent-focused interpretive method often used to analyse social movements that focuses on the meanings that manifest in particular contexts and involves selecting "…some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993: 55). Benford and Snow (2000) identify three types of collective action frames used by social movements: "diagnostic framing" (locating the problem and attributing blame); "prognostic framing" (formulating a solution) and "motivational framing" (formulating the rationale for action). These frames help agents negotiate a shared understanding of the problems they define as in need of change, propose an alternative set of arrangements, and encourage others to mobilize and affect change (Benford and Snow, 2000).

Framing processes can also be strategic and can be used to mobilize support. These are frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Snow and Benford 2000). Frame bridging refers to the linking of ideologically congruent but previously unconnected frames regarding an issue or a problem; frame amplification involves the invigoration or clarification of existing values or beliefs; frame extension refers to the strategic adoption of concerns that are beyond the primary aim of the social movement; and frame transformation refers to changing old understandings and meanings and generating new ones.

The following table provides a systematic overview of all frames under investigation:

Frame	**Explanation**
Diagnostic Frame	Locating the problem, injustice, attributing blame
Prognostic Frame	Locating the solution
Motivational Frame	Articulating rationale for action: urgency, duty, significance etc.
Frame Bridging	Connecting two previously unrelated issues

Frame Amplification	Clarifying, embellishing, highlighting beliefs
Frame Extension	Connecting to previously unaccounted for other movements
Frame Transformation	Taking external perceptions and transforming them into positive messages

Table 1: Frames and Explanation (Benford and Snow 2000)

Through collective identities, agents come to understand who they are, what their needs and problems are, what and who is to blame, solutions to the problem they seek and how to behave (Costanza 2009). Although these conceptions are not static, their relatively stable characteristics is pivotal for the effectiveness of social movements, in particular as a way of recruiting new adherents (Polletta and Jasper,2001). As the formation of collective identities is an agency-driven process involving movement leaders (Costanza 2009), this research seeks to understand how famous female alt-right advocates use frames to construct a collective identity through their online activism.

The data was transcribed and analyzed in batches with Atlas.ti up to the point where coding data reached saturation – where no more new codes were produced. The following questions are asked in the coding of the frames:

Frame	**Question**
Diagnostic Frame	What is the problem/challenge/threat/issue?
Prognostic Frame	What is the solution?
Motivational Frame	Why should we engage in action?
Frame Bridging	Which unconnected but ideologically congruent ideas are being linked with white supremacy?
Frame Amplification	How are white supremacist ideas being embellished?
Frame Extension	How are white supremacist interests being extended?
Frame Transformation	Which perceptions about the far-right are being transformed and how?

Table 2: Frames and Questions

This stage also included coding for conceptual themes (security, motherhood, beauty, feminism, immigrants, globalization etc.). Question 1 on the identity of alt-right women is separated from Q2 on "mainstreaming". In this case, a conscious choice was made to determine whether a theme pertains to women as agents or subjects. Furthermore, themes which specifically depict women are coded for Q1 and distinguished from those which talk about general issues facing the alt-right. The second step involved reflexively checking whether the themes accurately reflected coded quotes. Since probing for intercoder reliability was not possible, internal validity was ensured through a separate round of coding of select episodes and re-reading to ensure consistency in the analysis (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2012). The third step involved merging themes into higher conceptual categories while ensuring that they still reflected the coded statements. For example, the separate codes of "Crisis of Masculinity" and "Crisis of Femininity" were merged together to form a conceptual category of "Masculine Women (and Emasculated Men)." The fourth step involved determining how conceptual categories related to each frame by looking at the extent of their alignment – for example, in the aforementioned example, the data showed that the code "Masculine Women (and Emasculated Men)" was predominantly associated as a diagnostic frame. Once each conceptual category was assigned to a frame, the logical relationships between the requisite themes were created. These were inferred through a reflexive re-reading of the transcripts. The relationships are based on the connections allowed by Atlas.ti (contradiction, association, causation, part of, property of). The results of the data analysis are presented in the next section.

As discussed above, the criteria for verification of the findings in an interpretive approach are predominantly reflexivity, and researcher sense-checking during the research process, such as separating the note-taking and note-making process, searching for tensions in respondent responses, and questioning surprises in the data (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Reflexivity and positionality are an essential part of the research process throughout to avoid bias confirmation. Member-checking, a third verification process in interpretive research was not possible in this case for obvious reasons. We contend the findings of this research clarify and refine earlier work on this topic and serve as a basis for additional more quantitative projects, as such we view this research as theory-building and not theory-testing.

Constructing Feminine Identity

Network Map I demonstrates the cluster of themes which are associated with alt-right women's identity. The themes are color-coded to represent each framing task: red boxes demonstrate the cluster of themes associated with improper women – feminists who contribute to the crisis facing the white race; green boxes represent the cluster of frames through which the in-group of alt-right women is described or otherwise coded as proper women; yellow themes represents motivational frames and explain why other women should assume the proper alt-right identity; and the blue box signifies an amplification frame – how they clarify their own public activism in a highly patriarchal movement.

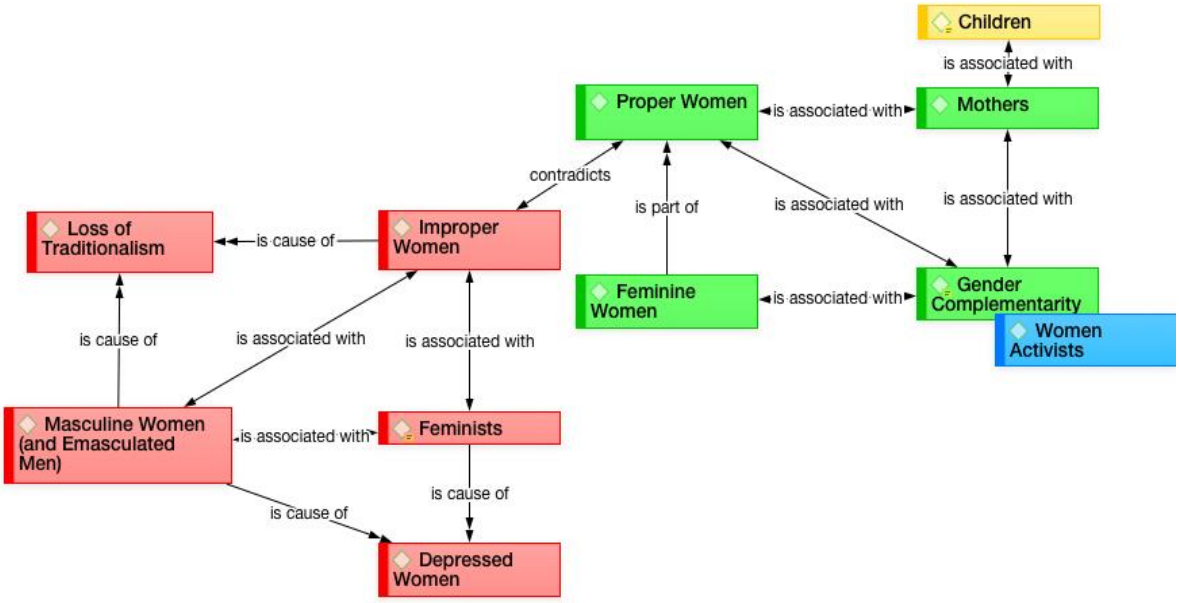

Figure 1: Network Map I: An Identity for Women in the Alt-right. Diagnostic frames are in red; prognostic frames are in green; motivational frames are in yellow; finally, the amplification frame is in blue.

As demonstrated in the results from Network Map I, women appear as agents in the alt-right movement. They appear to have a choice: either they become emancipated feminists responsible for the crisis of the white race, or they participate in the alt-right lifestyle fulfilling traditional gender roles in order to avert it: as wives, mothers or alt-right activists.

Diagnostic Frames

The main diagnostic frame in reference to the "out-group" of women is feminism. Interviewees construct feminism and feminists as forces causing a decline in white birth rates through their subversion of acceptable gender norms, emasculation of men and disdain for traditionalism. These "improper" women typically espouse the following characteristics: they represent emancipated and sexually liberated women, who compete with men for similar jobs, reject femininity, deprioritize childhood and as a consequence, become depressed. Many of them rationalize their disillusionment with the promises feminism as a path to identitarianism and the alt-right. Contrary to feminist claims of liberation, alt-right women contend that feminism is an oppressive ideology that demands women compete, become masculine and hate motherhood. One commentator articulates the perceived hypocrisy of feminism:

> It's supposed to be about giving you options, and for some reason, women's fertility…motherhood, which is a rite of passage, is one of the most demeaning things a woman can do. It is either demonized or you know, completely neglected. (Lokteff and Riley 2019)

Coupling purported feminist opposition to motherhood with the decline in white birth rates provides a stable foundation on which gender and race become interwoven in the alt-right. In this case feminism deviates women from their "true nature" by rejecting motherhood, heterosexual monogamy and same-race relationships. Therefore, the sexual and reproductive freedom connected with feminism is itself seen as a threat to white civilization and serves as a justification for the necessity to control white female sexuality within the alt-right and beyond.

Another element of this diagnostic frame is the conception of declining masculinity and female/male gender roles. In addition to denouncing the pressure on women to be more masculine in relationships, interviewees express their concern about the out-group of feminists who put men in subservient positions. This narrative reflects the importance of the interrelated conceptions of femininity and masculinity in the far-right. As previously discussed, masculinities are often invoked in the context of the extreme right movements; they play on perceptions of emasculation and loss of manhood among young men (Spierings

et al. 2015). Congruent with this ideology, most episodes in the podcast discuss the white man's struggle: loss of employment; stigmatization; and drug abuse (including the current opioid crisis) which is explicitly attributed to feminism, social equality, civil liberation, and immigration. As part of this narrative, progressive women's movements such as those demanding equal opportunities for men and women, opposing sexual assault and the #metoo movement are denounced as having alienated white men to a point where:

> If you're a man, you don't know if a woman's crazy or not, you don't know if she's going to be the kind of person who's going to accuse you of raping her (Lokteff et al. 2017).

By articulating an elaborate cultural narrative around the vulnerability of gender, the subordination of women becomes part of a vision for a return to a functional society, one which views the preservation of hierarchy as a legitimate means to an end – preserving traditionalism, white male dominance as well as white womanhood.

The destabilization of gender norms and loss of traditionalism in society is repackaged as an idea made comprehensible through conversations on white relationships, finding a spouse and companionships. In one episode titled *Finding Red-Pilled Love & Friendships*, guests exchange seemingly innocuous conversations about modern love, hook-up culture, the importance of getting married younger, often with direct appeals to the "biological clock" of each female listener.

> When I was growing up, it was kind of like "well you could get married but that's like the less desirable option because you should have a career,' and now I really honestly run across girls that are you know, between 20 and 25 who are raised being told that getting married wasn't even on the table as an option, that was never presented to them by their parents (Lokteff et al. 2017).

In this view, feminism has cheated women out of the comfort once given by the patriarchy, denying women's biological nature and consequently, their potential for fulfilment

and happiness (Bacchetta and Power 2002; Darby 2020). Depression and anxiety are directly associated with single and childless women who were told to put off having families:

> I think that's why so many women today are on anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications is, because they're feeling the discord inside themselves, because they are not living a true feminine lifestyle and they're feeling it (Lokteff et al. 2017).

The essentialized differences between men and women are used in this discourse to reinforce the notion that biological sex generates different but complementary roles which are essential for the maintenance of the white race (Ferber 1998). While these conversations may appear nothing more than an expression of conservative beliefs, it is notable that they propagate an idea that men's empowerment, the creation of white families and even women's happiness are predicated on control of white women's sexual behavior and their submission to white men.

Prognostic Frames

Identity and belonging are not only achieved through affiliation between members on the basis of pre-existing beliefs but also through lifestyles (Campion 2020). This a frequent theme of Lana Lokteff's podcast.[6] Femininity is defined in reference to the traditional gender roles of the late 1960s and 1970s in the United States when domestic labor and child bearing were vital "in the service of preserving tradition and a conservative status quo" (Cooksey 2021). Femininity is further affirmed as a function of women's natural desires. White women can find their place as wives, girlfriends and mothers fulfilling traditional familial roles, protected from the chaotic consequences induced by feminism and racial integration, whilst able to engage in public activism from the privacy of their home. To promote these views, Lokteff devotes a considerable amount of airtime interviewing tradwives - a colloquial shortened form of the term "traditional wife", a group of women who identify as radical anti-feminists and conservatives.[7]

[6] Three of the episodes in this study are titled *Femininity in a Modern World, Advice for Young Women Who want to Live a Feminine Life, Paleo Life & the Feminine Woman*

[7] While there is considerable overlap between these two communities, they are somewhat distinct. Where 'tradwife' ideology overlaps with the alt-right, these promoters of the 'tradwife' culture position femininity,

To alt-right women on Lotkeff's podcast, embracing traditionalism is portrayed as a liberation from the oppressive liberal ideology of feminism which forces women to follow a pre-determined (childless and career-focused) life trajectory. They often narrate their past experiences with feminism with a weak, naïve and directionless past self, and associate their transition with a committed, inspired and harmonized new identity. This narrative of liberation and empowerment imbue affirmative statements that women are biologically, psychologically and emotionally different from men, yet have an equally important role in the preservation of the white race:

> …in a supportive and nurturing role for her kids, for her husband for her family, for relatives, I think that's when we're most formidable in our femininity in our power as women (Lokteff and McCarthy 2017).

In one conversation, Lokteff and her interviewees discuss how feminists misrepresent women's subordination in history:

> It was thanks to white culture and men that have propped us up – our women have been the first to go into space and to be billionaires and fly planes and drive cars and it is men who have facilitated us. We're the ultimate privileged ones, women in white societies, absolutely up on a pedestal (Lokteff and Gorgo 2017).

The logic of this argument is that white men's ultimate romantic gesture to white women is the gift of civilization (Lokteff 2017).[8] Incidentally, this argument appears to draw on the discourse of paleoconversative activist Phyllis Schalfy, who argued that feminism degraded the equality between sexes by placing women on a "pedestal" (Ribieras, 2021). White men are presented as the legitimate protectors of the white race justifying hate-filled speech and violence against other ethnicities (Mattheis 2018). This romanticization not only upholds racist hierarchies but also positions the white woman as being at the mercy of white

chastity, marriage and motherhood as safety nets from the degradation of the modern society: immigration, multiculturalism and degeneracy. For a wider discussion of the overlap between the tradwife and alt-right movement, see Mattheis 2018; Leidig 2021; and Love 2020.

[8] Within the alt-right' 'Western civilization' has become a discursively acceptable code for 'white culture.' (Illing 2019).

men to protect them from the oversexualized "other" (Mattheis 2018). By valorizing white men's empowerment as saviors, builders, and protectors of Western Civilization, this affirmation of gendered complementarity is essential in positioning women in the alt-right: as requiring the protection of white men and privileged in relation to other ethnicities.

According to Lokteff's interviewees, the proper woman is one who is wife and mother first, has a huge breadth of skills: is able to change a diaper, cook, do all the domestic work, as well as enjoy activities like decorating and dressmaking. The symbol of women as mothers has a long history in the maintenance of white supremacy across contexts and time, used to normalize racist activity and add a degree of social acceptability to their claims (Darby 2020). Blee (2003) notes that because racist movements are concerned with reproduction and destiny, they place special emphasis on women's roles as mothers, allowing women to deflect racist accusations by rooting their activism in their maternal responsibility toward their children and families. In McRae's *Mothers of Massive Resistance* (2018), the author narrates how white mothers were central in preserving Jim Crow in the United States before 1941 by enforcing "racial distance in their homes and in the larger public sphere" and at the forefront of grassroots opposition to the civil rights movement after that period (2018: 4). In a similar manner, mothers in the alt-right movement police the cultural reproduction of white values. Other than procreation, these mothers remain in charge of the reproduction of racism by home-schooling their children to avoid exposing them to liberal brainwashing that villainizes white people and which they accuse educational institutions and mass media of popularizing. As one tradwife under the pseudonym "Motherhen" cautions:

> I've done my research on Youtube…it's like a hidden world that really wants to infiltrate our children. From the surface if you look at it, it seems harmless, but if you really start looking into it, it really is trying to recondition them and really get them to embrace degeneracy (Lokteff and Stewart 2020).

When discussing their motivation for joining, mothers in the alt-right movement commonly cite a desire to protect their children. Their concerns include; not wishing to become a minority in their own country; fear of anti-white educational and mass media

programming; concerns that their sons may grow up in a world which discriminates against men:

> We're all called to say something against the system and speak out and be loud about it because it is a system that, this anti-white system, that wants to come after our children that wants to destroy their future (Lokteff and Malkin 2020).

Women activists participate frequently in Lokteff's podcast. Contrary to previous accounts of women's activism confined to the private space of the home (Bacchetta and Power 2002), these mothers are also active publicly, even if mainly online. Through a particular type of mommy vlogging, these women personify a gendered and idealized expression of womanhood for other women viewers online (Campion 2020). Next to homemaking, they call for whites to reproduce early and often. For example, Ayla Stewart (otherwise known under the pseudonym of Wife with A Purpose) became infamous on Twitter when she issued her "white baby challenge" calling on other women to have more white babies than the six she already has. Her notable activism is recognized far beyond the Internet - she was the only woman selected to speak at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville (Darby 2020).

In an episode entitled "Tips on Having a Large Family", Lana Lokteff and two self-proclaimed tradwives – all mothers of six - discuss how they deal with the financial costs of having multiple children. Otherwise, innocuous conversations about homebirths, healthy living, thrift store shopping and cheap holidays would pass as everyday "women talk" were it not for interwoven discussions on fighting anti-whiteness. This further supports Lokmanoglu and Veilleux-Lepage (2020) findings that similar conversational topics are often discussed on white supremacist, women-only internet forums serving to create strong social bonds amongst far-right women.

As activists, alt-right women navigate a tension between their defense of women's naturally submissive role and their call for women's active participation. In congruence with the hierarchy of the movement, the participants note that women are too emotional or unfit for the "masculine type careers" of public advocacy (Lokteff et al. 2017). Nevertheless, in justifying their own activism, Radio3Fourteen participants frequently differentiate themselves

from the average woman. Seeking to clarify that alt-right women are not merely housewives, as assumed by commentators outside the movement, Lokteff asserts:

> There's also this misconception that women that speak like us don't know about anything politically that we don't read, we're not intellectual, we're just tied to the stove and know nothing about the outside world. I say alt-right women are very different because we want to be united, we want to be equals on the same page about politics, and we're kind of united in a bigger existential fight together - even though we could be staying at home (Lokteff and McCarthy 2017).

These and similar statements serve to frame women's participation in "choice" and "duty" while simultaneously upholding the traditional gender boundary – women's traditional place is at home, men's is to lead. Mattheis (2018) notes that Lokteff's references to women's natural inability to lead while invoking mythological women warriors such as "shield maidens," serve as an instruction for "in-group" members on how to be both submissive and active. Furthermore, these narratives seek to create rational entry points for other women who are seeking to participate. In this manner, Lokteff constructs an image of female empowerment in a highly racialized context which positions white women as necessary participants in view of the larger aim: to preserve the white race.

In sum, the alt-right feminine identity is constructed in ways that seek to preserve the traditional gender roles of the mid-20th century white middle-upper class family. White women are found in archetypical roles as wives, mothers and/or activists. The in-group is comprised of women who embrace femininity, gender complementarity and traditionalism, and the out-group in this paradigm opposes each of these characteristics. In this worldview feminine alt-right identity is constructed as liberated; valorizing men's leadership and upholding an essentialist perspective of gender and gender roles. Therefore, far from demonstrating an "emancipated" form of women's participation, alt-right women endorse the traditional forms of white masculinity typical to the far-right, while using their gender to legitimize racist ideas.

Mainstreaming the Alt-right

Figure 2 demonstrates how women mainstream far-right ideas. The boxes are color coded to represent each framing task: red boxes identify how far-right women problematize their reality; green boxes demonstrate how women identify the solutions; blue signifies amplification frames – how they amplify or embellish the challenges; yellow themes explain why, according to far-right women, others should join the alt-right movement.

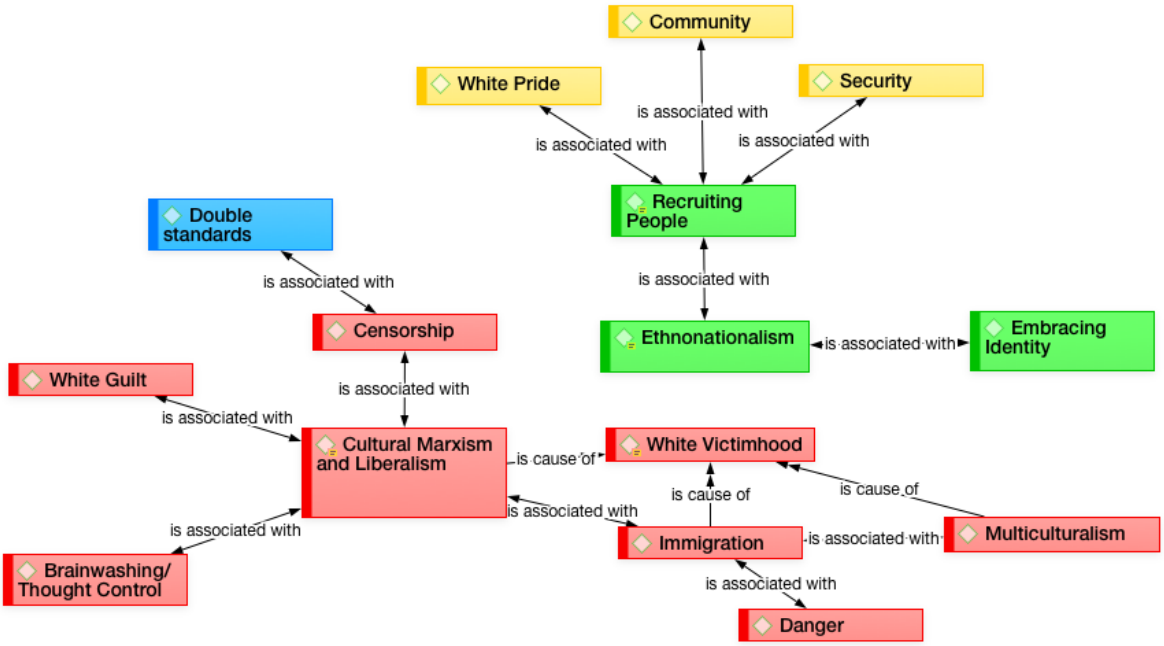

Figure 2: Network Map II: Mainstreaming the Alt-right. Diagnostic frames are in red; prognostic frames are in green; motivational frames are in yellow; finally, the amplification frame is in blue.

While the connections represented in the map by no means exhaust the logical relationships between ideas in the movement, this analysis aims to present a coherent picture of how far-right women mainstream racist ideas. It reveals the following finding: alt-right women are making a case for joining the movement by first, constructing a dominant picture of white victimhood and second, portraying white ethnonationalism as a way to preserve white racial identity, obtain security, community and a sense of pride.

Prognostic Frames

Mirroring elements of conspiracy theories such as the "Great Placement Theory" and "Eurabia" women white nationalists associate weak immigration laws with demographic

decline as well as physical and financial insecurities affecting all corners of society. As one participant argues:

> There is this increasing awareness that open borders are a danger not only to our civic culture and our national culture in general but our public safety, our national security and obviously, our public health (Lokteff and Malkin 2020).

Non-white immigrants are represented as low-skilled workers who infiltrate national welfare systems, vote for the left and attack white women. These challenges are compounded by the inability of white birth rates to keep up with the demographic displacement caused by migrants: immigrants are flooding in at such a pace that "even if we're all having six babies, they're still coming in at a rate that we still can't keep up with" (Lokteff and Malkin 2020). The participants further evoke discursively constructed gendered racist solutions framing themselves as physically vulnerable and threatened thus requiring borders to be closed in order to prevent miscegenation and to ensure security from foreigners and non-whites who they claim routinely kill and rape women at large. As one participant claims in defense of closing borders:

> I think what would it be like if we as white women were a minority in a civilization that was ruled by Africans or Islamic men. I mean, we can look to their cultures to see how women are actually treated. There are actually true rape cultures there (Lokteff and McCarthy 2017).[9]

In the view of Lokteff's interviewees white culture is also threatened by multiculturalism which they contend is imposed on homogenous white societies without consent. This narrative is supported with local anecdotes about cultural invasion, such as churches being turned into mosques, Muslims protesting LGBT education, and fears of the obligatory veiling of girls in schools.

Related to imposed multiculturalism is the idea of Cultural Marxism – another long existing trope that is common to far-right ideology (Wood 2019; Waltman and Mattheis

[9] The question of whether these cultures emerged as a result of centuries of male dominance and colonialism does not feature in these discussions.

2016). In this view, Cultural Marxism has made white people in Western civilization ignorant and unappreciative about the achievements of the white race and about "how white people essentially built the modern world" (Lokteff and Gorgo 2017). The propositions of this theory are that global elites seek to discredit various institutions such as the nation, hierarchy, authority, family and traditional morality and replace them with a multicultural global nation (Jamin 2014). Commentators have noted that it is a useful tool that escapes fascist connotations but is otherwise used as an ideological weapon (Jamin 2014; Mirrlees 2018).

In this narrative Cultural Marxism destroys Western civilization in three ways: it "brainwashes" people to hate their own race; commits entire generations to white guilt; and demands censorship under its demand for color-blind political correctness. Implicated in this agenda are the global political elite, leftists as "social justice warriors", the educational institutions and mainstream media.

Cultural Marxism is framed as the brainwashing of white people to regret their history, deny their values, reject white identity and even, white beauty standards. According to women on the show leftists are propelling this trend by using Cultural Marxism to create "legacy through thought control" for generations using educational institutions, social media, books and cartoons to achieve that aim (Lokteff and Stewart 2020). Harnessing their special role as women, the interviewees repeatedly express their worry about the indoctrination of children (and future generations) through an educational curriculum dominated by topics such as colonialism and slavery:

> You know all the same bullshit lines - American slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow. These are things that are beaten over, you know, white kids' heads and school, the Holocaust right, and then they live with this guilt and the shame they feel, they can't assert themselves (Lokteff and PhilosophiCat 2017).

Educational institutions are denigrated for promoting a liberal education which teaches white people to be ashamed for being racist and atone for sins committed in the past. Women are considered to have a special role in the education of their children opting for homeschooling, rather than subjecting them to liberal "brainwashing". Their motherhood "compels" them to take a public activist stance for the sake of their children. Just as the 20th

century white southern women leaders who advocated for segregated schools for the sake of their children's welfare, here, motherhood also becomes a tool of resistance (McRae 2018).

White guilt is a concept used to amplify the presumed destruction of white identity in which political correctness and racial color-blindness have suppressed white people's true feelings about their race. White guilt then provides a bridge between mainstream political discussions and far-right ideology. For example, Donald Trump's speech in 2020 at the National Archives in Washington DC, decried educational institutions for adopting a far-left agenda in classrooms, wiping out US history and defaming American heroes (Freedberg 2020). In Lokteff's podcast, women appeal to this loss by demonstrating how white guilt goes beyond its systemic infiltration and spills over into their personal lives. Having gone through a process of awakening about Cultural Marxism, women look to their own past experiences to communicate their hardship as white people:

> Everything we do is in a sense about avoiding being compared to Hitler or the Nazis. It's so strong in who we are and it's just cost so much damage and just trying to repair that image and I have to make a lot of effort to let people know that I am not a Nazi (Lokteff and Gorgo 2017).

Women on Lokteff's show claim to be victims of increased and systemic censorship that aims to stifle conservative voices. Censorship is seen as a manifestation of the political correctness typical to Cultural Marxists (Finley and Esposito 2020). Interviewees lament the suspension of their social media accounts, which they claim amounts to a violation of their right to free speech. These social media restrictions are framed as attempts to curtail open discussions on identity, race and ethnicity as opposed to the enforcement of these platforms' terms and conditions regarding hate speech. One interviewee notes: "[Social media companies] are broadening the definition of harm …to push more of us off" (Lokteff and Malkin 2020). Censorship and attacks are proof that their activism is valid, effective at reaching people and making a difference:

> They don't shut us down because what we say isn't true and full of lies and conspiratorial mumbo-jumbo. They shut us down because what we say is true,

> because we're affecting people, and we're reaching people and we're making a difference. Otherwise they wouldn't fear it (Lokteff and Malkin 2020).

Perceptions of injustice are further amplified by the perceived existence of double standards regarding white activism. Interviewees maintain if other groups are allowed to engage in identity politics, then white people should be able to make similar claims:

> You guys get to have black pride or whatever pride, gay pride. I'm going to have white pride! But as soon as we do it, it is the biggest double standard, as soon as we do it. It's terrible and it's like 'oh, well, you're the oppressor (Lokteff and Bell 2017).

Making the case for injustice is the first step through which white women attempt to mainstream racist rhetoric. These arguments are made to seem innocuous by enabling women to deflect accusations of racism by repositioning racial sentiments in the basis of wider identity-based claims. In this context white pride is portrayed as a legitimate common-sense political position for the mainstream individual. By appealing to the idea of the loss of the dominance of a naturally superior white population and white culture, far-right women are using immigration, multiculturalism, white guilt and censorship in order to amplify a sense of loss of status and make the case for white people's oppression. The next section demonstrates how women portray the necessity of embracing (white) ethnonationalism in averting that trend.

Diagnostic Frames

In alt-right discourse whiteness is constructed as an identity under siege. Ethnonationalism is presented as a solution to the challenges facing white people, offering not only physical and financial security but also identity security in an increasingly globalized world. This is a goal that white nationalist women explicitly seek to normalize (Lokteff et al. 2017). For example this is accomplished by making emotional appeals such as "the power of identity… is something that cannot be overcome, it is human nature", and "identity is important, even if you get over the values and group thing, group preference is extremely

strong" (Lokteff et al. 2017). These women appeal to the universality of white order without making explicit claims to white superiority and domination (Lokteff et al. 2017). This perception is further strengthened by frequent referrals to ancestral values such as tribalism and traditionalism; notions unimpeded by white guilt (Lokteff and Gorgo 2017). In one episode titled "Connecting with My Ancestors and Finding Racial Identity Cured My Depression" one interviewee narrates her own experience:

> I couldn't figure out where I fit in everything and once I discovered the alt-right, I found my place in everything and I started to have a sense of pride about who I am and where I come from and that was incredibly healing and it's probably the most positive aspect of the alt-right' (Lokteff and Gorgo 2017).

Rather than merely repackaging far-right propaganda, Lokteff's podcast offers a comprehensive playbook which facilitates recruitment by normalizing otherwise extreme views. Her interviews routinely stress the importance for alt-right personalities to construct positive, life-affirming narratives that promise "a better life", "a better way of feeling about themselves in the world", that sends "positive messages" and establishes "emotional and honest connections" with people. These "positive messages contend that happiness or a better life, reside in the gender complementarity of the movement, women's natural roles as mothers and nurturers of the family unit, and in-group survival. Indeed, the importance of establishing emotional connections to advance the cause is highlighted by one interviewee, who conducted a workshop for far-right adherents on how to debate those outside the movement dubbed "normies". She states that:

> The whole point of that workshop was learning to debate people without resorting to a lot of reason and evidence because most people cannot understand reason and evidence, like maybe 10% of people are going to find that appealing. Most people need appeals to emotion or to authority or to tradition (Lokteff and PhilosophiCat 2017).

She also encourages her participants to raise several themes designed to evoke an emotional response from an interlocutor, suggesting that:

> When they (normies) bring up these things like that multiculturalism is good, (ask) how is it good for you? How is it good for your neighborhood? How is it affecting your children's school? How is it affecting your employment opportunities? How is it affecting your housing prices? Because…if you're just talking about 'Oh, they're bringing gang violence to some other state in another part of the country' that's not personal (Lokteff and PhilosophiCat 2017).

At a time when achieving financial security is increasingly uncertain for many Lokteff and her guest activists offer a potentially attractive alternative life. Lokteff claims ethnonationalism affords women and men economic and physical security. It protects their homelands from invasion, fosters a safe environment for their children, provides socioeconomic conditions that allow their husbands to have jobs, and ensures that white "genetics aren't lost in the tides of time" (Lokteff, Stewart, et al. 2017). As one participant claims white nationalism "…is just a movement…that is most in line with reality and what has worked well to provide [for] and protect women for centuries" (Lokteff et al. 2017).

In addition to physical and economic security, Lokteff's interviewees extol the importance of white pride as a way of ridding oneself of the burden of white guilt and finding the power of identity. They do not describe themselves as hateful but rather justify their views through love for their own race and the need to protect their people. In one episode, an interviewee notes: "I don't hate them [other races] but I love my people more and I don't think that there's anything wrong with that. I think basically every other race is the same" (Lokteff and Gorgo 2017). Articulations of white pride and love for one's kind are cultural affectations which appeal to people's fundamental understandings of race and ethnicity (Berbier 1998). This permits adherents to speak about white identity, culture and pride with a veneer of normality while in reality denying the racialized other. As one interviewee narrates her experience of coming to the movement:

> I actually feel more grounded and like have a healthier thinking about the world and have better well-being in that sense and are more resilient you know because I have a purpose...I feel more connected to my ancestors and my family members in that kind of sense that can only come with recognizing the importance of racial differences (Lokteff and McCarthy 2017).

Alt-right women communicate the benefits of joining the alt-right through stories of finding community, friendships, sisterhood and even relationships within the movement. The community associated with the movement is a frequently occurring motivational frame which counters the competitive individualism which in their view characterizes today's society (Esposito 2018):

> I hear from men who feel that they actually have a tribe and a brotherhood again and women that feel like they actually have good female friends that they can actually talk to, it's a sense of family, a sense of community, something that we actually haven't had in our hyper-individualistic societies, right? (Lokteff and Gorgo 2017).

This benefit could appeal to wavering female listeners who may share some of movement's ideas of the movement but have not found a like-minded community either online or offline (Lokteff and Riley 2019). In this way alt-right activists such as Lokteff and her guests, capitalize on the above tropes to entice and attract new followers to the movement.

Conclusion

This article has discussed how female influencers in the alt-right movement are producing and mainstreaming a narrative on ethnicity and gender. These findings contradict some of the extant mainstream literature on women's participation in online far-right movements which presents women as having limited agency and as passive consumers of ideology. This article has shown that women not only have agency but also are actively working as ideologues; creating content and mainstreaming ideology in efforts to recruit followers. Anecdotal

accounts found from former adherents online demonstrate that recruitment by white supremacist groups through social media works (Roose 2019). As Julia Ebner argues, far-right ideologues (such as Lokteff) have leveraged the digital space to reach their key audiences through a range of strategies, one of which is through manipulation campaigns which target the mainstream. Through online campaigns, far-right individuals "initiate conversations, build trust, exploit common grievances and tailor the language to the person they seek to bring closer to their ideologies" (Ebner 2018) – strategies which sound strikingly similar to those proposed by alt-right women. In this context, the internet is believed to facilitate individual radicalization processes by providing an echo chamber for racist ideas. In the virtual world, individuals can find legitimacy for racist ideas, allowing self-radicalization to occur without physical contact (Koehler 2014; Veilleux-Lepage and Archambault 2019). The formation of this new subculture of women content creators therefore warrants academic and policy attention, as well as the attention of social media watchdogs.

Lokteff's interviewees ground their narratives in anti-feminist stance. Feminism is viewed as a direct threat to a homogenous white society in which white women can thrive. Alt-right female influencers frame women's subordination to white men and their embrace of alt-right wifehood and motherhood as liberation and empowerment from an oppressive feminist ideology. In doing so, Lokteff and her guests problematize feminism as having achieved women's emancipation but at the cost of sexual objectification, loneliness (never finding a husband) and childlessness. Within this narrative their liberation is conceptualized as "choice feminism". Choice feminism is a concept which is "too often about safeguarding privilege under the guise of individual liberty" (Darby 2020: 123). The narratives associated with it ignore the multiple and overlapping structural factors that negatively impacted women's lived experiences, such as sexism, racism, occupational discrimination, and economic inequality. They also do not interrogate the obvious contradiction between their stated desire to be subordinate to men, and the role of patriarchy and colonialism in creating disadvantaged conditions for women in the other cultures they claim superiority over.

Lokteff and her guests could be characterized as "organic intellectuals" of the movement (Worth, 2021), as they skilfully weave anti-feminist and racist rhetoric, it becomes evident that they are careful not to overstep the line of "empowerment" by employing rhetoric

which defers leadership to men. In producing this content, the archetypes of wife, mother and activist typical of far-right movements are performed demonstrating that alt-right women follow in the footsteps of their ideological predecessors (Bacchetta and Power 2002; Blee 2003; Deutsch and Blee 2012; Félix 2015).

While Connell's (2005) reconceptualization of hegemonic masculinity called for "much closer attention to the practices of women and to the historical interplay of femininities and masculinities", few studies have sought to understand how anti-feminism and femininity matter for the far-right (Mattheis 2018; Darby 2020; Bjork-James 2020). As Kathleen Blee (2020) argues, the finding that gender matters in the far-right does not demonstrate how it matters, to what extent it matters, how it varies over time, place or political forum. This article sheds some light on how a small but highly visible group of influencers are actively working to promote a dangerous far-right ideology. It shows how far-right women mainstream and soften white supremacist rhetoric, seek to rehabilitate toxic notions of racial superiority and women's subordination, and fuel fears of the other for their political ends, while using gendered political rhetoric.

In conclusion, these findings have two major implications for gender-aware Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) policies and programs. First, Lokteff's podcast creates a spaces where women influencers and ideologues can engage in the processes of ideological interpretation and reinterpretation, establishing a sense of meaning and purpose within the movement. In other words, Lokteff's guests are provided with platform for them to express their views and share with a wider audience, reflecting their agency within the movement. As a result, any P/CVE program must be gender-responsive and account for the sense of empowerment and agency women experience as a result of their involvement in the movement. Second, Lokteff's podcast should not be disregarded as innocuous, as it provides a platform that can help women become more radicalized and stay involved in the movement by allowing them to solidify their ontological security and "place" within it. As a result, it is critical to evaluate gendered risk factors and account for the unique experiences of women in violent extremism while evaluating existing P/CVE initiatives. This includes reacting to the push and pull elements that are frequently discussed in these Lokteff's conversation with her guests, but also to recognize her podcast as both a potential entrance point into such movements, as well as a means of retaining and supporting existing members.

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