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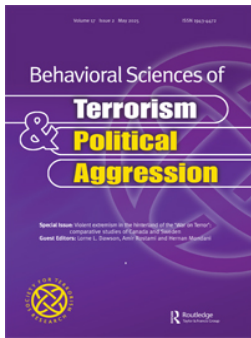
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'Tell them if they race-mix, they will rot in hell': right-wing extremists' narratives on children's ideological socialization

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ABSTRACT

A recent rise in right-wing extremist movements and activities has sparked international concerns over children raised in right-wing extremist households. The general consensus appears to be that these children are at risk of radicalization themselves, and could end up following in their parents' footsteps. To understand how children's ideological socialization is perceived within the milieu itself, a narrative analysis of white nationalist parents' discussions on the online forum *Stormfront* was conducted. Five distinct narratives on children's ideological socialization were identified. These narratives differ in terms of their underlying rationale and the action perspective that they imply. Findings suggest that in raising their children, right-wing extremist parents find themselves grappling with two conflicting 'meta-narratives' [see Walton, M. S. (2020). *Defending white America: The apocalyptic meta-narrative of white nationalist rhetoric*. Brigham Young University] underlying their ideology. One that departs from children's autonomy and self-determination (vis-à-vis mainstream society), and one that stresses the importance of authoritarianism and obedience (vis-à-vis the family ideology). This is reflected in Stormfront users' inconsistent and at times contradictory narratives on parenting.

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Introduction

In recent years, the Global North has seen a rise in right-wing extremist movements and associated terrorist activities (Hart, 2023; Jones, 2022; Toobin, 2024). With this development, concerns have been voiced about the children being raised in right-wing extremist households. The general consensus appears to be that these children are at risk of radicalization themselves, and could end up following in their parents' ideological footsteps (Cook & Schneider, 2024; Lee & Knott, 2017; Rousseau et al., 2024; Simi et al., 2021). The underlying assumption appears to be, as Pels and De Ruyter (2012) write, 'if one is convinced of the (moral or religious) truth of one's ideals and values, one will want to ensure that children will also be as strongly convinced' (p. 315). In reality, however,

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little empirical work has been conducted on the ways in which right-wing extremist parents raise their children in practice. Most studies examining extremist socialization practices have been preoccupied with jihadist or Islamic extremist families (e.g. Peterson et al., 2020; Sikkens et al., 2018; Weggemans et al., 2022) – and our general understanding of ideological socialization in right-wing extremist households thus remains limited (Copeland, 2020; Mattsson, 2021). This is problematic, as in a previous empirical study, we suggested that parental socialization mechanisms may differ among ideologies (Van Wieringen et al., 2022, 2024) – where findings on jihadist families may not necessarily translate to right-wing extremist households. Moreover, many of the qualitative studies that *do* focus on right-wing extremist families, rely on retrospective data, such as interviews with former extremists (e.g. Koehler, 2014; Simi et al., 2021), post-hoc autobiographies (e.g. Copeland, 2020) or case file data (e.g. Rousseau et al., 2024). These sources only partially give insight into right-wing extremist family dynamics, and generally fall short in understanding parents' inner motivations and considerations in the ideological socialization of their children.

In this study, we aim to address this lacune by examining right-wing extremist parents' beliefs and narratives about children's ideological socialization in the context of the online community *Stormfront*. Analyzing right-wing extremist parents' first-hand accounts allowed us to gain insight into their 'real-time' opinions and perspectives on children's upbringing, and the ways in which they socialize them into their violent worldviews. To do so, we conducted a qualitative analysis of Stormfront users' parental narratives. Inherent to narrative analysis is the idea that all communication ultimately comes down to the telling and sharing of stories, which in turn reveal how we understand ourselves and the world around us (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019; Presser & Sandberg, 2019). Narrative analysis is therefore concerned with uncovering the implicit or explicit accounts that individuals use to make sense of their life experiences (Maruna & Liem, 2021; Presser & Sandberg, 2019). This approach has in recent years proven fruitful in understanding engagement in violent extremism and processes of radicalization more generally (Copeland, 2020; Ferguson & McAuley, 2020; Lakhani, 2020). In the current study, we maintain that narrative analyses are equally suitable to understand right-wing extremists' approaches to family life and their respective ideas on the ideological socialization of children. These insights are useful for all individuals working with families in which children are potentially raised with right-wing extremist ideas and may aid in the development of adequate prevention and intervention measures in the long run.

Theoretical background

Over the past decades, the influence parents can have on children's ideological development has been well-established in a myriad of academic studies. The intergenerational transmission of parental beliefs has been described in topics ranging from political preferences (Van Deth et al., 2011) and religious convictions (Min et al., 2012) to criminality (Farrington et al., 2009) and gender role attitudes (Witt, 1997). Furthermore, the roles that family members can play in the processes of radicalization have similarly received extensive academic attention (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022; Rousseau et al., 2024; Sikkens et al., 2018; Valtolina & Zanfrini, 2023; Weggemans et al., 2022). For example, a meta-analysis of 127 studies conducted by Wolfowicz et al. (2021) found that having radicalized

family members has a small but significant effect on individuals' ideological radicalization. In a similar vein, Zych and Nasaescu (2022) found that having extremist relatives significantly increases the likelihood of radicalization. It should be noted, however, that the aforementioned meta-analysis is based on merely two studies that included having radicalized family members as a variable (Zych & Nasaescu, 2022). Lastly, LaFree et al. (2018) also noted that having radicalized family members raises the risk of engaging in extremist violence, based on data from 1473 radicalized persons in the US.

Nonetheless, still little is known about the ways in which right-wing extremist parents raise their children in practice, and only a few qualitative studies touch upon this topic. For example, by interviewing four Swedish neo-Nazi leaders, Mattsson (2021) examined the choices these fathers make regarding their children's education. All four interviewees express a deep distrust towards the public school system – frequently engaging in arguments with their children whenever they have been taught values at school that contradict their own Nazi beliefs (such as the universal declaration of human rights). As Mattsson (2021) writes, 'they prepare their children to disregard democratic teachings without attracting too much attention' (p. 11). Additionally, all fathers provide their children with alternative education in the home environment – 'although to different degrees and in varying forms' (Mattsson, 2021, p. 11).

Furthermore, in a recent empirical study, we tried to gain in-depth insight in potential extremist transmission processes, using interviews with (former) right-wing extremist and (former) jihadist research participants and a case file analysis involving extremist families (Van Wieringen et al., 2024). We found that extremist parents can play a direct role in transmitting their worldviews to their children. It was observed that extremist parents purposefully convey their views to their children through the use of social isolation and/or control over social relations, homeschooling, media control, and the use of extremist discourses and symbolism within the home environment (Van Wieringen et al., 2024). Moreover, our findings suggested that parents' own beliefs regarding (their role in) children's upbringing are key to understanding the ways in which children may be raised within extremist milieus. Parents' ideas and assumptions about childrearing and parenthood ultimately inspire the family dynamics and socialization mechanisms through which the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideologies can take place (Van Wieringen et al., 2024).

However, this particular aspect (i.e. parents' own ideas about children's ideological socialization) received little scholarly attention so far. Moreover, research on parental socialization practices in the right-wing extremist milieu remains sparse – with academic studies still being generally preoccupied with religious (i.e. jihadist) extremism. This imbalance is potentially problematic, as our previous study suggests that jihadist parents might adhere to different socialization practices than right-wing extremist families (Van Wieringen et al., 2024). For instance, it was observed that in teaching children about the family ideology, right-wing extremist parents strongly appeal to multigenerational duties, often through the romanticization of historical events (such as the rise of Nazi Germany and previous generations' involvement in World War II) and a strong emphasis on genetic heritage. These narratives appeared to be less prevalent in jihadist cases, possibly because long-standing family involvement in right-wing extremist milieus, often spanning multiple generations, appeared to be more common in these contexts (Van Wieringen et al., 2024). Additionally, it was observed that jihadist parents in the Global North tend to emphasize social isolation in raising their children, advocating for

complete withdrawal from mainstream society. This approach – which appears to be less common in right-wing extremist families – seems to stem from lived experiences of discrimination and stigmatization, and negative interactions with mainstream society. In contrast, right-wing extremist parents typically frame their parenting around more general alarmist fears of the perceived decline of the white race, rather than personal experiences of marginalization or exclusion (Van Wieringen et al., 2024).

These differences warrant further scrutiny of the specific socialization narratives that right-wing extremists adhere to. The current study hypothesizes that this group might face a particular challenge in raising their children to their ideology. Considering that right-wing extremist ideologies strongly value (state-level) authoritarianism, hierarchical obedience, and traditional values (Carter, 2018; Heller et al., 2022; Mudde, 2019), one might expect to find similarly rigid narratives regarding parents' child-rearing practices. Yet, studies on the intergenerational transmission of religion and 'mainstream' political ideologies suggest that authoritative parenting – defined by emotional warmth, parental responsiveness, and reasonable discipline – is most effective in ensuring ideological continuity across generations (e.g. Bengtson, 2017; Goodman & Dyer, 2020). Intuitively, this is hardly surprising: we are probably more inclined to embrace the worldviews of those we trust and we believe care about us. However, for right-wing extremist parents, it creates an interesting tension – urging them to balance the rigid underpinnings of the family ideology, and the need to employ warmer, more flexible parenting styles if they wish to successfully transmit their beliefs to their children.

In the current study, we address this topic by using first-hand accounts of right-wing extremist parents themselves, to better understand their motivations and underlying rationale for engaging in children's ideological socialization. We will do this by conducting a narrative analysis of online content on the white supremacist forum *Stormfront* – the background of which we will briefly outline in the next section.

The Stormfront forum

While according to the website, Stormfront self-identifies as a white nationalist discussion forum, it is more generally acknowledged as a neo-Nazi or right-wing extremist platform (Bright et al., 2022; Castle & Chevalier, 2011; Hardy, 2023). The Stormfront forum was established in 1995 by Don Black, a prominent member of both the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and the American Nazi Party. As such, Stormfront is widely considered to be one of the first virtual communities of right-wing extremists (Castle & Chevalier, 2011; Kaplan & Weinberg, 1998). Moreover, several Stormfront members have previously been linked to involvement in various terrorist attacks across the globe (Beirich, 2015), which further justifies using Stormfront as a case study in understanding right-wing extremists' narratives.

Regardless of its US origins, Stormfront attracts individuals from all over the world (Bowman-Grieve, 2009; Törnberg & Törnberg, 2021). At the time of writing, Stormfront has over 380,000 international members and contains more than a million threads. These threads are organized into several subforums. Subforum categories range from discussions on news articles, politics, literature and ideological matters, to users giving each other relationship advice, sharing poems and exchanging tips on developing traditional skills such as farming, cooking and crafting. Although all registered users can post to

Stormfront, moderators actively check all content to adhere to the white nationalist ideology, with dissenting comments or threads frequently being deleted (Bright et al., 2022).

It is unclear what percentage of Stormfront members maintain active profiles on the website. Furthermore, little is known about the demographic composition of the platform's user base. Consequently, we cannot determine the extent to which the Stormfront community accurately represents the broader right-wing extremist milieu. For instance, it can be assumed that the average age of Stormfront users is higher than that of right-wing extremists who are not active on the forum, given the platform's long history (established in 1995), and the emergence of new online hate communities on platforms that might be more appealing to younger right-wing extremist populations (e.g. Telegram). However, despite potential demographic differences, Stormfront's reputation for radical content and its 'relative opinion homogeneity' (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2024, p. 99) suggests that the discourse on the platform remains a reliable reflection of contemporary right-wing extremist ideologies.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which right-wing extremist parents understand and discuss their own role in the ideological socialization of their children. To this end, a narrative analysis of threads posted on the *Stormfront* forum was conducted. Prior to this project, official approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs at Leiden University (reference number 2021-010-ISGA-Van Wieringen, certificate available upon request).

For the current study, we were predominantly interested in examining threads in which parents share experiences, dilemmas or advice regarding children's ideological socialization. To do so, a hand search of all Stormfront threads was conducted. Potentially relevant threads were identified by entering various search terms (such as 'kid/s', 'child/ren', 'daughter/s', 'son/s', 'parent/s', 'parenting' and 'upbringing') into the Stormfront search tool. Only posts that explicitly related to the topic of parenthood or child-rearing were included. Excluded were threads on family life-related topics such as breastfeeding, marriage, gender roles, contraception and fertility. Additionally, threads had to be started in the past 10 years to guarantee modern-day relevancy. The authors did not create Stormfront accounts, as the content of the forum can be accessed without registration.

Ultimately, this yielded a selection of 49 threads, created by 46 unique accounts, with a total of 1475 replies. Only threads containing three or more replies were analyzed, to ensure that the selected threads contain substantive discussion and reflect broader community engagement, rather than singular, uncontextualized statements. Most of the included threads were posted in the respective subforums 'Education and Homeschooling' and 'Homemaking'. Examples of the titles of included threads are: 'Discussing racial awareness with a five year old' (13/03/2022); 'Training your children to pre-emptively combat indoctrination' (01/07/2022); 'What skills do you want your children to know?' (01/11/2018); and 'Ways to prevent your child from becoming a mudshark' (17/01/2017).

Coding was conducted by one of the authors, whose work was periodically reviewed by a co-author, as to ensure inter-rater reliability. Minor discrepancies in coding style were

subsequently resolved through team discussions. In analyzing the data, we went through multiple coding cycles, as is common practice in narrative research (Bamberg, 2020; Seal, 2018).

The selected threads and their replies were coded using a combination of inductive and deductive coding styles, as we drew inspiration from our previous studies (Van Wieringen et al., 2021; Van Wieringen et al., 2024), and their findings regarding the intergenerational transmission of extremism. For example, in our 2024 study, we used codes related to parental narratives, such as ‘emphasizing collective victimhood’, ‘us vs. them discourse’, ‘emphasizing discipline’ and ‘appeal to intergenerational loyalty’ as a starting point for coding (Van Wieringen et al., 2024). In our 2021 study, we used codes related to socialization practices more generally, such as ‘social isolation’, ‘media control’, ‘punishing/rewarding’ and ‘taking children to ideological events’ (Van Wieringen et al., 2021). Both coding groups (i.e. socialization practices and socialization narratives) were further supplemented with inductive codes that arose out of the data – such as the codes ‘children’s literature’, ‘using statistical facts/data’, ‘cutting ties’, and ‘emphasizing free will’. The most prevalent co-occurring codes were then matched and merged into overarching themes that captured the sentiments expressed on the Stormfront forum. In the end, five separate (at times conflicting) narratives were identified. Each will be discussed in the following section.

Results

Narrative A: ‘control their every move’

On the Stormfront website, white nationalist parents encourage each other to exert as much control over their children as possible (observed in 36 out of 49 threads). This is most visible in their approach to children’s media consumption. For example, on Stormfront, users exchange tips for children’s books that adhere to (or at least are not in conflict with) their ideology. Parents frequently mention having their children read Greek and Roman literature; non-fiction books about history and geography; fairytales by Hans Christian Andersen or the Grimm Brothers; classic novels such as *Little House on the Prairie* or *Animal Farm* (‘We haven’t quite gotten rid of communism yet, and until we do, I’ll keep this book high on my list of books for children’, u/Varick writes [05/10/2013]), and anything by J.R.R. Tolkien. On Stormfront, the general consensus appears to be that modern children’s books are heavily influenced by ‘woke’ ideologies, thus more ‘traditional’ literature is generally preferred.

Additionally, Stormfront parents strictly monitor the social relations of their children. They encourage each other not to let children engage with so-called ‘degenerates’ – which is commonly used by Stormfront users as slur for, among others, black, Jewish and queer people. Moreover, Stormfront parents appear generally opposed to modern technology and suggest that children should be kept away from mobile phones, laptops and TV’s as much as possible. Instead, they encourage each other to introduce their children to their own network of likeminded individuals. For example, u/Guitarist advises a white nationalist mother of a twelve-year-old daughter to arrange ‘regular exposure to social gatherings with other parents that have White boys her own age’ (10/24/2023), to halt her daughter’s developing interest in dating black partners.

When it comes to children's education, parental narratives on Stormfront are generally in favor of homeschooling. An often-cited aphorism circulating on the forum reads: 'You cannot put your child in enemy territory for 6–8 h a day, 6+ days a week, and expect the enemy to lose' (e.g. u/famavita, 02/08/2023), which serves to stress the importance of exerting ideological control over children's interactions. For many white nationalist parents on the website, homeschooling is therefore perceived as the most desirable option in ensuring ideological influence over children. In advising a fellow Stormfront member, one user writes:

The american educational system is a joke. It is nothing but twelve long years of social indoctrination and mind control. If they cannot turn kids into mud loving sluts, they try and turn them into manhating carpet munchers. Home schooling is your only choice if you want to save your child. (u/DomTxn, 10/11/2018) [sic]

Although some parents on Stormfront express concerns over the lack of social interactions that homeschooled children might have, these comments are usually met with skepticism. Parents who express fears that opting for homeschooling may result in their children not being well-adjusted to peers, receive much critique ('My homeschooled son has no problem interacting with other kids. I have zero interest in 'socializing' my children. Sounds like something a communist finds important,' u/Duitsebloed, 31/03/2021). In a similar thread, u/S.Sinistrari writes: 'Social connections DO NOT HAVE TO BE THERE' (10/24/2023), again suggesting that exerting ideological control should take preference over stimulating children's social development.

Narrative B: 'talk, don't yell'

Regardless, white nationalist parents on Stormfront seem to be generally aware that in order to socialize their children into their ideology, a certain level of trust between children and their parents is required. On the forum, the general consensus therefore appears to be that gently explaining the right-wing extremist way of life is more effective in getting children to adhere to parents' worldviews than coercive approaches (observed in 19 out of 49 threads). Emphasis is often placed on socialization through 'open communication' and 'friendly discussions'. On Stormfront, a parent who struggles with the political leanings of her seventeen-year-old daughter is for example encouraged to invest in their relationship: 'Spend time with her. Listen to her. Talk, not yell,' u/Magog writes (22/01/2021). This emphasis on calm and rational parenting is further illustrated by the following quotation:

Whatever [political ideology] your kids tell you they're 'into', provide them with all the literature you can find that talks about it! Sit down with them for some friendly discussions and tell them some gripping stories of history – do not waste time arguing with them. Let them stretch their minds and stop trying to make them do it your way! The more you encourage them to learn from the major works dealing with their favorite topics, the more different perspectives you offer from good writers and thinkers, including those of whom you approve, the more likely you all are going to agree anyway! (u/Little Ice Age, 25/01/2021)

This shows that Stormfront parents believe that ideological socialization does not come about by arguing, but instead naturally develops overtime as children discover the ideology themselves. As such, it is suggested that persuasion is not an effective approach, and may even be counter-productive in getting children to embrace their white nationalist

heritage. Instead, children should be made to feel as if they have agency and autonomy over their worldviews, the following quote suggests:

Explain to [your children] what things are degenerate and why, but let them take ownership of the decisions to the extent practical and within reasonable limits. They will be more likely to behave responsibly if they believe it is their own decision rather than something that was forced on them. Bringing home a Black boyfriend/girlfriend is outside reasonable limits, so I would not permit that. (u/fluxmaster, 26/03/2019)

Here too, the underlying idea appears to be that creating the illusion of free will in children, or alluding to a (false) sense of agency, is pivotal in getting offspring to embrace the white nationalist ideology – even though the choice to date non-white partners clearly falls beyond the scope of this freedom.

Narrative C: ‘present them the facts’

In line with the section above, in socializing their children into their white nationalist ideology, parents on Stormfront often claim to rely on rational arguments and logic (observed in 18 out of 49 threads). To them, the validity of their ideology is rooted in historical, biological, economic, political and social facts and figures. Therefore, convincing their offspring of the truthfulness or righteousness of the right-wing extremist ideology appears to be pivotal to Stormfront members. This particularly pertains to children who are deemed old enough to understand the underlying rationale of the white supremacist ideology. For example, Stormfront user u/Boondocksaint11 shares that they tried to prevent their teenage daughter from dating a black boy by ‘[showing] and [explaining] typical behavior that one should expect from a negro’ using ‘videos, FBI crime statistics [and] my own life encounters and experiences’ (24/10/2023). Others resort to judicial or religious arguments to discourage children from engaging in what they perceive as ‘homosexual filth’ (u/Odium14, 19/06/2018), by stressing that dating same-sex partners is not permitted either by federal law or by Church, and that queer relations would inhibit them from fulfilling their white nationalist ‘duties’.

More generally, however, in discussing socialization efforts, Stormfront parents tend to appeal to what they refer to as ‘the truth’, ‘forgotten facts’ or ‘the evidence’ (e.g. u/NY Nationalist, 02/09/2014). Central to this narrative is the idea that parents should at all times strive to provide children with ‘REAL information and knowledge’ (u/famavita, 19/02/2019), and that this will ultimately inspire them to follow in their parents’ ideological footsteps. ‘Discuss racial differences from an early age. Never tell them what to think or believe; just present the facts,’ u/fluxmaster writes (01/07/2022). In a different thread, a Stormfront user advises a fellow right-wing extremist parent:

It is going to take more than a speech to get [your daughter] to realize the truth, take her out on an outing and then while outdoors in a nice place carefully explain why liberal values are a disaster, then explain what she can expect with an improved National Socialist attitude. (u/Defend our Homeland, 20/06/2018)

Likewise, a Stormfront parent concerned with their teenage daughter’s developing interest in leftist ideologies is advised to ‘use reverse psychology; buy her Marxist literature and make her read it; then show her the flaws and stupidity of it’ (u/HristoLukov88, 20/11/2020). In the same thread, another white nationalist parent similarly suggests: ‘Sit

down with her and discuss the facts, history, and consequences of Communism. No sane person would support Communism if they grasped the truth of it' (u/Jotunn, 27/11/2020). As such, this narrative heavily relies on children's supposed critical thinking skills and the perceived internal logic of the right-wing extremist ideology. Ultimately, according to Stormfront users, it is up to parents to confront children with the reality that they live in, which should be sufficient in having them adopt white nationalist worldviews.

Narrative D: 'instill a healthy fear in them'

Remarkably, and contrary to the previously observed emphasis on calm and rational parenting, Stormfront users also frequently describe using threats and emotional manipulation in socializing their children (observed in 16 out of 49 threads). This type of scaremongering behavior is even encouraged among members – with white nationalist parents who struggle to keep their children in line being told to make sure their offspring develops 'a healthy fear for what's around them' (u/WhaiteManScorned, 20/10/2017). In a different thread, u/WhiteSeedBreeds writes: 'In our growing ARYAN FAMILY we make sure to constantly instill in our children how they will rot in hell for eternity if they talk to or look at another race. They are not the same type of human' (07/05/2020). Similarly, a white nationalist parent who asks for advice on dealing with a child who seems interested in dating non-white peers, is told:

Tell stuff about negroes that will gross out your 12-year-old daughter. I never had to have that conversation with my daughter, because she told me that she didn't like them because they stink. And I was like yeah, they carry lice, fleas, crabs and really nasty diseases too. (u/Country-Boy88, 10/24/2023)

Stormfront users encourage each other to cut ties with children who do not adhere to the family ideology. 'You absolutely must disown them if they marry outside their race, and let them know about this well in advance,' u/fluxmaster writes (26/03/2019). Likewise, a parent whose teenage daughter does not follow the white nationalist way of life, is even told to have their daughter taken out of their home:

She is beyond the point of being salvaged so to put it bluntly you should get an eviction order and have her removed from the house after which your relationship with her should come to an end. Now as harsh as that may sound I am telling you she is endangering your life plus in the long run she will be better off for it however that may take several decades to fully come about. Do the hard things and you will be better off for it. (u/Defend our Homeland, 25/01/2021)

This quotation seems to suggest that disobeying children is considered a potential danger to their parents, although the nature of this threat remains unclear. Moreover, it reflects that to Stormfront parents, having children embrace the right-extremist ideology is of pivotal importance, even though this is rarely explicitly acknowledged on the forum. This creates an interesting paradox: while the general narrative on Stormfront is that children should be free to follow their own ideological development, in practice, this freedom seems very much restricted. This contradiction is illustrated by the following quotation:

We (wife & I) always gave our kids free will, that is that they could make their own choice if they wanted to follow the racist ideology once they got in High School. (...) Our philosophy (wife & self) was, we will love them if they decide our ideology is not for them. But if

they became race mixers, they would no longer be part of our family and be considered 'dead' to us. To pollute our genetic heritage and blood line with inferior nonwhite genes was something we could not live with. Or actively working against our cause. (u/AGD88, 26/02/2019)

Although the father at hand suggests that his children are free to divert from the family ideology, they will be considered 'dead' to him if they end up having a child with a non-white partner. According to several users, the possibility of having disobedient adolescent children therefore justifies having larger families. As one of them writes: 'Another reason to have more than 1 [child] is, so if you DO get a bad apple despite your blood/sweat/tears rearing them, well at least you have other kids so you aren't completely heartbroken' (u/PalelsPretty, 04/04/2019). This further underscores the observation that although Stormfront users tend to present themselves as lenient or reasonable parents, in reality, ideological socialization of their offspring is very much a core objective.

Narrative E: 'teach by example'

Finally, the Stormfront forum suggests that children's socialization into right-wing extremist ideologies ultimately comes down to adequate example-setting (observed in 16 out of 49 threads). It is frequently suggested that being a good parent is in the end all about '[being] a good white person' (u/DomTxn, 22/02/2019). In a Stormfront thread where parents share their most valuable parenting lessons, ideological role modeling is therefore often mentioned. 'The most important thing is to teach by example, showing good style and ethics. Being an honest good person. Be hard on yourself, not on the children' u/Goth writes (22/02/2019). In practice, being a good white nationalist role model implies that parents should primarily interact with other right-wing extremist families. Furthermore, they ought to respond 'appropriately' to outside groups. For example, parents on Stormfront are advised to call a black person 'a goblin, pest, snake, asshole, jerk, clown, prick or something that cannot be construed as racial' (u/SFR, 10/25/2023) in front of children, to discourage them from interacting with them, while simultaneously disguising the right-extremist nature of the family ideology to the outside world. Another Stormfront parent writes:

One thing I've been doing with my young children is any time black/brown people or LGBT are mentioned, I show them a disgusted expression on my face. They find it funny, and it gets the message through without me having to lecture them (that can come later when they're older if need be). (u/The Counsel, 01/07/2022)

From this emphasis on example-setting follows that on Stormfront, parents who struggle with the ideological socialization of their children are generally perceived to be 'failing' as white nationalist parents. A father concerned with his daughter's interest in queer relationships, is for example gently reminded that 'a proper upbringing should result in her not going through this 'phase'' (u/myjeepgrand87132, 18/08/2018). Similarly, a right-wing extremist mother who grapples with her children's leftist sympathies, is met with criticism: 'To be blunt, why would you let this happen? (...) YOU allowed it to get to this point' (u/famavita 27/11/2020). Other Stormfront parents like to emphasize that they themselves have *never* experienced their children rebelling against the family ideology – thereby implicitly suggesting that these issues are indeed indicative of parental

failure. This altogether points to an overarching narrative where white nationalist socialization should come naturally to those who are genuinely committed to the ideology. If you are a good white person, your children will automatically follow in your footsteps, the underlying messaging seems to be. This interestingly contradicts the previous sections in which parents emphasize the importance of actively controlling children's interactions, convincing them with 'facts and figures' or using scaremongering to ensure obedience.

Discussion and conclusion

The goal of the current study was to shed light on the ways in which right-wing extremist parents raise their children, by examining online discussions on right-wing extremist forum *Stormfront*. This study is unique in various regards. First, it builds on previous studies that examined extremist socialization mechanisms by focusing primarily on jihadist or Islamic-inspired extremist ideologies. Due to this academic emphasis on religious extremism, our understanding of transmission processes in right-wing extremist households has remained largely underdeveloped, even though there are indications that this group is different from jihadist families in various regards (Van Wieringen et al., 2024). Second, scholars tend to draw on retrospective or post-hoc data (such as interviews with formers) in understanding extremist family dynamics. These approaches give us only limited insight into the 'genuine' underlying assumptions and convictions that inspire parents' socialization practices – partially due to the shame former extremists might experience when looking back at the (parenting) choices they made in the past (see also Sikkens et al., 2018; Weggemans et al., 2022). Therefore, we opted to examine the real-time, first-hand accounts of right-wing extremist parents instead. By conducting a narrative analysis of *Stormfront* data, we were able to study how right-wing extremist parents consider their perceived role in raising their children, and what their motivations for engaging in children's extremist socialization may be.

It was observed that generally, *Stormfront* users appeal to five distinct narratives in discussing their views on children's ideological socialization. These narratives differ in terms of their underlying rationale and the action perspective that they imply. For example, *Stormfront* parents tend to support calm and rational approaches to children's upbringing – preferring tranquil explanations and friendly discussions over persuasion and coercion. Emphasis is often placed on children's free will and their right to choose their own path. As such, the general consensus appears to be that children's ideological convictions will come about naturally when they are presented with the 'facts' of the white nationalist ideology – and when children have 'good' white parents as role models. The 'meta-narrative' (see Walton, 2020) is thus one of passive parenting, where parents should trust children's gradual development instead of forcing the ideology upon them. This sentiment largely reflects the nature of *Stormfront* users' right-wing extremist ideology – in which independence, autonomy and self-determination are valued highly (also see Koehler, 2014; Scott, 2017), as is equally visible from *Stormfront* members' 'anti-indoctrination' arguments against public schooling. Moreover, this meta-narrative of passive parenting is indicative of parents' determinist attitudes: they are convinced of their right-wing extremist worldviews to the extent that they feel explicit socialization efforts are not necessary since children will ultimately come to accept these beliefs on their own account.

At the same time, however, the Stormfront case study makes clear that ideological socialization of children *is* in fact a key concern to white nationalist parents – even though this is hardly explicitly acknowledged on the forum. This narrative, too, arises out of the right-wing extremist ideology itself, which commends parents to have large families as to preserve their white nationalist heritage. According to right-wing extremists, children are explicitly considered the gateway to the future of the white race, and as such, offspring needs to be adequately prepared for the race war that they think will inevitably come about (Byman, 2023; Van Wieringen et al., 2024). On Stormfront, white nationalist parents therefore encourage each other to actively exert as much control over children's lives as possible, specifically with regard to their media consumption, (peer) relationships and (home)schooling. They additionally stimulate the use of scaremongering and emotional manipulation to dissuade children from engaging with so-called 'degenerate' groups – which fits with previous observations (e.g. Schneider, 2022). When children end up diverting from the family ideology regardless of these efforts, Stormfront members seem to agree that cutting all ties is not just legitimized, but the preferred course of action.

These narratives of active ideological socialization contradict the narratives of passive parenting in which children's free will is repeatedly emphasized. It suggests that right-wing extremist parents find themselves grappling with two conflicting meta-narratives (see Walton, 2020) underlying their ideology. One that departs from children's autonomy and self-determination (*vis-à-vis* mainstream society), and one that stresses the importance of authoritarianism and obedience (*vis-à-vis* the family ideology). This supports the idea that extremist parents can be rather contradictory in their (attitudes on) parenting, which reflects findings from our recent study on the intergenerational transmission of extremism (Van Wieringen et al., 2024). Here, we discussed how interviewees raised in right-wing-extremist households often recalled their caregivers being inconsistent or 'hypocritical' in their parenting practices, as they did not always live up to their own rules (Van Wieringen et al., 2024).

It is important to note that inconsistencies in parenting are not unique to right-wing extremist households *per se*, as parents of all backgrounds might struggle to balance conflicting beliefs in raising their children (e.g. Knafo & Galansky, 2008; Knafo & Schwartz, 2003). However, in the context of right-wing extremist parenting, these contradictions take on particular significance, as they reflect deeper tensions within the ideology itself. These inconsistencies may ultimately provide an entry point for children to question and eventually break away from their extremist upbringing. Studies on deradicalization suggest that ideological disillusionment – often triggered by exposure to hypocrisy, inconsistencies, or real-world contradictions – can be a key factor in initiating an individual's 'exit' process (Christensen, 2015; Feddes, 2015; Windisch et al., 2019). Indeed, numerous documented cases demonstrate that children raised in extremist families can successfully distance themselves from their caregivers' violent worldviews (see Förster, 2016; Nordverbund Ausstieg Rechts, 2017; Scherr, 2009). To better understand these dynamics, future research might examine how and under what conditions these observed contradictions influence children's ideological trajectories following their extremist upbringing. Such insights could prove valuable in developing more effective policies and programs aimed at promoting disengagement and deradicalization from extremism.

Likewise, it is worth examining to what extent the meta-narratives observed in this study influence the eventual effectiveness of parents' socialization efforts. As discussed, research on the transmission of religion and political convictions generally points to parenting styles characterized by warmth and trust as being more successful in the long-term transmission of these ideas (e.g. Bengtson, 2017; Goodman & Dyer, 2020). The fact that Stormfront users at times promote harsh and authoritarian parenting, including emotional manipulation and scaremongering, raises questions about the degree to which they are indeed able to transmit their ideologies to their children in the long run. Insights might be drawn from children being raised in sectarian movements and other high-control groups (e.g. Latta, 2011), to understand whether authoritarian group structures indeed translate to authoritarian parenting styles, and how this might impact children's ideological development.

Several limitations apply to this study. First, narrative analyses are naturally limited by their inherent subjectivity (Copeland, 2020; Presser & Sandberg, 2019). The stories and accounts examined in this article may not fully capture the diversity of attitudes and experiences of right-wing extremist parents. It is for example possible that some of the narratives identified in this study differ among fathers and mothers, considering that gender has been hypothesized to play an important role in extremist transmission processes (Blee, 2003; Copeland, 2020; Van Wieringen et al., 2022). Moreover, we were not able to verify whether the claims made on Stormfront were indeed authored by parents. It is possible that harsher or less nuanced claims about socialization practices originated from users who do not have children themselves. However, it should be noted that the purpose of our study was not to uncover the actual parenting practices employed in right-wing extremist families, but rather, to gain insight into the socialization narratives and justifications that this milieu adheres to. Furthermore, considering that the contradictory narratives discussed in this study were not just observed between users, but also within users' messaging (sometimes even within the same post, as exemplified by some of the quotations included in this article), our study was indeed able to provide valuable insight into the dominant ideas shaping these narratives, regardless of variation in individuals' family contexts.

Finally, although Stormfront represents a global community of white nationalists, a large part of its users are traditionally based in the United States (Bowman-Grieve, 2009). This might limit the generalizability of findings, as the narratives discussed in this article are likely (to some degree) reflective of the Northern American context. This is particularly the case for Stormfront narratives regarding children's education. While homeschooling is allowed in all states of the US (Hirsch, 2019), the European context is somewhat more heterogeneous. In various European countries (such as Hungary and The Netherlands) home education is only possible on an exemption basis, and in others (such as Germany and Sweden) it is even prohibited altogether. Nonetheless, the insight that to right-wing extremists, homeschooling is generally considered the preferred type of children's education might serve valuable in these contexts as well – as it can put the socialization efforts employed in extremist households into a broader ideological perspective.

In the end, platforms like Stormfront may continue to contribute to and solidify existing extremist narratives around child-rearing – creating an international echo chamber for parents (or parents-to-be) with right-wing extremist worldviews. Considering the

potential security threats associated with children raised in extremist households (Van Wieringen et al., 2021; Van Wieringen et al., 2024), further research on the ways online discourses shape right-wing extremists' family lives should be promoted. The current study demonstrated that qualitative (narrative) approaches can prove to be particularly valuable in this regard. These approaches allow us to move beyond the observable family dynamics, and shift focus towards the 'real-time' assumptions underlying parenting decisions. As such, they may offer a valuable framework for future research seeking to understand and address the intricate relationship between family dynamics, online spaces, and the transmission of extremist beliefs.

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