DeRadicalisation
in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate

Mainstreaming, Gender and Communication in the UK

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations……4

Acknowledgements……5

About the Project……6

Executive Summary……7

1. Introduction……8

2. Methodology and methods……9

3. Mediated hegemonic gender presentations and its relationship to radicalisation in the UK……11

4. Media presence, production, and circulation of collective agents of radicalisation……14

5. Media presence, production, and circulation of collective agents of de-radicalisation……21

6. Media presence, production, and circulation of ordinary users against radicalisation……26

7. Discussion and conclusion……33

Appendix……36

Bibliography……45

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
EU	European Union
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
SNP	Scottish National Party
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer +
TERF	Trans-exclusionary Radical Feminism
GC	Gender Critical
GRA	Gender Recognition Act
GRC	Gender Recognition Certificate
Incel	Involuntary Celibacy
MGTOW	Men Going Their Own Way

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About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks and wider social contexts driving radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation) with the goal of moving towards the measurable evaluation of de-radicalisation programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, which include the person's sense of being victimised, of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures and coming under the influence of 'us vs them' identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Georgia, Austria and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation in order to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of 17 nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts will be crucial in uncovering the strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that processes of radicalisation often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national frameworks of justice. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analysing and devising solutions to online radicalisation will be central to the project's aims.

Executive Summary

The DRad 5.2 UK country report studies the online agents of far-right extremism and the ways in which citizens and members of civil society attempt to tackle social and political problems related to radicalisation in the UK. By looking at the patterns of visual political communication on social media platforms, the report showcases everyday expressions of sexism, misogyny, transphobia, and racialisation in the UK. In doing so, it aims to provide a scholarly discussion on the textual and visual affordances pertinent to social media platforms that help reproduce existing power structures and social inequalities in society, whilst reinforcing legacy media norms. The report identifies several reasons to explain the underlying issues that help the formation of performative masculinity and its mainstreaming as a far-right reference point for wider users and audiences. First, the Brexit vote in 2016 and subsequent right-wing, nativistic, and populist political leaders such as former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, have made certain radicalised and divisive narratives mainstream in the UK. Second, recent research questions the algorithmic systems underlying new technologies and how they bolster already existing social inequalities and exclusions as well as the communicative tools of social media platforms and apps that boost the visibility of various forms of online hate. Moreover, social media platforms remain largely unregulated, with proposed regulations facing major backlash as some proponents of freedom of speech oppose strict regulation. Problematic and controversial figures can also move from platform to platform, avoiding absolute removal. Although the report is interested in users' engagement with newer platforms (e.g. TikTok) and the ways these actors and stakeholders engage with them, the report also analyses different types of radicalisation and deradicalisation on legacy social media platforms (e.g. YouTube) where narratives hit the mainstream, are legitimised in society, and reach wider audiences and receive wider support.

1. Introduction

This DRad report responds to the mainstreaming of far-right extremism on a global scale by focusing on the UK. The report looks at the online agents of far-right extremism, which we consider to be one of the most important forms of radicalisation in the Western world, and the ways in which citizens attempt to tackle social and political problems related to radicalisation. By looking at the patterns of visual political communication on social media platforms, the report showcases everyday expressions of sexism, misogyny, transphobia, and racialisation (Hall 1997; 2005). In doing so, it aims to provide a scholarly discussion on the textual and visual affordances pertinent to social media that help reproduce existing power structures and social inequalities in society, whilst reinforcing legacy media norms. Moreno-Almeida and Gerbaudo (2021, 885). We identify the renewed far-right discourses as racist, anti-immigrant, antisemitic, Islamophobic, anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-leftist, and anti-establishment as well as reactionary and ethno- and ultranationalist. Between 2002 and 2019, 35 far-right incidents and deaths took place in the UK, which ranked third amongst other Western countries (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020) and hate crimes have experiences the highest increase over the past decade (Proctor, 2019).The report also aims to account for various ways in which de-radicalisation agents and ordinary citizens use social media platforms to tackle far-right extremism, particularly in the form of misogyny, sexism, homophobia and transphobia.

The report identifies several reasons to explain the underlying issues that help the formation of performative masculinity and its mainstreaming as a far-right reference point for wider audiences. Firstly, a social reason. The Brexit vote in 2016 and subsequent right-wing, nativistic, and populist political leaders such as former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, have made certain radicalised and divisive narratives mainstream in the UK. Moreover, controversial figures like the former leader of the far-right UK Independence Party (UKIP) Nigel Farage, have become household names, opening the door for actors with similar ideologies to establish themselves in the mainstream. Secondly, recent research (see Umoja Noble 2018; Benjamin 2019) questions the algorithmic systems underlying new technologies and how they bolster already existing social inequalities, as well as the communicative tools of social media platforms that boost the visibility of various forms of online hate. Moreover, social media platforms remain largely unregulated, with proposed regulations facing major backlash as some proponents of freedom of speech oppose strict regulation. Problematic and controversial figures can also move from platform to platform, avoiding absolute removal. For instance, upon being removed from Facebook, Britain First migrated to a less regulated platform – Gab, which is popular amongst public figures within far-right groups, including Tommy Robinson, Milo Yiannopoulos and Paul Joseph Watson (Nouri et al. 2020, 2). Thirdly, messages become ubiquitous online, unbound by geographical limitations.

Although we are interested in users' engagement with newer platforms (e.g. TikTok) and the ways these actors exploit them, the report also analyses legacy social media platforms

(e.g. YouTube) where narratives hit the mainstream, are legitimised in society, reach wider audiences, and receive wider support. Structurally, this report first lays out the methodology used, focusing on multimodal discourse analysis, followed by the section on cultural and political framework of mediated hegemonic gender presentations in the UK. The ensuing parts frame gendered radicalisation and (de)radicalisation patterns in the UK using visual data from various social media profiles, followed finally by the discussion and conclusion section.

2.Methodology and methods

The cases for the report were selected in part using the researchers' knowledge about radicalisation and deradicalisation voices and organisations in the UK. The aim was to examine online actors who would have a significant influence on radicalising and deradicalising discourse in the context of misogyny, homophobia, sexism and/or transphobia. For example, famous author J. K. Rowling has, in recent years, espoused transphobia on her online platforms, making her an appropriate radicalisation actor who has mainstream influence, to examine. Moreover, well-known deradicalisation organisations such as Stonewall UK have a significant online presence, making their online activity highly relevant for examination.

Desk research was used to identify further actors and cases. This involved searching keywords related to gendered radicalisation and deradicalisation (e.g., "TERF", "incel", "self-help", "feminism" etc.) on visual-centric social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. The content of the accounts returned in the searches was assessed to determine whether: (1) the account was mostly dedicated to radicalisation or deradicalisation and (2) the account had a notable following and received significant engagement. Through discussions with the research team, three radicalisation actors, three deradicalisation organisations, and three citizen actors of deradicalisation were identified for analysis. It was also ensured that various topics related to (de)radicalisation were present across the selected accounts' content, for example, transphobia, feminism, toxic masculinity, intersections of racism and toxic masculinity etc.

In terms of sampling content from the identified actors, this was largely determined by the level of engagement. Engagement, such as likes, retweets, and views, is a common means of sampling the most relevant data when examining social media as such metrics often represent content with the most reach and audience endorsement (Halavais 2014). Thus, such content can be seen as most representative of the account's activity. Consequently, each account was reviewed to identify the most engaged-with content. This largely concerned views as most content was videos[1]. As not every actor/organisation exclusively

[1] JK Rowling was an exception to this, as Rowling almost exclusively shares her transphobic views on Twitter and mostly in textual form. Due to Rowling's international, mainstream celebrity and immense reach on Twitter (14 million followers

created content related to (de)radicalisation in the context of misogyny, homophobia, sexism and/or transphobia content irrelevant to this not sampled. In most cases, several posts/videos from the chosen profiles were analysed to understand content scope.

Multimodal discourse analysis was used to analyse the sampled data. Discourse is a specific communicative event that involves actors, typically in speaker/writer and hearer/reader roles, taking part in a communicative act in a specific context (time, place, circumstance). Through these communicative practices, individuals develop a particular way of dealing with and reflecting on issues, in turn forming and maintaining their social realities. In this report, we are interested to see how social realities are constructed to justify, legitimise, and galvanise further support (Van Dijk 2015).

Multimodal discourse analysis is used to analyse data that includes hybrid forms of communication, such as text combined with images (O'Halloran 2011). The value of using multimodal discourse analysis to explore online phenomena has been recognised, particularly when examining YouTube because the platform is rich in multimodality (Benson 2015). In using multimodality in the context of online communication, a relationship between the creators, the readers, and the subjects represented is central (Núñez Puente et al. 2015, 323). Other research has also emphasised the power social media platforms have in destabilising centralised institutions and muddying the author-reader relationship (Bouvier and Machin 2018). Indeed, there have been many investigations into the role of the reader of the text on social media platforms (see Liew and Hassan 2021), as well as several pieces of research investigating gender-related issues on social media such as #MeToo (Almanssori and Stanley 2022), gendered conflict (Sagredos and Nikolova 2022), and gender-neutral toilets (Colliver and Coyle 2020). Multimodal discourse analysis, therefore, is a particularly fitting approach for understanding the mainstreaming of far-right gendered extremism on social media. Fittingly, this report looks at how, through the personalisation of politics online, emotions, which are expressed on the audio-visual content and in the comment-sphere where audiences interact, work as an identity tool as they connect an individual with their imagined cultural group. In this sense, they establish what particular events should be experienced as a collective issue (Anderson et al., 2006). In the context of the report, these are issues related to radicalised views of, for example, women, feminism, and transgender people.

as of January 2023), it was determined that her sharing of transphobic narratives was essential to include in the UK report. Rowling has been vocal on Twitter about her opposition to proposed reforms to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) (*Gender Recognition Act 2004*) in Scotland, which has included sharing a photograph. As GRA reform is a highly topical subject in the UK, it was decided that this photograph would be analysed in order to understand Rowling's use of visuals on social media to contribute to transphobic rhetoric in the UK.

3. Mediated hegemonic gender presentations and its relationship to radicalisation in the UK

3.1 Cultural and political framework of hegemonic gender presentations in the UK

The UK has made notable social progress throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. While not considered as socially progressive as some other European countries, particularly Scandinavian countries, it has made significant steps towards inclusivity and equality (Social Progress Imperative 2022). The most significant piece of legislation in this area is the Equality Act 2010 which presents a list of protected characteristics illegal to discriminate against in public and professional settings such as the workplace and in education. This includes age, gender reassignment, being married or in a civil partnership, being pregnant or on maternity leave, disability, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation (UK Government n.d.a).

In terms of gay rights, homosexuality was decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967, in Scotland in 1980, and in Northern Ireland in 1982. Today, gay and bisexual people in the UK largely have the same legal rights as heterosexual people. Civil partnerships (introduced in the Civil Partnership Act 2004), afforded same sex couples very similar rights to hetrosexual married couples and same sex marriage was later legalised in England, Wales, and Scotland in 2014, and in Northern Ireland in 2020. Moreover, the UK (excluding Scotland) was the first European country to legalise same-sex adoption in 2002 (subsequently introduced in Scotland in 2009). Thus, the UK has made significant progress in affording gay and bisexual people the same rights as heterosexual people, particularly when compared to other European countries. For example, Italy, Greece, and Hungary only allow civil partnerships/unions, and same-sex marriage is still illegal in countries such as Lithuania, Poland, and Latvia (Lipka and Masci 2019).

Concerning transgender rights, the most significant piece of legislation was the Gender Recognition Act (GRA), which allows people who experience gender dysphoria[2] to legally change their gender. Through the GRA, transgender people can apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) which allows them to be legally recognised as a member of the sex most appropriate to their gender identity. There have been efforts to reform the GRA, largely because the process of attaining a GRC can be long-winded and invasive (Jones and Slater 2020). While these reforms have been rejected in England, Scotland is working towards them. The UK is, therefore, one of the more progressive countries in Europe in terms of transgender rights; countries such as Finland, Latvia, and Slovakia still

[2] "Gender dysphoria is a term that describes a sense of unease that a person may have because of a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity. This sense of unease or dissatisfaction may be so intense it can lead to depression and anxiety and have a harmful impact on daily life" (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria).

require transgender people to be sterilised to be legally recognised, and some countries have no legal recognition of transgender people, for example, Hungary and Bulgaria.

Women's rights have deep roots in the UK. Most famously, the Suffragette movement fought for and succeeded in achieving the right for British women to vote in 1928. Many prominent suffragettes during this time, such as Emmeline Pankhurst and Emily Davison, have achieved international recognition, cementing the UK as a significant contributor to women's rights. Further milestones in gender equality in the UK include access to abortion (in England, Wales, and Scotland) (1967), equal pay (1985), criminalisation of rape in marriage (1994), and the abolition of tax on sanitary products (2021). Thus, the UK has a strong history of feminism and progress in women's rights.

At the same time however, recent political history has worked to foster certain radicalised and/or populist ideologies regarding, for example, race, gender, and wealth. Margaret Thatcher, former leader of the right-wing Conservative Party, was the Prime Minister from 1979-1990 and her tenure was marked by individualism, free market, small state, and denationalisation. Post-WWII Britain (1945-1979) saw the creation of the welfare state and National Health Services (NHS), nationalisation of important industries, and the growth of worker's rights (Dutton 1997). Thatcher's policies, better known as Thatcherism, sought to reverse this social and economic progress. Throughout the 1980s, it was thus increasingly difficult for ordinary people to rely on the government's safety net to protect them from homelessness, unemployment, and poverty.

Thatcherism thus began the UK's slow steps towards "hardship and frustration", producing "one of the most unequal societies in Europe" (Bhattacharyya 2021, 2-7). The Conservative Party has been in power since 2010[3], and following the 2008 worldwide financial crisis, the Conservative government has operated some form of austerity up to and including today, characterised by high taxes combined with spending cuts to the public sector. A 2018 UN investigation into the effects of austerity in the UK found that the government has "inflicted "great misery" on its people with "punitive, mean-spirited, and often callous" austerity policies" that are "not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster" (Booth and Butler 2018). This over-decade-long austerity policy, which has evidently been detrimental to the lives of many in the UK, led to "a grudging acceptance that life's hardships will not, and perhaps cannot, be ameliorated by state intervention" (Bhattacharyya 2021, 8).

It has consequently been too long for many British people to expect to receive support from the government, and so other scapegoats have progressively become the means by which many blame social and economic predicaments. These demonised scapegoats are often marginalised and powerless groups who make easy targets, such as the working class and those who are not economically self-reliant, such as low-income earners, disabled people, and immigrants/asylum seekers (Jones 2011; Hughes 2015; Bhattacharyya 2021; Morrison 2021). Through the repetition of demonising narratives, most

[3] Minority power 2010-2015 under a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition.

often in the media, these groups have come to represent the minority 'societal other' who the societal majority are urged to fear and/or hate through social rejection, polarisation, isolation, and villainisation, creating an 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy (Bailey and Harindranath 2005; Mountz 2009). Such narratives can lead to moral panics, in which minority groups "become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (Cohen 2002, 1); the presumed danger of the group is heightened and, in response, so is the urgency to shun and/or remove them from society.

A recent key event based on radical right-wing, divisive ideas was the European Union membership public referendum, i.e., the 2016 Brexit vote, facilitated by the Conservative Party, which led to the UK leaving the EU on 31st January 2020. Brexit has been described as "a case study in populist right-wing Eurosceptic discourse" by delivering "the opportunity for a popular revolt by "the people'' against both elites and minorities" (Corbett 2016, 11-27), with mainstream media also fostered a "highly xenophobic" fear of the EU linked to a loss of identity and the erosion of British culture" (Bergmann 2020, 259). Thus, in this context, the demonisation of marginalised groups became commonplace; Brexit was an exploitable opportunity to spread populist discourses in the UK, leading to the mainstreaming of radicalised narratives centred on the othering of marginalised groups in which 'we' (white British) need to protect ourselves against 'them' (the EU, anti-Brexit 'elites', immigrants, refugees, and/or other ethnic minority groups) (Corbett 2016; Bhattacharyya et al. 2021; Faulkner et al. 2021). The UK government's New Plan for Immigration (Home Office, 2021) is also increasingly hostile towards not only 'illegal' migrants, but an ever-widening group of people and organisations who are perceived as facilitating illegal entry and/or those held responsible for preventing/delaying their removal (e.g. lawyers or activists) (Griffiths and Trebilcock 2022). This bolsters everyday hostility and "us" and "them" divisions in society, which Mayblin et al. (2020) calls "the slow violence of the everyday".

There have however been efforts to resist such rhetoric and foster empathy and understanding. The UK government has worked towards reducing hate crimes across the country. The Home Office, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, and Ministry of Justice (2016) collaboratively put together the"Hate crime action plan 2016 to 2020". This included understanding and defining hate crimes, assessing the progress the UK has made in tackling hate crimes, and putting forward an action plan. The Home Office (2022) also publishes yearly reports of hate crime statistics and the government has run a hate crime awareness campaign (UK Government n.d.b). There are also many UK charities that seek to empower, help, and protect marginalised people from hate crimes and negative discourses, such as anti-hate crime charities like Stop Hate UK, anti-racism charities like SARI (Stand Against Racism & Inequality), anti-Islamophobia charities like Tell Mama, and pro-LGBTQ+ charities like Galop. These are just a handful of charities in the UK that work to protect and empower marginalised communities. The UK as a whole is thus in a difficult position of radicalisation and deradicalisation, with the social and governmental

consequences of the past few decades creating an environment primed for radicalisation, juxtaposed with significant efforts to undermine such narratives.

4.The analysis of media performance of far-right actors: Personalisation of politics

In the existing hostile environment, right-wing populists, celebrities, and politicians become instigators of social, political, and economic forces, rather than reflections of them (Zeglen and Ewen 2020, 271-272). Today such actors leverage celebrity to gain legitimacy and consent (Zeglen and Ewen 2020) and increase their stature by utilising affect, engaging in the aesthetics of spectacle, and cultivating a legible semiotic style pertinent to their own cultural contexts and media ecologies. These political 'celebrities' and influencers assert supremacy using various visual and textual affordances of mediated environments. In addition, their social media posts that personalise and dramatise political processes hit the mainstream due to the support that they receive from the political regimes (neoliberalism and far-right policy-making) under which they operate, particularly by dramatising political processes and with their aesthetics of spectacle. Their online performance helps them gain traction online and become more appealing.

4.1.Paul Joseph Watson

One of the far-right agents of radicalisation is Paul Joseph Watson, whose online career started with his work for conspiracy theorist Alex Jones and his website Infowars. Watson has become a controversial right-wing conspiracy theorist in his own right, known for his YouTube videos criticising 'woke', anti-racist movements, and feminism. By October 2022, he had 1.2M followers on Twitter and 1.91M subscribers on YouTube. He was previously banned from Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Watson uses animation, game and music video aesthetics, and archival footage in his videos to appeal to wider audiences. He takes on an investigative journalistic persona in an attempt to make his content appealing and convincing (see Appendix 1). Watson represents both everyday and organised far-right politics, having become a member of UKIP in 2018 and consistently reaffirming his support for Nigel Farage and his far-right political leaning on his social media profiles. In this report, we focus on Watson's YouTube channel because of his significant engagement on this platform. Most content responds to current political issues such as elections, wars, and mass shootings, as well as topics related to popular culture. In many of his videos, Watson not only directly targets immigrants and refugees in the UK, but also "multicultural agendas" and diversity. As much as relying on an anti-immigration and racist outlook, these videos also perpetuate a patriarchal and militaristic agenda in user-friendly and easy-to-consume formats.

The first video to represent Watson's milieu is: "the truth about migrants", which has received over two million views. This video features Watson's talking head and rhetorical performance (Szemere 2020) and juxtaposes news and multimedia sources. Although some of these news sources may be genuine, Watson presents them disingenuously. The video starts with Watson positioning himself as the "male" authority on the global immigration of Muslims, exploiting an "expert" position. Watson appeals to common stereotypes about Muslims and refugees by using individual stories and statistics (for example, claiming 85% of refugees do not have jobs in the Netherlands) to deceptively suggest that immigrants are dangerous and criminal. This perpetuates the far-right dehumanising stereotype of Muslim refugees as 'prone to crime' and exploitative of the welfare system.

Global news stories are also integral to Watson's videos, such as a video exploring YouTube channel Asian Boss, which was incorporated into Watson's video. He uses examples from non-Western contexts to bolster his persuasive techniques and contribute to his hegemonic masculine performance. Watson uses a background with a world map and provides global examples, pretending that he presents a cosmopolitan and inclusive perspective. Far-right media in the UK have assimilated the language of multiculturalist discourse through their adoption of terms such as equality, fairness, and rights, positioning whites as victims (Atton 2004, 63).

Different from other political influencers, Watson uses satire and humour to boost his patriarchal image and far-right politics. At the beginning of this video, Watson uses the words "bigoted", "white trash", and "backwards" to subvert anti-immigration rhetoric. To do this, rather than focusing on "Western" examples, he turns to the so-called South Korean anti-immigrant policies to show how it is not just white Westerners but Asians that oppose Muslim immigrants (see Appendix 2). The video pretends to give voice to South Korean people who allegedly signed a national petition against refugees. However, the video only uses short excerpts of interviews with South Korean people, which are immediately followed by Watson's assertive commentary. Watson cites "one South Korean professor" (not named), in order to bring "scientific" justifications for his Islamophobic rhetoric, who claims immigrants did more harm to Germany than good. In the background, there are brown and black people in the presented image, acting as a dog whistle for far-right radicalisation. Following this, Watson shares negative news stories he himself made about refugees. Watson also uses far-right politicians' public speeches, such as former-President Trump stating the USA will not be a "migrant camp".

The comments-sphere of Watson's video is reflective of its content; most include Islamophobic and anti-immigrant/refugee discourses and reassert supremacies by presenting them as unintegrated others, for example: "those immigrants clearly aren't blending in, let's send them back." In addition to bolstering grievances against refugees and immigrants, the comment-sphere acts as a space for international bonding for far-right individuals: 'I love your vlogs Paul, greetings from Norway'. The comments also present a

unified front against Europe and Germanywhich, in this view, experienced a large influx of refugees between 2014 and 2016: 'Fuck EU and Germany' (Jäckle and König 2018).

While this video represents Watson's anti-immigration milieu that rests on a chauvinist performance of manhood, in other popular videos he directly responds to the achievements gained by LGBTQ+ communities. In the video: "GAY PRIDE MONTH 🏳️‍🌈" (653,547 views as of the 31st of October 2022), Watson claims that banks, major Western governments, and the US Marines are behind Pride month and so Pride is now commercialised and mainstream (see Appendix 3). For Watson, this implies that the LGBTQ+ people are not marginalised anymore and it is non-LGBTQ+ communities that are in fact marginalised. To convey this, Watson uses keywords such as "diversity", "inclusivity", and "marginalisation" similar to his anti-immigrant videos in an attempt to undermine the achievements of LGBTQ+ activism. He mocks the LGBTQ+ flag for incorporating different identities, as well as drag shows and similar events, sardonically laughing at their "family friendliness" (see Appendix 4). This spreads both transphobia and homophobia whilst reproducing traditional hetronormative family models. Overall, the video is representative of the conservative, trans-exclusive, and misogynistic overtones in Watson's oeuvre.

The top comments are consistent with the video's message: "After gay pride month is over, we'll be going back to the normal schedule of gay pride every other day and a mixture of trans, melanin pride and the flag of the week". A similar top comment reads: "Tolerating it is not sufficient. WELL PUT! They don't want acceptance, they want attention all the time". These comments undermine the social, cultural, and political achievements of the LGTBQ+ activism, disingenuously presenting them as a demanding force disrupting hetero-/gendernormative society.

Watson illustrates a crucial intersection of chauvinism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia, which is consistent across other political influencers across far-right ideologies in the UK. While aesthetic styles across far-right commentators and politicians differ, all present an overall message that discriminates and alienates minority communities by orchestrating panic of their existence and fear about the social progress made.

4.2. J. K. Rowling

While Watson represents far-right influencers in the UK that disseminate extremist views largely aimed towards marginalised communities in the form of chauvinism and patriarchy, there are other influencers that mainstream different forms of extremism, such as transphobia. Joanne Rowling (best known by her pen name J. K. Rowling), author of the popular children's fantasy series *Harry Potter,* is one of the most prominent figures in this area. She has come under criticism for her views on sex, gender, and transgender people, linked to TERF ideology (trans-exclusionary radical feminist). The term TERF, coined in 2008 as a means of distinguishing between trans-exclusionary and trans-inclusionary

feminism, generally concerns individuals who consider themselves feminists but exclude transgender women[4]. The movement has experienced a significant rise in the UK over the past 5 years (Thurlow 2022) and centres on prioritising "'biologically defined' notions of femaleness and womanhood over gender identity and social concepts of gender" (Pearce et al. 2020, 681). Following this logic, trans men cannot be men, and trans women cannot be women. The trans-exclusionary movement also presents a flawed dichotomy between transgender rights and ciswomen's rights, this being that the more transgender people are accepted through legislation and social progression, the more ciswomen will suffer and require protection (Jones and Slater 2020). Pearce et al. (2020, 680) highlight the ironic misogyny of this: by presenting ciswoman as "uniquely vulnerable to the threat of 'male' violence… trans-exclusionary arguments… lend support to the gendered and misogynistic discourses that have long positioned (white) women as the 'weaker sex' needing protection".

This dichotomy between trans women and ciswomen also creates an 'us' versus 'them' narrative, which works to uphold barriers for trans people and present trans people as societal 'others'. In post-Brexit Britain, we have seen the fostering and normalisation of such polarising and divisive language targeted at minority groups (Corbett 2016). While Brexit largely involved the othering and demonisation of racialised minority groups, not trans people, it arguably fostered a hostile 'us' versus 'them' environment which enabled the normalisation of the othering of all marginalised groups and the promulgation of right-wing ideology.

The trans-exclusionary movement has thus gained prominence post-Brexit, most significantly because certain mainstream celebrities have voiced support for the movement, along with the growing influence of anti-trans organisations. Rowling is the most notable celebrity and is the subject of investigation for this section. However, wider support for the movement should also be acknowledged. For example, Graham Linehan is most well-known for creating popular sitcoms *Father Ted*, *Black Books*, and *The IT Crowd*. However, since 2018 he has also become an outspoken anti-trans activist (Wakefield 2020). Anti-trans organisations have also gained prominence in the UK, for example, The LGB Alliance and Transgender Trend. Thus, Rowling's trans-exclusionary rhetoric is not in a vacuum; there has been steady growth in the UK towards mainstreaming transphobic views.

Looking at Rowling's trans-exclusionary activity online, she has largely espoused such views on her Twitter account. Since 2018, this has included liking a tweet referring to transgender women as "men in dresses", accusing transgender people of erasing the "the lived reality of women globally", and vocalising support for The LGB Alliance and GC activists. Rowling has also published essays on her website where she has explained her

[4] Some prefer the label 'Gender Critical' (GC), viewing TERF as derogatory (Jones and Slater 2020). This has been considered an attempt to rebrand. Firstly, by linguistically pivoting from "anti-trans" to "pro-women" and secondly, by modifying the movement's theoretical rationale by arguing that GC views stem from "legitimate concerns", "science", and "reality" in order to claim legitimacy and gain mainstream support (Thurlow 2022). Yet, GC continues to rely on transphobic tropes, moral panic, and essentialist views of gender (Pearce et al. 2020; Zanghellini 2020; Thurlow 2022).

opposition to Gender Recognition Act reform in Scotland. Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and leader of the SNP (Scottish National Party) has frequently supported trans rights, backing the GRA reform in Scotland and referring to trans-exclusionary opposition as "not valid" (Gordon 2021).

For Women Scotland, an organisation formed to oppose Scottish GRA reform, organised a rally at the Scottish Parliament on 6th October 2022. In support of the rally, Rowling tweeted a photograph, which received 34,400 likes, 6,000 retweets, and 2,300 replies as of 18th October 2022. The photograph is a selfie, and she is wearing a black t-shirt with white writing. The writing states: "Nicola Sturgeon destroyer of women's rights", in the format of a dictionary definition with a supposed International Phonetic Alphabet pronunciation of Nicola Sturgeon's name and the word "*noun*". The tweet's text reads: "I stand in solidarity with @ForWomenScot and all women protesting and speaking outside the Scottish parliament. #NoToSelfID" (See Appendix 5).

Replies to the tweet are mixed, both endorsing and resisting Rowling's message. For example, the top reply, with ~6,700 likes, is supportive: "this might not be the right place, but who can resist a woman rocking a T-shirt with a message. If you need to ask, I'm with them too". Some replies also share photographs of themselves wearing the t-shirt.Conversely, replies opposing Rowling's message include: "The T-shirt is from someone linked to the far right, who called for men with guns to harass people in the lady's toilets who don't look feminine enough. You're a parody of yourself.". Evidently, Rowling's tweet was divisive and spread polarisation amongst those who both support and oppose her views either through replies (2,300) or retweets (6,000).

There are several notable signifiers from the photograph to take into consideration. That Rowling is wearing the message on her body is important. For those who align with trans-exclusionary ideology, the definition of a woman is dependent on biological sex, which reaffirms the ideology that trans women cannot be women and undermines notions of gender identity. Thus, the 'biologically female' body is of vital significance to the trans-exclusionary movement, and that Rowling wears the messaging on her body signifies this. Echoing Pearce et al.'s (2020) observation that TERF is often ironically misogynistic, that the movement often reduces the definition of 'woman' to the body and not things such as lived experience and one's own perspective of gender, is in itself also misogynistic. This trans-exclusionary ideology reinforces heteronormative narratives.

Secondly, the text on the t-shirt is presented in the format of a dictionary definition. Dictionaries are used to categorically provide definitions, usage, etymologies, and pronunciations of a word. Rowling's declaration of Sturgeon as a "destroyer of women's rights" as a dictionary definition suggests that the messaging is authoritative and absolute. The t-shirt's format is seemingly inspired by a slogan used by TERFs to define women as "adult human female" (see Appendix 6). This presentation of TERF rhetoric as authoritative facts in the form of falsified dictionary definitions is an attempt to legitimise their views on womanhood. Again, we see women whittled down to biological sex by promulgating a

definition that is misogynistic, essentialist, oversimplified, and does not reflect the highly-varied gender experiences of women (Jones and Slater 2020; Zanghellini 2020; Thurlow 2022).

Finally, it is important to consider the words used in the message on Rowling's t-shirt. The divisive demonisation of a minority group (trans people) and those who support their rights as "destroyers", invoking images of obliteration and victimhood, is reflective of the language used in moral panics to emphasise the perceived threat of the minority group (Cohen 2002). The t-shirt's message is also emotive and not reflective of the reality of the GRA reform in Scotland, which is not seeking to change women's rights, but give stronger rights to trans people. Rowling regularly engages in hyperbolic, victimhood language when discussing trans people on Twitter, often escalating perceptions of threat by invoking imagery of rape and murder, even when violence is not the topic of discussion or discussed in a serious manner (see Appendix 7).

Altogether, Rowling approaches GRA reform from the perspective of a victim, based on emotional reaction and not logical evidence. Her messaging works to reinforce the heteronormative and sometimes misogynistic narratives found in trans-exclusionary feminism: gender expression and exploration are not welcome, 'male' and 'female' are binary and immovable concepts, and women are always under threat. This presents the anachronistic, misogynistic view of women as the weaker sex in need of protection. Ironically, Rowling's claims of victimhood come from a position of privilege; she is a wealthy, cis-gendered, heterosexual white woman who claims to be victimised by trans people, a marginalised group with little power who experience significant harassment and violence (Stop Hate UK n.d.; Stonewall UK 2017). Thus, while Rowling repeatedly references threats of rape and murder, it is the community she targets who are far more likely to experience these. This circles back to how the othering of marginalised groups is a tentpole of right-wing rhetoric. Rowling's anti-trans activity is arguably a path with which one might become radicalised into supporting harmful and extreme heteronormative and transphobic narratives.

4.3.Hamza

While this report tackles actors of radicalisation within more organised and mainstream spheres, we also argue that self-help videos for men are a form of radicalisation. Interactive media opened new possibilities for self-help practices and while most self-help cultures could be viewed as 'apolitical' (Rimke 2020), we show that men's self-help videos have the potential to radicalise followers by creating an idealised form of masculinity and perpetuating normative heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. This links to earlier fascist movements that prioritise sports and exercise to produce strong, disciplined, and virile men (see Mangan 1999; Imy 2016).

Based on this perspective, we focus on Hamza (1.05M channel subscribers on YouTube), arguing that this influencer represents self-help based gendered radicalisation in the UK. We analysed the two most popular videos of Hamza, which adhere to and reproduce hegemonic masculinity and fascist socialisation. The first video entitled “How to build an aesthetic body (No Bullsh*t Guide)”, (3.4 million views as of the 2nd of November 2022) centres on “helping men to become more attractive” and equates this with sexual attraction from the “opposite sex”, which essentialises biological sex. The video idealises the “perfected” male body to the point where societal success for men is centred on physique.

The video not only promotes toxic heteronormativity, it also objectifies women and imagines them as a homogeneous, mindless group. This is evident through the statement: “if you cannot obtain this ideal body, girls won’t date you” which was followed by random images of “attractive”, i.e., thin women (see Appendix 8). The video thus presents a commodified and fatphobic account of body, sexuality, and dating. While these narratives may be seen as “neutral”, they not only create a binary understanding of men and women but also promotes a competitive, consumerist understanding of the body and sexual identity. Hamza addresses his imagined audience of young men using the talking head style, strong facial expressions, and inserted texts on the visuals. He relies heavily on his own body image, and uses “weaker” men’s images to compare himself and other “high achieving” men in terms of physical attractiveness, dating and thus success. The comment-sphere of the video endorses a similar outlook, for example: “While i do care about attracting girls (im a human after all) the main reason ive been working out is to improve myself and my body and ive had great results so far” and “Even for females this is really motivating, sometimes we all just need a little motivation in our lives to start improving ourselves! <3”. These comments affirm the emphasis on the idealised body, independent from the differences in gender or motivations.

The second most popular video by Hamza is entitled “Society failed men.”, presented with the hashtags #masculinity and #self-improvement, which received 2.8M views and 195K likes as of the 4th of November 2022. Rather than an emphasis on the idealised male body, the video focuses on Hamza’s face and starts with footage from a TV show featuring a man telling his story of being hospitalised because of the violence he suffered from his partner (see Appendix 9). This is followed by Hamza’s speech about how the government replaced fathers and that fathers’ role in the family has been killed off, destroying men’s purpose. He argues that marriage, divorce, and childcare laws are blatantly sexist as they favour women. This resonates with incel ideology, which purports that gender equality "destroyed" society. The remaining video revolves around the idea that it is hypocritical to demand that men be less masculine, and that masculinity is needed to have sex with women. This message is juxtaposed with images of “ideal men”, with Hamza listing attributes of “real men”, such as masculinity, strength, and stoicism. He advises men to do the opposite of what society tells them to do and become more masculine. Hamza also criticises modernity as a tool to make men “blue-pilled” and scared of their masculinity. While the format of the two videos differ, both rest on a misogynistic, sexist, and

heteronormative idea of men and family; masculinity and femininity are binary opposites and society should return to “traditional” family values.The most popular comments of the video bolster the video’s message, for example: “Violence against women=tragedy😭 Violence against men= comedy 🤡” and “I'm glad the host said that in his defence. My goodness, that was so wrong. Abuse is abuse. Good video btw. I moved to a western country less than a decade ago, and was shocked (still am tbh) at all the radical movement against men :/”. These comments not only undermine the overwhelming violence women and LGBTQ+ communities have historically suffered, but also denigrates feminist achievements.

Self-improvement videos suggest that civilisation is collapsing, and the only way to avert this collapse is through a return to masculine strength, “authentic” living, and traditional values. This reflects alt-right narratives and themes from fascism (Elley 2021), which Hamza reflects, creating content about male self-improvement. His posts speak in a unique tone that blends fitness instructor and propagandist through the persona of a self-help guru. Overall, self-help videos tend to disseminate a radicalised view of how society should be organised as well as an extremist understanding of gender norms.

5) Media presence, production, and circulation of collective agents of de-radicalisation

As contemporary extremist cultures rely on social media platforms to conduct their activities and to spread radical messages (Khosrokhavar 2015; Conway 2017; Gerrand 2022), organisations that work to counter these radical messages are pushed to create content on social networks. The Internet is no longer just one part of the spectrum of extremist activism – it has become the primary operational environment, in which political ideologies are realised and social movements made (Weimann 2010). Non-governmental actors are key to initiatives aimed at deradicalisation because, firstly, the UK government's interest in deradicalisation is largely focused on individuals vulnerable to Islamic extremism and secondly, there is a climate of denial regarding the existence of far-right radicalisation. As a result, NGOs have become the main agents of deradicalisation in this area.

Although the spectrum of organisations that produce deradicalising content is broad, our scope is reduced if we select organisations that have sustained activity over time and have a significant level of engagement. First, we provide information about each NGO. Then, we analyse some of their campaigns with the highest audience response. Although they are different organisations with different histories, the content they create and disseminate shows some common features. Most of the videos feature personal stories, which is common to newer and visual social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram that

favour the publication of personalised content. Moreover, these voices have an emotional charge that favours the creation of audience bonds to work as an identity tool: they connect an individual with their cultural group, and, in this sense, establish what particular events should be experienced as a collective issue.

5.2.Stonewall UK

Stonewall UK is at the forefront of LGBTQ+-based de-radicalisation. The charity was founded in London in 1989, named after the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022), as a response to the passing of Section 28 by the UK Conservative government in 1988. This act aimed to prevent councils and schools from "promoting the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" (*Local Government Act 1988*). Stonewall UK has played an important role in the achievements gained by LGBTQ+ communities in the UK, for example the subsequent abolition of Section 28 in 2003 and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in the Armed Forces. We argue that the historical efforts of the charity and their programmes promoting equality and inclusion put them at the forefront of de-radicalisation work.

Stonewall UK has a considerable following on social media and the organisation uses these platforms effectively. Their most popular online profile is Twitter (255.4K followers), followed by Facebook (121K followers), and TikTok (28.5K followers) as of the 7th of November 2022. To fight against the anti-LGBTQ+ Internet-sphere, the videos made by Stonewall UK revolve around the lived experience of LGBTQ+ communities. To understand more, we turned to the most popular content shared by the charity on TikTok.

The most popular TikTok, with 268.2K views and 13.4K likes by the 7th of November 2022, is titled: "H (she/her) speaks about being bisexual and Muslim, and explains why all bi people deserve belonging 🌼 #BiVisibility" (see Appendix 10). In the video, H shares her story of being a bisexual Muslim woman, where she has been perceived as "lost" or "such a good ally" because she looks "different". However, the video shows how community spaces made her feel safer and gave her a better sense of belonging. While people have questioned her identity, she narrates her story of finding space in the LGBTQ+ community. The comments acts not only as a resource against biphobia but also Islamophobia by questioning notions of inclusivity and exclusivity within and beyond queer spaces, for example "anyone who uses faith to justify hatred/exclusion doesn't deserve the time of the day", which criticises the use of faith to justify anti-LGBTQ+ narratives. Overall, the video acts as an important representation of the lived experience of "different" types of LGBTQ+ individuals and functions as an educative tool against the intersection of online hate, racism, Islamophobia and gender-based radicalisation.

The second most popular video is entitled “Happy Trans Day of Visibility! X and Y share their amazing story into parenthood”, which has accumulated 258.7K views by the 7th of November 2022. The video was posted for ‘Transgender Awareness Day’, conveying the lived experience of a transgender couple who had become parents through surrogacy (see Appendix 11). The medium shot of the couple is accompanied visually by subtitles, the emojis 🏳 and ⚧, hashtags #transawareness, #transandproud, #tdov (Trans Day of Visibility), #trans, #lgbtq, #stonewall and #equality and stickers such as “all families are beautiful” to create more visibility, reach out to audiences, and make it more consumable. The video acts as an awareness campaign for transgender people who wish to have a baby, resting on a simple aesthetics of a couple speaking to camera exploring the everyday struggles and resistance of transgender communities by presenting an intimate story of the process of having a baby in a heteronormative society. They not only present this personal story by walking the audiences through their experiences, but also refer to how queer and trans families offered advice and direction. The video, representative of other videos on Stonewall UK’s TikTok, uses peaceful and calm language and introduces personal stories to create inclusion, equality, and harmony, which proves their power in the de-radicalisation of those that might engage in anti-LGBTQ+ homophobic, biphobic and transphobic talk and action.The comment-sphere of the video resonates with the video’s message, revolving around users finding the couple’s story inspiring and powerful, for example: “This is so cute. Very happy for both of them” and “♡ this - being a mum or dad is so much more than biology”. Comments like these show that users responded to the video overwhelmingly positively. In this sense, we argue that the charity’s online presence and visibility evolved into a thought-provoking, inclusive, and transformative space.

5.3.Gendered Intelligence

Gendered Intelligence, considered to be the most important trans-led charity in the UK, works to increase an understanding of gender diversity, fight against transphobia, and improve the lives of trans people (Gendered Intelligence n.d.). We therefore consider this charity a crucial stakeholder of de-radicalisation in the UK. Twitter is the main social media platform used by the Gendered Intelligence with 50.3K followers, followed by Instagram (22.9K followers), Facebook (10K followers) and YouTube (101 subscribers) by the 13th of November 2022. We chose to focus on the charity’s Instagram profile to understand their image-based de-radicalising work. The charity’s Instagram posts are often accompanied by visuals with large texts inserted, the most popular related to trans awareness day and other important days within the trans communities.

The most popular post features a group of activists with trans flags, who appear to be celebrating an achievement (see Appendix 12). The colours of the trans flag are the most evident trope in this image. The accompanying text is informative, detailing Bell v Tavistock, a case examining whether puberty blockers could be prescribed to under 18s in the UK. Initial judgements in 2020 concluded that teenagers were too young to understand the consequences of using this treatment, however following an appeal, this decision was overturned in 2021. This, as this post describes, was a huge achievement for trans youth. The comment-sphere is also congratulatory, such as using the heart emoji. We argue that these types of online content give momentum to the overall transfeminist and/or trans-inclusive movements.

The second most popular post aims to educate audiences about the steps they can take to be a trans ally (See Appendix 13). The post is animated and shows different characters using a laptop, tablet, and microphone. Suggestions for allyship include writing to the Prime Minister, writing to your Member of Parliament, and sharing pro-trans content on social media. This informative post is accessible through its simplicity and ease of use. Audience reaction is positive, with users either asking questions about or affirming the post. One commenter reported that they took the post's advice, highlighting the appeal and impact of this informative post in helping users engage in advocacy work.

The third most popular post was about toilet provision (Appendix 14), aimed to provide information about equal access to toilets, as transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people people do not currently feel comfortable using public toilets (Stonewall UK 2017) as they have long been a crucial point of controversy within the boundaries of public toilets (Nirta 2014). This post responds to the need for trans-inclusive social change in this area. In terms of format, the post uses the same shades of purple and grey used in many Gendered Intelligence posts, with the charity's logo. It does not use any hashtags or mentions but has an accompanying text that also explains the issue. The comments are supportive and point to issues related to trans people's access to public toilets. For example: "A point worth flagging butch/androgenous looking women using female toilets in face challenge from the 'policing' of facilities by transphobic people, harming the cis-gendered women they claim to be 'protecting'". The comment highlights how toilet policing can be both transphobic and misogynistic, feeding into the heteronormative regulation of public spaces.

On the whole, this informative post and its parallel comment-sphere showcase how trans-exclusionary positions do not improve toilet access and instead put trans and gender non-conforming people at a greater risk of violence, proliferating the dangerous homogenisation of womanhood (Jones and Slater 2020). Similar to other charities in this area, all posts shared by Gendered Intelligence are informative about the social and political causes that

they champion to improve the inclusion and rights of trans people. This shows that such organisations engage in significant work in the area of de-radicalisation because the denial of basic rights to trans communities under the cover of “free speech” implies radicalisation (McLean 2021).

5.4.The Female Lead

The Female Lead is a feminist charity that seeks to empower women, share women’s success stories, and support girls’ education. The organisation has developed a strong social media presence, in particular on Instagram (2.4 million followers as of December 2022) and TikTok (900,000 followers, 17 million likes as of December 2022), where it shares both original content and content from creators that aligns with the organisation’s messaging. Some of the content shared is also intersectional, for example, explorations of disability and queerness in the context of feminism. This section of the report will look specifically at the organisation’s TikTok activity due to the account’s high level of engagement.

The organisation’s early TikTok activity that garnered significant engagement involved sharing videos of famous people sharing feminist views, such as Duchess of Sussex Megan Markle, actress Emma Watson, and former US President Barack Obama (see Appendix 15). These videos are short snippets from longer interviews in which the speaker makes a snappy, pro-feminist statement. For example, Obama refers to himself as “Michelle’s husband”, subverting the patriarchal method of referring to married women as their husband’s wife. These videos provide quick and easy-to-consume pro-feminism commentary. That these videos have received a significant number of views suggests audiences were particularly reciprocative to this succinct kind of content.

Concerning more topical videos, some celebrated England’s success in the 2022 UEFA European Women's Football Championship (See Appendix 16). The organisation shared a video of a screenshot of a viral tweet about how England’s win works to empower girls. The video reflects on the role of women in sports, as football has historically been considered a male sport (History n.d.). However, England’s win has been seen as a tool for empowerment and a means of deconstructing barriers for girls who wish to play football (Barnett 2022). The video is evidently used as a means of celebrating this shift in football and how it symbolises girls achieving their full potential. This is also reflected in the video’s top comment: “My little daughter put on her trainers, took hold of her football and said: “Today I'm like them" while pointing at the players... Representation matters! 🦁⚽”. Another video is the reading of a poem set to photographs from women’s football matches. Some lines from the poem include: “This is a woman’s game… this is change, empowerment… our goal is to see more girls believing in themselves”. The poem’s overall

message is that women have a place in football and that women's success in football can have a wider positive impact on women. It also subverts the stereotype that football is a 'man's game'. However, unlike the previous video, some of the top comments are not supportive of the video's message, for example: "Didn't the Australian women's football team lose to 15-year-old boys?". These comments suggest that there is still resistance to women's football.

Looking at recent vital content on the account, a video about body image and fatphobia posted on the 6th of September 2022 has gained ~2.7 million views (see Appendix 17). A screenshot of a message is superimposed onto the video, which states: "Diet culture is something your generation made up so you can feel like victims". This is followed by presentions of evidence from the media criticising women for their appearance and/or weight. This includes sitcoms, the news media, and reality TV. The overall motivation of the video is to show that mainstream media regularly and historically judges women based on their appearance. The top comments largely respond emotionally and share the sentiment of the video, for example: "Simon and Sharon on the X-factor video were OUT OF LINE". Commenters also shared their own experiences growing up with this type of media messaging, for example: "I deserve to be compensated for being a teenager during this time period".

Overall, The Female Lead uses social media platforms to share a variety of content related to the experiences of women in order to celebrate women and bring awareness to their oppression within a patriarchal, hetronormative society. There is some resistance to these efforts from commenters, however, overall, audiences appear reciprocative of how The Female Lead uses social media to discuss feminist topics.

6.Media presence, production, and circulation of ordinary users against radicalisation

In addition to institutionalised forms of de-radicalisation, due to the participatory nature of social media, many ordinary citizens have turned to platforms to counter gender and anti-LGBTQ+ radicalisation. According to Ingram and Reed (2016), to counter extremism online, campaigns should undermine extremist narratives by dismantling the "systems of meaning" that undergird them. The below ordinary users use creative techniques and strategies to dismantle the systems of meanings underpinning extremist misogynistic and anti-LGBTQ+ narratives and build a large following base to widely disseminate their political message. Similar to the content created by feminist and LGBTQ+ organisations, these profiles use first-person narratives, everyday settings, and aesthetics in their de-radicalisation work.

Differently, these actors create more lighthearted and humorous content that reaches more users on legacy (YouTube) and newer (TikTok) platforms.

6.1.Jammidodger

The first influencer we identified to be at the forefront of citizen attempts in de-radicalisation was Jammidodger, a popular British YouTuber (1.02 million subscribers, 211,298,580 video views as of December 2022) who covers “Trans, LGBT+, lifestyle, fashion, relationship, PhD, reactions”. Jammidodger is a transgender man and has documented his physical and emotional transition on YouTube, which have amassed tens of millions of views. Jammidodger is evidently open about sharing his experiences as a trans man, regularly celebrating his transition. His videos are typically vlogs, a common format on YouTube where the content creator speaks directly to the camera and so, by extension, their audience. Vlogging has been linked to enhancing a parasocial relationship between the content creator and their audience, which in turn strengthens the perceived credibility and authenticity of the content creator (Morris and Anderson 2015; Cunningham and Craig 2017; Reinikainen et al. 2020), presenting then as an “ordinary expert” (Tolson 2010, 283).

Jammidodger produced a YouTube Short responding to Rowling’s tweet previously examined in this report (See Appendix 18), which received 153,000 views and 28,000 likes as of December 2022. Jammidodger begins the video stating sarcastically: “In shocking news, JK Rowling is still being transphobic”. The photograph of Rowling then appears behind Jammidodger as he call the t-shirt “ridiculous”. He explains that Nicola Sturgeon supports GRA reforms, which Jammidodger says would make the lives of transgender people “a little bit easier and not affect anybody else’s lives whatsoever”. This is in direct contrast to Rowling’s perspective, where she presents the reforms as significant and negatively impacting women’s rights. Jammidodger, therefore, seeks to subvert Rowling’s discourse.

Jammidodger continues, stating that Rowling views Sturgeon as a “destroyer of women’s rights simply because Sturgeon supports trans people''. While stating this, a quote from Sturgeon about the GRA reforms is superimposed onto the video, in which she asserts that the reforms are about “reforming an existing process”, and so they do not take rights away from women. Again, there is repeated emphasis that GRA reforms are negligible. There is a further quote from Sturgeon emphasising that trans people are a marginalised group and so arguments against GRA reform could work to marginalise further. Jammidodger then states the ways in which Sturgeon has worked to strengthen women’s rights in Scotland, such as tackling health inequalities.The video concludes with Jammidodger stating: “I need to laugh about how ridiculous it is, or else I’d cry out of frustration. Repeat after me: trans rights do not take away from women’s rights”. Thus, the video ends on a serious note.

While he maintains a laid-back, mocking tone, Jammidodger is also able to provide an evidenced deconstruction of Rowling's discourse. The video is, therefore, informative while also maintaining a lighthearted tone typical of Jammidodger' videos. The two posts from Rowling and Jammidodger are consequently quite different. In Rowling's opposition to GRA reform, she does not provide supporting evidence, her position seems to come from a place of emotion, and she engages in hyperbolic rhetoric. In response, Jammidodger presents evidence that undercuts Rowling and, while his response does come from a place of emotion, he has also researched trans and women's rights in Scotland. The majority of comments also appear to support Jammidodger, for example: "Imagine defending "equality" while excluding a whole demographic of people" and "As a feminist, I am revolved that she calls herself as one. She is not". Commenters similarly question Rowling's flawed opposition to GRA reforms.

Jammidodger has also covered topics related to online sexism and misogyny, for example, a video with ~1.6 million views (as of 1st December 2022) titled "Bad Women's Anatomy" (see Appendix 19). He begins by stating that while the video is called "Bad Women's Anatomy", he acknowledges that not all women have the same anatomy and that not everyone with the kind of anatomy discussed in the video is a woman, which is a pro-trans statement. Jammidodger then explores examples of people online discussing women's bodies. This includes the double standard of women being unable to show their nipples in public,, examples of men writing about women and fixating on their breasts, men's misunderstanding of menstruation, and fatphobia and unrealistic expectations of women's bodies.

With each example, Jammidodger presents logical opposition and talks about his own experiences as a trans man who has medically transitioned. Throughout the video, he also maintains lighthearted humour as a means of mocking the ridiculousness of the discourses examined, for example, jokingly asking: "is she supposed to leave her arse at home?" on a post sexualising a female police officer. This works to delegitimize these discourses, presenting them as absurd. Evidently, Jammidodger's method of destabilising sexist, misogynistic, and transphobic rhetoric is twofold; a welcoming and jovial, albeit sardonic approach, combined with logical and evidenced opposition. Some of the top commenters join in with Jammidodger's mocking of the content, for example: ""As a man, I think period pain is a myth" As a woman, I think getting kneed in the balls doesn't hurt". As with the previous video, Jammidodger's audience appears reciprocative of his discourse; his comments are largely not a place for debate or confrontation but for the audience to respond and reflect on the video's wider meaning.

6.2.Claire_Training

Claire_Training similarly centres her online content on undermining sexism and the objectification of women's bodies. Claire is a prominent British TikToker, with ~800,000 followers and 32.2 million likes as of December 2022. She describes herself on her Instagram as a "Lesbian, Feminist, Triple Blackbelt". Claire largely uses her TikTok to produce quick feminist and pro-LGBTQ+ videos. Her videos are mostly recorded outside, and she often wears the same style of outfit; athletic wear, a pair of sunglasses, and a hat . Her videos are typically cheery and lighthearted while at the same time using her platform to tackle prejudices Claire generally uses two different video formats when producing videos of this nature, either skipping towards the camera to make a a feminist and/or pro-LGBTQ+ statement or her playing two characters, one being herself and the other being someone making a misogynistic/homophobic statement.

Claire's videos often receive at least 100,000 views, with many receiving over 1 million. Her most viewed video was posted on 17th June 2021 and has received 17.2 million views and 3.3 million likes as of December 2022. The title of the video tags another user and has the hashtag #feminism. In the video, Claire skips towards the camera holding the pride flag. She drops the flag and makes the statement: "To the men that say: "big boobs don't count if you're fat"". She then removes her sunglasses and continues: "neither does a dick if half of it's your personality". The video concludes with her jogging away from the camera. Her words are also captioned on the video (see Appendix 20).

The purpose of the video is to undermine fatphobia and misogyny, specifically countering the devaluation of fat female bodies. Women's bodies have a history of being scrutinised, particularly in the media, with their worth determined by their appearance (Fairclough 2012; Satinsky 2013; Tsaousi 2016). Claire counters by applying the same argument to penis size, stating that if someone is fixated on their penis then size is irrelevant. This links to the trope that some men are defined by penis size and, thus, by extension, their sexual prowess (Rickett 2015). Claire is evidently seeking to undermine misogynistic rhetoric about the value of women's bodies and highlight its hypocrisy by applying the same rhetoric to men's bodies, while also mocking male fixation on penis size. While Claire's comments are turned off, that the video has received 3.3 million likes suggests that Claire's audience was reciprocative.

Another TikTok from Claire that tackles similar topics and has significant views was posted on 10th June 2022, receiving 4.7 million views and 667,400 likes as of December 2022. In this TikTok, Claire plays two characters talking to each other. The first character, seemingly herself, asks someone off camera: "What's your type of woman?". The camera then cuts to Claire on the right, a new character. The person Claire is playing is labelled in the textual caption as "sexist man", who answers the question: "petite, no body hair, submission,

preferably a virgin". The camera then cuts back to Claire as herself, who responds questionably: "A child?". The camera then cuts back to the "sexist man", who pulls a shocked/disgusted face (see Appendix 21).

As with the previous TikTok, this one is also used to examine male critique of women's bodies and the notion that a woman's value is dependent on her body, appearance, and sexual history. It suggests that some men have unrealistic and dehumanising sexual expectations of women. Some of the expectations Claire lists are antithetical to the bodies of adult women or are physical aspects a woman has no control over. Moreover, the preference for women to be "submissive" and, by extension, inactive and inexperienced sexual objects. This is reflective of the "male gaze" (Eaton 2008), a common media trope which portrays women in belittling and sexualising ways for the pleasure of heterosexual men. Claire, therefore, concludes that the "sexist man's" "type" of woman is in fact a child. This emphasises the absurdity of the man's sexual preferences. This TikTok from Claire, therefore, works to undermine the male gaze and highlight how women and their bodies are often both sexualised and objectified. And again, we see Claire delivering her message concisely and in a lighthearted fashion.

While Claire's TikTok content is not particularly diverse, with much presented in these two formats, it is a means of succinctly undermining harmful misogynistic narratives. While TikTok and YouTube are both video-sharing platforms, they are quite different, with TikTok's engagement centreing on sharing quick content. YouTube, on the other hand, allows for the creation of longer, more reflective content. Here, Claire arguably succeeds; in her relatively short time on TikTok (she first started uploading videos towards the end of 2019), she has garnered a significant audience. This suggests that her content resonates with users and that her efforts to combat misogynistic and homophobic rhetoric have some effect deradicalising effects.

6.3.Rachel Oates

Rachel Oates is a British YouTuber who has also produced feminist content. She has 265,000 subscribers and ~33,800,000 video views as of December 2022, and so her YouTube presence is significant. Like Jammidodger, Oates largely produces informative and conversational vlogs. She tackles a variety of topics, including: "Social Commentary (I'm big on Liberal Feminism and Pro-LGBTQ+ content)". One of Oates' most popular videos on feminist issues, with ~475,000 views as of December 2022, is an examination of "Men Going Their Own Way" (MGTOW), a mostly-online anti-feminist movement that encourages men not to seek relationships with women, to separate themselves from women, and demonise women and feminism (Wright et al. 2020).

Oates begins the video by explaining she has been looking at the #MGTOW hashtag on Tumblr. She says the purpose of the video is to have a “giggle” at some of the posts she encountered, while at the same time acknowledging that the content is “terrifying”. Oates thus acknowledges that the subject matter is quite heavy, but, similar to the other citizen actors examined, she also aims to keep her content light in tone (see Appendix 22).The first couple of posts Oates scrutinises centre on disparaging women, blaming modern society for allowing women to “behave any way they want”. A further post asserts that women are not adults because they are subordinate and indecisive. Oates argues these perspectives are used to justify belittling women and viewing women as lesser than men. Oates also responds to a post about “second-hand women”, calling the term “disgusting”, noting that it is a means of treating women like objects and that it speaks to male insecurity. A further post claims that society is controlled and constructed by women, with Oates highlighting that most societies have been and continue to be patriarchal. Another post states that MGTOW does not hate women but has contempt for them because women “disgust” them. Oates emphasises how dehumanising and “bizarre” this perspective is and that, by this definition, MGTOW is misogynistic and so *does* hate women.

Oates concludes the video by asking: “Should we have jobs? Or should we not have jobs? Should we be independent? Or should we be reliant on men?”, emphasising the confusing nature of MGTOW ideology. She also notes that a significant portion of “internet politics and internet social issues” fixate on hating certain social groups. She wants people to treat other people with empathy and not have specific communities reduced to a characteristic. The video, therefore, ends on a positive note asking for equality. In summary, the video is used to deconstruct the sexist and misogynistic narratives used by the online MGTOW movement. While some level of humour and lightheartedness is maintained, Oates’ efforts to destabilise this discourse are notably serious, often producing logical and evidence-based retorts. Thus, while some of her responses come from a place of emotion, her efforts to deconstruct often centre on scrutinising the logic of MGTOW. Interestingly, the comments suggest that this video attracted a pro-MGTOW audience: “I don’t despise women, I just don’t aspire to be in a relationship with one”. These comments have hundreds of replies, much of which are either in agreement or argumentative. Therefore, while the purpose of Oates’ video was to undermine MGTOW, it appears that some of the audience used the video to perpetuate MGTOW's beliefs and engage in divisive debates with other commenters.

Oates also produced a video about incels (a portmanteau of “involuntary celibate”). The video, titled “The Wacky World of Incels”, received 395,000~ views as of December 2022 (see Appendix 23). At the beginning, she notes that incels are particularly topical, likely in reference to the 23rd April 2018 Toronto van attack, which was characterised as “misogynistic terrorism”. In the video, Oates looks at posts from the website:

https://incels.me/. The site, which was shut down in November 2018, has been described as a “toxic misogynistic community of self-proclaimed involuntary celibates” (Binder 2018). Like her video examining MGTOW, Oates notes that while some of the posts are “ridiculous” and so we can “just have a bit of a giggle at them,” others are “on the scarier side” and require a more serious approach. Oates then explores the meaning of “incel”, this being men who desire to have sex with women but are unable to despite trying. She notes that incels believe they are unable to have sex not because of their own flaws or attitudes, but because of women and feminism.In looking at the posts, Oates observes that it is possible to feel sympathy as users talk about feeling lonely. However, the language of such posts turns violent. “That right there is why you feel lonely,” Oates states, “no one wants to be around someone like that”. Oates notes that the replies often validate the original poster, with some saying that such feelings give them a desire to commit misogynistic terrorism. For Oates, this highlights the danger of idolising such terrorists because users think “women owe them something… they can go out and kill people just because they’re not getting the attention they want… it’s scary”.

She also explores incel expectations of women, noting that women are not considered “good enough” and are seen as “terrible people” if they do not fit within specific standards, for example, a post mocking an overweight woman using a dating app and a post arguing that women are not oppressed and have an elevated position in society because they are in a position to choose who they have sex with. Oates expresses confusion at the logic of incels, as it is obvious to her that their involuntary celibacy can be explained by their behaviour and attitudes. Here, Oates notes the extent to which incel ideology revolves around sex and describes an incel worldview as “warped”.A further post concerns a “manlet” (a man who is under 6ft tall) saying that being his height is worse than being raped because rape is temporary and not everyone will know about it, while he cannot change his height, so his “psychological pain” is worse. Oates angrily responds by sarcastically stating rape victims do not experience these feelings, and she mocks the offhandedness with which the poster dismisses rape.

The video concludes with Oates noting how disturbing incel ideology is. She acknowledges that while incels can be laughed at, there is genuine danger behind the community. Unlike the MGTOW video, commenters appear to be receptive. The top comment explains that the incel movement originated from a woman wanting to create an online group for lonely people “meant to be positive and supportive”. Other top comments are from men reflecting on whether they are incels, along with a transgender man who, once he had transitioned, was shocked to find so many men with angry and violent views. Thus, the comments are a place of discussion and a means to reflect on the content of the video.

Oates' MGTOW and incel videos follow similar formats, with her critiquing online posts from the two online misogynistic movements. Oates uses her platform to explain the dangers of these communities and works to undermine the questionable logic with which they orient themselves. Her responses are informative and sometimes emotional, which highlights the severity of the opinions expressed. While her content on these topics is sometimes met with resistance, her effort to destabilise these discourses is evident, accounting for her place and role within misogynistic deradicalisation.

7.Discussion and conclusion

The UK has made notable social progress, regarding rights for women and LGBTQ+ people. At the same time, over the last decade, the UK has experienced significant social and political turbulence, most markedly, a socially harsh right-wing government and Brexit. This has led to the mainstreaming of certain right-wing radicalised rhetoric, especially negative discourse aimed at othering marginalised groups from wider society. The UK DRad report has examined this mainstreaming through visuals on social media in the context of misogynistic and anti-LGBTQ+ radicalisation. The report first examined cases of prominent radicalising actors within this area. This was followed by an exploration of feminist and LGBTQ+ organisations along with ordinary citizen actors using their social media presence to undermine these narratives.

A significant component of the mainstreaming of radicalised ideas in the UK is many of those who propagate such ideas have been given or already had mainstream platforms. While Paul Joseph Watson continues to be considered a controversial figure, his work and association with other prominent far-right commentators, combined with his substantial social media reach, has worked to make Watson a figurehead of far-right, anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric. Anti-trans narratives have become mainstream in the UK because anti-trans organisations have garnered media attention and already-mainstream figures have begun to espouse these views, most notably J. K. Rowling. Rather than harmful discourse about women and LGBTQ+ people largely existing on fringe corners of the internet, it can be found on Twitter, YouTube, and in the news, shared by celebrities and users with verified accounts, thus presenting these narratives as acceptable. Watson and Rowling approach LGBTQ+ and other marginalised groups in similar ways, from a distorted perspective of reason, concern, and science, in an attempt to present their views as legitimate. Watson appears as an informed expert and cites often questionable/unsubstantiated sources to support his views. Rowling approaches trans people from the position of victimhood, concerned with trans people hurting ciswomen and regularly invoking violent imagery. She also adopts a position of reason and authority, suggesting that she has the right to determine who can and cannot have rights. These approaches, largely underpinned by emotion and uncomplicated (albeit flawed) reason, pander to audiences' fear, anxiety,

and/or anger towards non-normative minority groups in a way that is simple, quick, and easy to digest.

Self-help actors such as Hamza provide advice for men to better themselves, thus, on the surface, appearing apolitical. However, such online content perpetuates normative heterosexuality, essentializes biological sex, and idealises hegemonic masculinity. Hamza regularly denounces presentations of masculinity and femininity outside of traditionalist gender norms. This aligns with right-wing, conservative perspectives on the roles of men and women. His content focuses on how to attract and have sex with women, presenting women as an objectified homogeneous group. The commodification of women's bodies is central; traditionally attractive women are considered high value and there is no consideration of non-standard female bodies. Some of his most popular content also laments men's perceived loss of societal dominance, blaming gender equality. This echoes the views of online misogynistic movements, whose ideology centres on hating women and blaming women for men's perceived misfortunes. The perpetuation of misogynistic narratives in Hamza's content is evident and illustrates how his audience may become radicalised into viewing women in misogynistic ways.

Deradicalising efforts approach the subject from a perspective of awareness, logic, and/or mockery. The narratives of the organisations examined generally centred on messages of empathy and understanding, using their online platforms to tell diverse stories about women and LGBTQ+ people. While discourse from radicalisation actors dehumanised minority communities, presenting them as objectified amorphous groups, content from LGBTQ+ and feminist organisations works to rehumanise and empower. The content from these organisations is also educational, providing diverse information about issues and achievements within marginalised communities.

In terms of citizen actors, analysis suggested that deconstruction was a significant method of undermining radicalised narratives, centring on logical and evidenced argumentation. Content was also generally lighthearted, and in some instances mocking, while also regularly reminding their audience of the seriousness of the issues discussed. There were also efforts to challenge the logic of radicalised narratives; citizen actors used their platforms to pick apart common misogynistic and transphobic tropes. Claire_Training deconstructed fatphobic and sexist narratives about the value of women's bodies. Jammidodger challenged the assumed consequences of GRA reforms and misogynistic presentations of women. Rachel Oates concentrated on misogynistic online movements, using her platform to question the ideology of incels and MGTOW. All maintained a lighthearted tone, but also reminded their audience of the importance of what they were discussing. Deradicalising citizen actors evidently understood the gravitas of the issues they discussed and used their understandings of these issues to subvert radicalising

narratives and disseminate arguments against the oppression of women and LGBTQ+ communities.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Paul Joseph Watson's investigative journalism style

Appendix 2: Using “others” to testify against refugees

Appendix 3: Watson’s claim that LGBTQ+ Pride has become mainstream

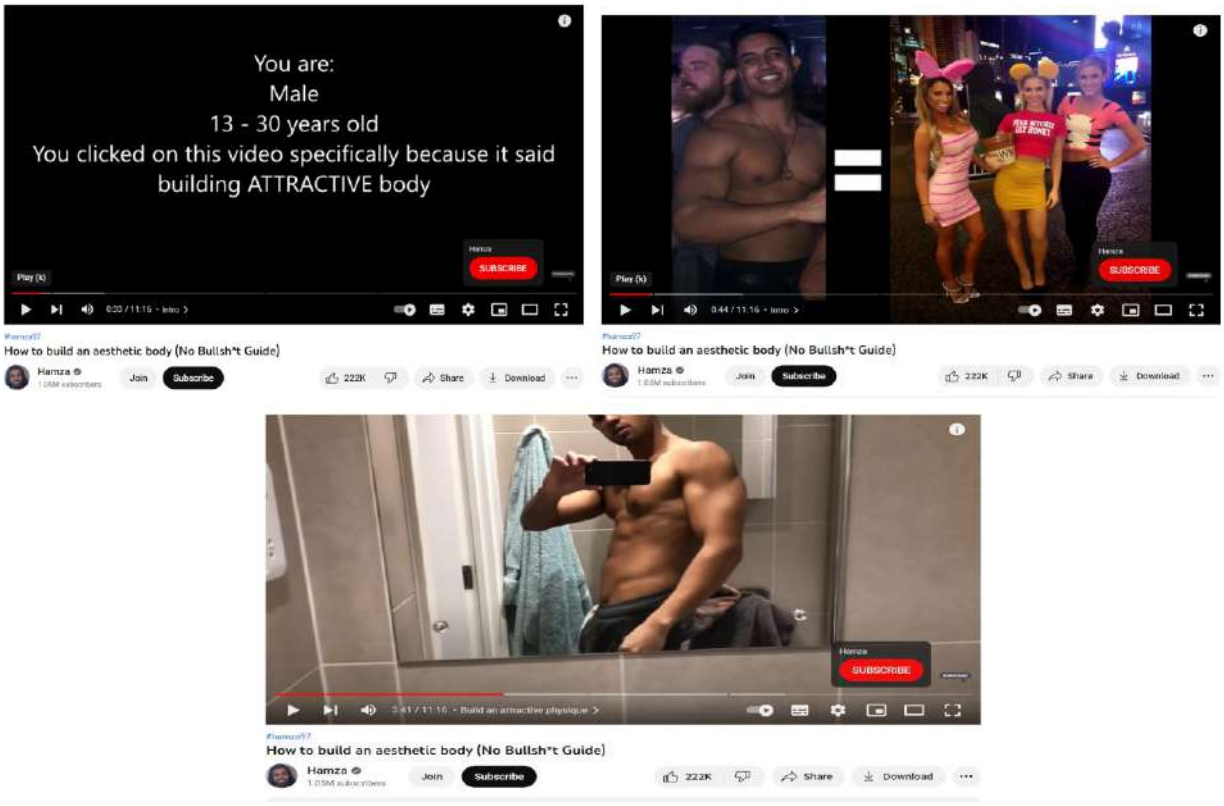
Appendix 4: Watson's misleading mocking of drag shows to insinuate that they are not 'family friendly'

Appendix 5: The J. K. Rowling tweet, photograph, and a better picture of the t-shirt she wore

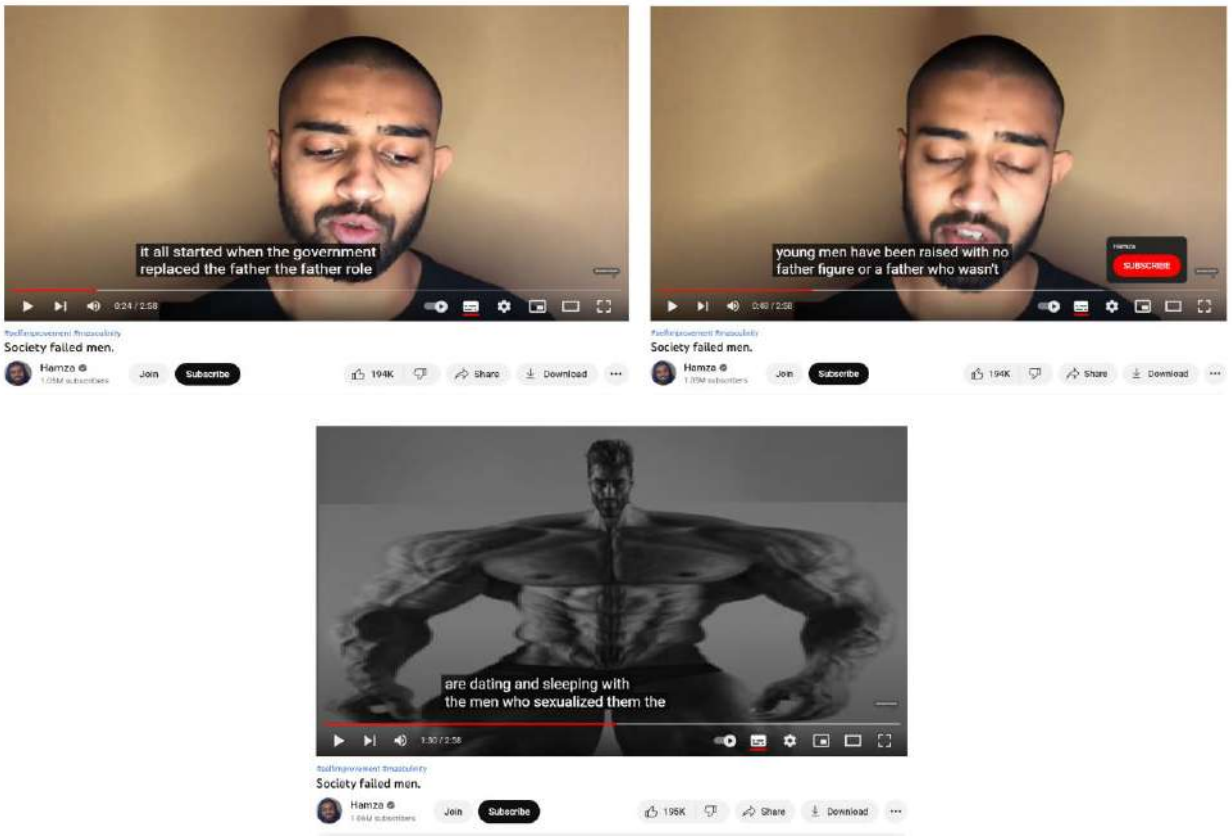
Appendix 6: Example of the TERF slogan "adult human female". The person wearing the t-shirt in the photograph is Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull, a vocal anti-transgender rights activist.

Appendix 7: Examples of Rowling's narrative of escalated violence on Twitter.

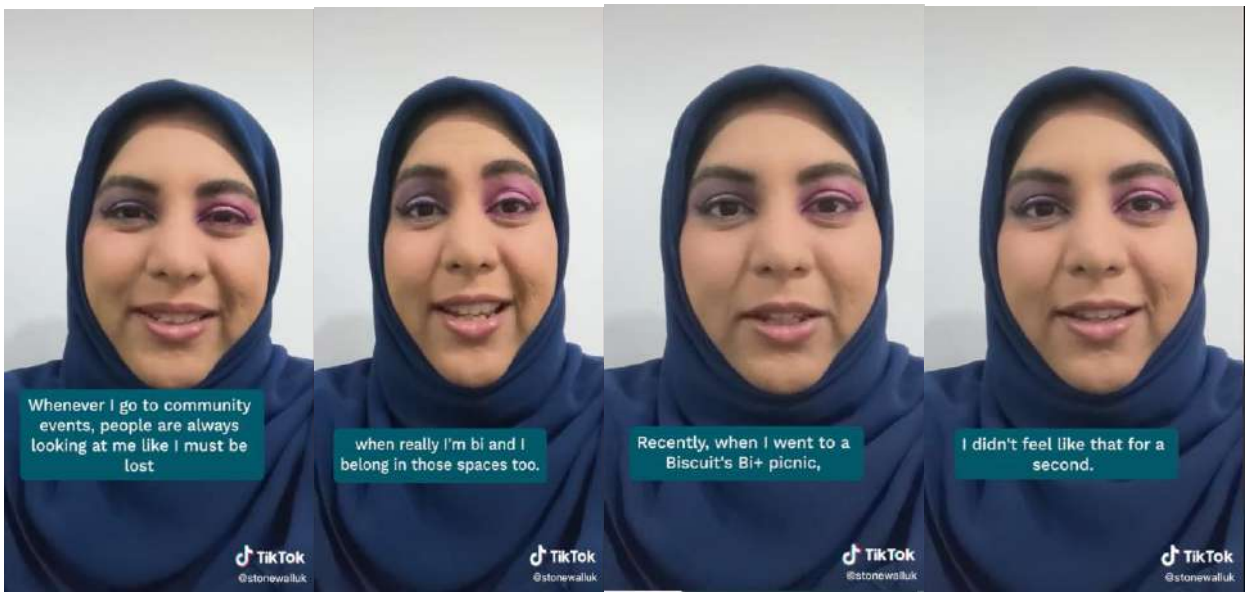
Appendix 8: Screenshots from Hamza's video about attracting women



Appendix 9: Screenshots from Hamza's video about society's perceived failure of men



Appendix 10: Screenshots from Stonewall UK's video about a bisexual Muslim woman



Appendix 11: Screenshots from Stonewall UK's video about transgender parents

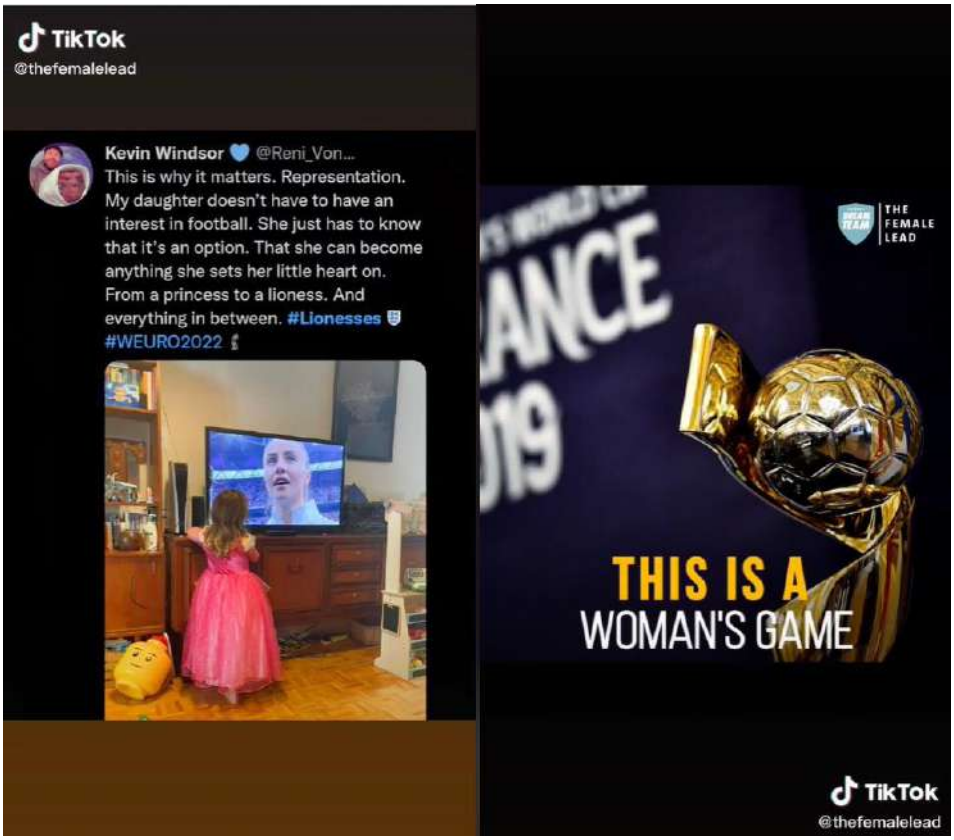
Appendix 12: Screenshot of Gendered Intelligence's Instagram post about Bell v Tavistock

Appendix 13: Screenshots of Gendered Intelligence's Instagram post about how to be a trans ally

Appendix 14: Screenshots of Gendered Intelligence's posts about toilet provisions

Appendix 15: Examples of The Female Lead's TikTok posts with celebrities

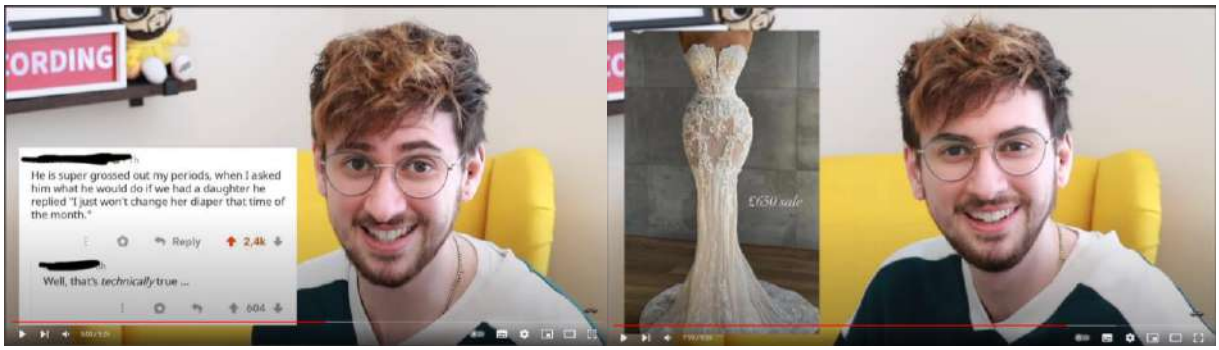
Appendix 16: Screenshots from The Female Lead's TikTok posts about the 2022 UEFA European Women's Football Championship



Appendix 17: Screenshots from The Female Lead's video about diet culture in the media

Appendix 18: Screenshots from Jammidodger's video about J. K. Rowling's tweet

Appendix 19: Screenshots from Jammididger's video about online sexism and misogyny

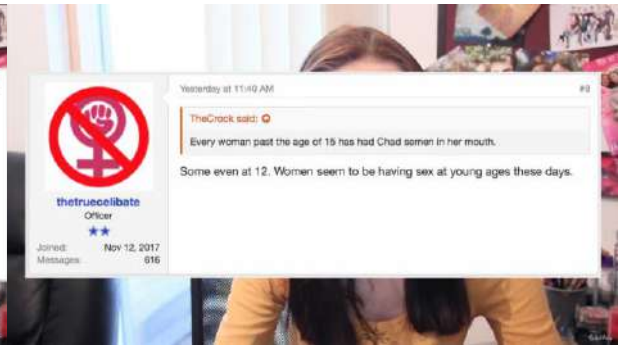


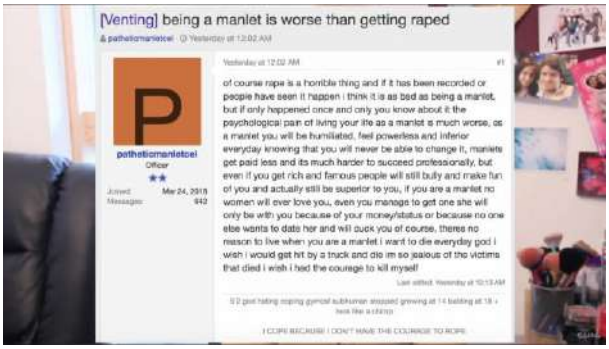
Appendix 20: Screenshots from Claire_training's TikTok about fatphobia

Appendix 21: Screenshots from Claire_training's video about sexism

Appendix 22: Screenshots from Rachel Oates' video about MGTOW

Appendix 23: Screenshots from Rachel Oates' video about incels





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