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"We can say big things" A multimodal critical discourse analysis of stereotypical femininity in the spread of far-right ideology by women online

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Citation

Hijl, A. (2022). *"We can say big things": A multimodal critical discourse analysis of stereotypical femininity in the spread of far-right ideology by women online.*

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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“We can say big things”

*A multimodal critical discourse analysis of
stereotypical femininity in the spread of far-right
ideology by women online*

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in International Relations - Specialization in Global Conflict in
the Modern Era

May 2022

Word count: 13.705



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Introduction

When asked to imagine a far-right member, who do you see? Most people will imagine a White¹ man, young or middle-aged. Dressed in black holding a flag or a torch. He may be chanting ‘White power!’. He might even behave violently.

Now imagine the following: a young, White woman looking at you, directly into the camera. Her blonde hair falls nicely combed over her right shoulder. She is wearing pink lipstick and she smiles. What are your associations? What movement would she belong to? Probably not the far right. However, this image is about to change when we look closer and hear her uttering words like “we are living in the day of hysterical and psychotic anti-Whiteness” (Lokteff, 2021).

These words belong to Lana Lokteff, who is part of a growing group of women joining the far-right movement (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2018; Miller-Idriss & Pilkington, 2019; Provost & Whyte, 2018). This increase has led to articles writing about the diverse roles women take up in the movement, especially online (Campion, 2020). Indeed, women are recently addressed for their importance in the normalisation and mainstreaming of the far-right ideology. In this context, they are positioned as being a ‘soft introduction’, a strategy or a friendly face to the movement (De Leede, 2021; Ebner & Davey, 2019; Love, 2020; Mudde, 2019; Provost & Whyte, 2018). In these articles however, it is often not detailed *how* women mainstream the ideology or are a ‘soft introduction’. By not explaining this, they arguably assume the reader to know what they mean and state these terms as neutral or ungendered. However, they actually imply femininity as an important factor. Is the recognition of the important role of women in the far right based on a stereotype of femininity or is it something these women actually and actively do?

Paying attention to women in the far right is especially relevant because the far right has been rising in prominence since the turn of the century, particularly since 2014 (CARR Center for Human Rights Policy Harvard Kennedy School, 2021; Counter Extremism Project, 2020; Grindheim, 2019; Mudde, 2019). Right-wing parties are elected into governments and security agencies warn of a growing threat of far-right violence and terrorism in the U.S. and Europe alike (Anti-Defamation League, 2019; Europol, 2019, 2020; The Soufan Center, 2019). Furthermore, many scholars argue that the far right is being normalised into the ‘mainstream’ (see e.g. Miller-Idriss, 2020; Mudde, 2019), thereby empowering their global

¹ This thesis follows the American Psychological Association in their recommendation to capitalise both ‘Black’ and ‘White’ (American Psychological Association, n.d.).



reach. The rise, mainstreaming and internationalisation of the far right has benefited significantly from social media and women allegedly play a key role in this digital network, where information and far-right ideology are easily shared across borders (Albrecht, Fielitz & Thurstun, 2019, p.8; Campion, 2020; Maly, 2020; Miller-Idriss, 2020). In investigating women within the far right, the digital sphere should therefore be a primary database. Especially videos provide us with useful data to specifically look at the way women present themselves, not only through text, but also through looks and visuals. Furthermore, female influencers of the far right have an opportunity at hand here to reach a global audience and attract millions of viewers, in a movement where men are traditionally more prominently visible (Caldeira, De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2018).

This thesis focuses on women in the far right and how they help to spread the far right ideology online. This is vital, because the far right is growing in prominence and women are said to play a role in this. This role is recently addressed, but not described in detail. Not understanding specifically how these women operate could risk perpetuating stereotypes and thereby underestimating the threat these women pose. This is especially important because the view of women as peaceful is still persistent (Rothermel, 2020; Sjoberg, 2015). Perpetuating this stereotype could be dangerous as De Leede (2021) says that not thoroughly understanding the role, self-presentation and impact of women in the far right is a threat to successfully developing adequate countermeasures and exit strategies.

This thesis aims to give insight into women's self-presentation in the far right, by closely studying how two prominent women within this digital far-right space operate. More specifically, this thesis investigates what 'femininity' means in this context and to what extent and how they use this femininity in their self-presentation. The central research question that this thesis aims to answer is the following: *To what extent, and how, do women in the far right use stereotypical femininity to spread far-right ideas in videos online?*

With its close and critical examining of women's self-presentation, this thesis fits into the growing contribution that feminist academics have made to scholarship, including that of international relations. They have been actively addressing the gendered assumptions of the field and argue it is important to question them. Both the findings and the engagements with these lenses provide a complex picture of the use of femininity by women in the far right.

To answer the research question, this thesis will first provide a literature review to engage with the literature on women and the far right and explore the concept of femininity to be used in this thesis, informed by feminist and poststructuralist thought. This will be



followed by an introduction of the chosen method, multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA), which combines both visual and textual elements. Two videos, created by different female influencers, are analysed to investigate their self-presentation online. The discussion will compare the results and critically engage with them to present three core findings. Finally, this thesis brings all this together in a conclusion and offers suggestions for further research.



Literature review

In literature and media coverage women have often been left out of all kinds of social movements, even if they had major roles (Blee, 2020; Kenny, 2019; Provost & Whyte, 2018). This is no different for literature on the far right and it is a persistent phenomenon that feminist scholars have been very significant in addressing.

Recently, news sources and scholarly literature emphasise the importance of women to the far-right movement. Women are argued to have a special role in the spread of far-right ideology by normalising or mainstreaming it. Articles, among others, by Ebner & Davey (2019) and Love (2020) state that women help normalise the far-right ideology by being a 'soft introduction'. These articles make clear what they do for the far right but *how* they do this is not made explicit. This way, the issues of gender and especially feminine stereotypes are not addressed or stay implicit. From a feminist and poststructural lens this is problematic, as this way we could miss important information about their strategies.

Firstly, this literature review provides a definition of far right and reviews the literature on women in the far right. Secondly, this literature is critically assessed through a short introduction on feminist and poststructural international relations theory that guides the interest of this research towards the concept of femininity. The literature review concludes with outlining an understanding of femininity and distinguishing three dimensions to structure the analysis.

The far right

There is no consensus about the definition of 'far right', and the complex collection of groups, ideas and individuals connected to it (Mudde, 2019, p.19). It is not within the scope of this thesis to expand on this and not its aim to provide a judgement on the definition of the term. However, it is important for this research to be clear about what it means when the term 'far right' is used. This thesis follows the definition of Cas Mudde, a leading scholar in the field of the far right. He defines the far right² as those that are anti-system or 'hostile to liberal democracy' (Mudde, 2019, p.21). When we look at gender in relation to the far right, as is relevant for this thesis, it is argued that a conservative gender ideology is fundamental to the far right, especially to its transnational movement, and that it works as a connection between different groups (Graff, Kapur & Walters, 2019).

² Within the far right he distinguished the 'extreme right' and the 'radical right', but this thesis will work only with the umbrella term 'far right'.



Women in the far right

Earlier work on women within the far right focused on how women are portrayed within the movement or the roles they fulfil (see for instance Blee, 2002; Campion, 2017). There are, however, scarce sources about how women present *themselves* within the movement and *how* they do this. This scarcity is especially interesting in light of a growing number of news articles and scholarly works that signal the increasing (visible) presence of women in the movement (e.g. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2018; Miller-Idriss & Pilkington, 2019; Provost & Whyte, 2018). This increase led to new articles exploring the specific role of women within the contemporary far right, but in these articles their self-presentation only figures implicitly again.

An article by Nancy Love (2020) mentions several ways that women engage with the far right. She concludes that: “Alt right women’s presence as “shield maidens,” “fashy femmes,” and “trad wives” serves to soften and normalise white supremacy, often in ironic and insidious ways” (Love, 2020, p.1). She mentions that women typically act as an “auxiliary”, where their role is to soften and normalise white supremacy, earning them the label “shield maidens”. Furthermore, she argues that ‘TradWives’ (traditional wives) use hyperfemininity as a mask, and “fashy femmes” weaponize femininity against feminism. She further states that White women “shield white supremacy with their delusions of domesticity, purity and vulnerability” (Love, 2020).

Ebner & Davey (2019) weigh in on the role of women, explicitly in the advancement of the internationalisation of the far right. They state that women help normalise and mainstream their ideas:

As the specter of internationalized right-wing extremists continues to grow, the success of women in the virtual sphere becomes particularly problematic, with these broadcasters often serving as a soft introduction to hard edge ideology, facilitating the ‘redpilling’ of individuals who are vulnerable to radicalization. (p.33)

They argue that especially digital media “made women a key asset” in branding and outreach. Furthermore, they name the TradWife movement as an effective phenomenon to drive radicalisation when they promote traditional gender roles as a step towards empowerment for women. Women are also mentioned as strategies for the far right to “rebrand” their movement. They mention both femnationalism, arguing that women and their rights are



victims that need to be protected from ‘out-group men’, as well as traditional gender roles that the far right uses in their ideology to recruit both women and men (Ebner & Davey, 2019):

Videos like these make traditional gender constructs that are popular among the far right more accessible to a general audience. White and male supremacist organizations may take advantage of this effect, and strategically use women to soften their image and make regressive values appear normal and even attractive. (p.35)

Other articles signal women as a ‘friendly face’ (Provost & Whyte, 2018) or ‘figureheads’ (Worth, 2021). Another writer that states the effectiveness of femininity is Mudde when he states that, especially in what he calls the ‘fourth wave’ of the far right, the movement is mainstreamed and normalised and ‘feminine traits’ are used to soften the image of far-right groups (Mudde, 2019, p.285).

In these articles several elements are brought forward that apparently make women strategically important to the far right. These include their content around traditional values and gender roles, and a victimhood narrative. But threaded through all this is something of which its workings stay implicit: their femininity.

Feminist critique

In the articles above, *what* women do for the far right is explicitly stated, but *how* they do this is largely implied. Poststructuralism calls attention to the importance of language, because meaning is codified in it (Tickner & Sjoberg, 2016). Looking at the articles from this lens, the words that are used in relation to women are meaningful.

Feminist theory of international relations informs us on the possibility of a stereotypical image of women that we may overlook. The articles above, and their arguments about women, describe women as playing an ‘introductory’ role or being a ‘strategy’ of the far right. This is presumably still the first thought of most people when thinking of the far right, as mainly consisting of men and characterised by masculinity (Provost & Whyte, 2018). The stereotype of women being inherently peaceful and caring remains a prominent one in international relations and its scholarship, as argued by feminist scholars (Rothermel, 2020; Sjoberg, 2015; Tickner, 1992). J. Ann Tickner already wrote about the gendered structure of international relations in 1992. International relations has long been a White male



endeavour, where masculine characteristics are valued and male experiences are at the centre. In her book, Tickner argued that it is important to acknowledge the gendered characteristics of the discipline and overcome them. For this to happen, it is important to question certain ideas about men and women that remain central (Tickner, 1992, p.59). If we do not, it risks overlooking other perspectives, as feminist scholars believe that the construction of power is intertwined with the construction of gender (Tickner, 1992, p.19).

This feminist theoretical lens is important for this thesis because it calls attention to assumptions about women and femininity and what those mean for our understanding of security risks. Because, how women are talked about seems to imply that their role is not as significant as other (male?) players. To uncover this, this thesis will look closely and critically at what women actually do. Since to date femininity is only implied to be important, in this thesis it is made explicit. This is done by looking at what femininity entails in practice, through examining how it is used in the self-presentation of women in videos online. In the next sections, femininity will be addressed explicitly, to avoid the pitfall of implicit stereotypes and not take this concept for granted.

Gender

Where sex is biologically determined, gender is socially constructed and engages with femininity and masculinity (Mudde, 2019). Femininity, then, is not a fixed concept. It gets its meaning through how we look at it and use the words associated with it. Both sex and gender are often understood to be a binary between man/woman. For the far right, the concepts of sex and gender are still understood to be intrinsically connected. Women are equated with femininity, where men are with masculinity. In this thesis however, the concepts are understood to be different and will be discussed as such.

For the analysis of women in the far right, it is important to discuss how gender can be understood and observed in practice. The prominent feminist philosopher Judith Butler, in her famous essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988), argues that gender is performative. This means that there is no 'essence' that is connected to femininity or masculinity, rooted in the sex of a person. She defines gender identity as constructed over time, through a 'stylized repetition of acts' and the 'stylization of the body'. When following this theory, both femininity and masculinity are performed identities through acts that both "constitute meaning and through which meaning is performed or enacted" (Butler, 1988, p.521). This means that, by giving them meaning,



certain acts and stylizations of the body can be understood as feminine. This understanding of gender, and especially the concepts of performativity and stylization, are important for this thesis. By analysing how these women act and how they stylise their bodies, we can understand their presentation of themselves and thus their performed ‘femininity’.

Performing femininity

Following Butler then, femininity is performative. But, what can be understood as femininity? There are multiple approaches to the concept. However, this thesis is not centred around finding a good definition of femininity. Rather, it is focused on the stereotypes that may underlie the understanding of women in the far right and the representation of them in media and scholarship. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis a stereotypical conceptualization of femininity is used, derived from several studies on femininity, that will structure the analysis. This conceptualization consists of three dimensions, namely: ‘appearance’, ‘traditional gender role ideology’ and ‘traits’ (Cole & Zucker, 2007; Collins, 2004; Helgeson, 1994). These three dimensions will be outlined below.

The first dimension, appearance, includes clothing, the home and make-up as key aspects (Cole & Zucker, 2007, p.2). Things that can be thought of here include long hair, wearing a dress, being ‘small’, smiling and manicured nails (Helgeson, 1994, p.663). Furthermore, this thesis adds an additional element. In the digital sphere, ‘the home’ can be expanded to the ‘digital home’, the branding of their personal page. This can include colours, font, photos, sounds but also terminology and usernames. This is what figures in the idea of ‘Pastel QAnon’, coined as a term by Argentino. He identified the phenomenon of women using pastel colours and ‘feminine aesthetics’ to post conspiracy theories on their Instagram, right next to Yoga videos and motherhood-related content, while in the comments racist and anti-Semitic ideas are being shared. Here, the aesthetics are considered especially effective in getting their content across (Argentino, 2021).

The second dimension, ‘traditional gender role ideology’ “stems from heteronormative assumptions about the appropriateness and desirability of separate and well-defined roles for women and men implicit in hegemonic femininity” (Cole & Zucker, 2007, p.2). It includes the idea that women’s place is in the home and they are happiest in a domestic role. This is complemented by the thought that men have ‘more drive for success’, and would be more suited for work and leadership roles (p.2).



The third dimension, feminine traits, contains characteristics such as being gentle and sensitive, caring, soft-spoken, delicate, friendly (Cole & Zucker, 2007, p.4; Helgeson, 1994, p.663). Furthermore, women are often connected to characteristics like communality, as opposed to agency, which is associated with men (Hentschel, Heilman & Peus, 2019).

Conclusion

In this chapter literature on women in the far right was reviewed, showing that women are argued to have an important role for the movement. They are named as effective in normalising and ‘softening’ the far-right ideology. However, *how* they do this is not elaborated on, while at the same time femininity is implied to be important. To uncover this implied femininity and to see if women actually use this in their performance, an understanding of stereotypical femininity was outlined. The three dimensions, appearance, traditional gender role ideology and traits, will be guiding the analysis. The next chapter will discuss the methodology that will be used to analyse two videos of prominent women within the far right.



Research design

The literature review showed that articles that argue that women play an important role in the far right do not elaborate on *how* they do this, while femininity is implicitly addressed as important. Subsequently, the literature review outlined an understanding of stereotypical femininity, building on gender as performative. It is important to assess if these women actually use femininity in their self-presentation to better understand their strategies within the far right and counter the threat that they may pose. So, what exactly do these women do to spread far-right ideas, and to what extent do they use femininity in their self-presentation?

This section will outline the methodological approach to answer these questions. Firstly, critical discourse analysis will be explained, including its position within research theory. Secondly, because of the importance of visuals a more comprehensive methodology, multimodal critical discourse analysis, will be introduced. Next, a number of ethical considerations and research limitations will be addressed. This chapter will end with a brief introduction of the cases.

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is part of the constructivist theory, which does not take the world as something objectively meaningful outside of us but as something that is socially constructed. Discourses are regarded as “structures of signification which construct social realities” and are thereby productive in constructing the things they define (Milliken, 1999, p.229). One significant strand of discourse analysis is critical discourse analysis (CDA), which focuses on the relationship between discourse and power and argues that power relations are exercised through discourse. Through discourse one can create the way we look at or exist in the world and create a ‘regime of truth’ that excludes alternative ways of looking (Milliken, 1999). It does not only look objectively at which words are used, so *what* is being said, but also focuses on *why* and *how* something is said (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Several studies have used discourse analysis to research the far right and women that are part of the movement (see for instance Askanius, 2021; Mattheis, 2018). But, as mentioned previously, femininity is not something that is performed only through language. According to Butler, femininity is also performed through repetitions of acts and through stylisations of the body (Butler, 1988). To study it, it is important to incorporate textual as well as visual discourse analysis.



A method that is increasingly used to put these two together is multimodal critical discourse analysis. This method is preferred over a (thematic) content analysis, as it offers a more complex and comprehensive tool to investigate the way that far-right women use presentation and discourse to spread their ideas, instead of a focus solely on these ideas themselves (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.1). Furthermore, it does not only look at text and visual elements independently, but also at how both work together (p.8). Visual elements can be used to say things that cannot be said in language. The focus here is, like in CDA, on the critical stance to be able to question language and visual strategies that seem natural or normal, but implicitly represent certain viewpoints that are not communicated directly. It especially looks at how visual strategies influence and make use of power relations.

This thesis takes guidance from the method that Machin & Mayr (2012) have put forward in their book on MCDA. As this method is relatively new, there is no singular understanding of what the method should precisely include. Machin & Mayr (2012) have produced a very comprehensive toolbox. To not exceed the scope of this thesis, this thesis will use the broad stages of *what*, *how* and *why* of their method. First, what visual and lexical choices are made? Next, how are they used and how do they create a certain vision of reality or bring a message across? Lastly, these stages are connected to a broader framework and context and show what power relations are uncovered. To further structure the analysis, these stages are applied to each dimension of stereotypical femininity that was outlined in the literature review, (1) appearance, (2) traditional gender role ideology and (3) traits.

Ethical considerations

With regards to research ethics, there are two considerations to unpack. Firstly, the questions could be put forward if these videos can be used without the authors' permission, and if the makers should be kept anonymous. Videos posted publicly on the Internet can be considered "gray data", which means they can be considered as either text, material that is public, or as a product of human research subjects (Rambukkana, 2019). Choices around ethics should thus be made in the context of the research. In this case, these videos were posted on a public platform that everyone can access. Furthermore, to be able to research the whole self-presentation of the makers, it is important to research both text and visuals. Making the data anonymous thus would not be fruitful. Therefore, in this research, the choice was made to use the material, seeing it was published publicly, and by using the usernames the makers use themselves.



Secondly, there is the ethical consideration of the possibility of, unwillingly, further amplifying the far-right ideology by researching it and publishing about it (Colley & Moore, 2022, p.21-2). This is a legitimate concern. Nevertheless, as stated in the introduction, part of why this research is done is the danger that the far right poses. This does not only mean physical violence, but also the softer, more implicit ways language and visuals are used to promote violent and extremist ideas. To counter this threat, it is important to investigate how far-right ideology is spread across borders through the use of videos online.

Research limitations

There are some limitations to this research. Firstly, to avoid exceeding the scope of this thesis the data are limited to two videos. Therefore, the results cannot be representative of all women within the far right that are active online. They do, however, give an interesting insight into the phenomenon and may spark further research with a bigger data sample.

Another aspect to be considered is the positionality of the researcher, acknowledging a subjective position rooted in situated knowledge (Darwin Holmes, 2020; Haraway, 1988). The author is a White woman born in Europe, which produces a gendered, western-centric viewpoint that is important to acknowledge. Awareness of the perpetuation of a western discourse and view on femininity and masculinity is crucial in order to avoid generalisations and assumptions about universal applicability. In this thesis, engaging with other perspectives on these issues explicitly is not possible within its scope, but it would be highly valuable to include them in further research.

This is connected to the danger of engaging in stereotypes as a researcher. The author has experienced using terms around gender as a slippery slope, to talk about it while trying to avoid perpetuating those same stereotypes. It is a complicated endeavour to have femininity as a central element of research, given that femininity is a multifaceted social construct that cannot be understood in any singular way. That is why the author has taken a critical stance towards the subject, and has engaged in reflexivity towards all parts of this thesis to mitigate this limitation as much as possible.

Case selection and data

For this thesis, a qualitative comparative analysis is chosen, to be able to compare different women and their performative styles. Two videos were chosen, made by two women within the far right. Lewis (2018) has identified the Alternative Influence Network (AIN), based on



a network analysis of far-right figures and their connections. From this network, two women were identified to be analysed. These women are Blonde in the Belly of the Beast and Lana Lokteff. They are both still actively producing videos and they have, or had when they were still on YouTube in the case of Lokteff, more than 100.000 subscribers. Additionally, they were chosen because they talk about issues that cross borders, and are not only focused on national issues. From each woman, one video was chosen for detailed analysis. The women were chosen for their different approach to producing videos, but there was no explicit reason for choosing a certain video based on theme, as this thesis does not centre on the ideology of the women per se, but on the performance they use to spread it. One video was uploaded to YouTube and the other was shared on the personal broadcasting website Red Ice. To be able to compare these women more thoroughly, other videos of these women will also be mentioned if necessary.

Analysis

The former section has explained why MCDA is the appropriate method to answer the questions this thesis puts forward. It combines both textual and visual elements in the analysis, which is essential to fully comprehend the performativity of the women. This chapter will unpack the analysis of the videos by Blonde in the Belly of the Beast and Lana Lokteff. The case studies will be introduced shortly, where after the analysis will be structured along the three dimensions of stereotypical femininity outlined in the literature review, namely (1) appearance, (2) traditional gender role ideology and (3) traits, to see to what extent and how these occur in their presentation.

Blonde in the Belly of the Beast

Blonde in the Belly of the Beast is mentioned in the AIN of Lewis as “a conservative, anti-feminist vlogger who also frequently employs white nationalist arguments” (Lewis, 2018, p.46). She is also included in the article by Kristy Campion as a ‘promoter’ within the far right (Campion, 2020). On her YouTube channel she posts videos with societal and political commentary and conversations with other YouTubers. In January 2020, she started a second channel called ‘Motherland’, where she and another female far-right YouTuber aim to be a resource on motherhood for ‘pro-natalist’ people (Motherland, n.d.). Although diverse, the main themes of her videos are about ‘the Left/Right’, Western civilisation and women/men. The title of the video analysed is ‘*How Women Can Provide Value Again*’ and was posted on the 14th of January, 2018. It was viewed over 180.000 times, has 10.000 likes and almost 3.000 comments. In the video she presents her view on women nowadays and the way she thinks they should be. In what follows, the three dimensions of stereotypical femininity will be analysed to see to what extent they figure in the video.

Appearance

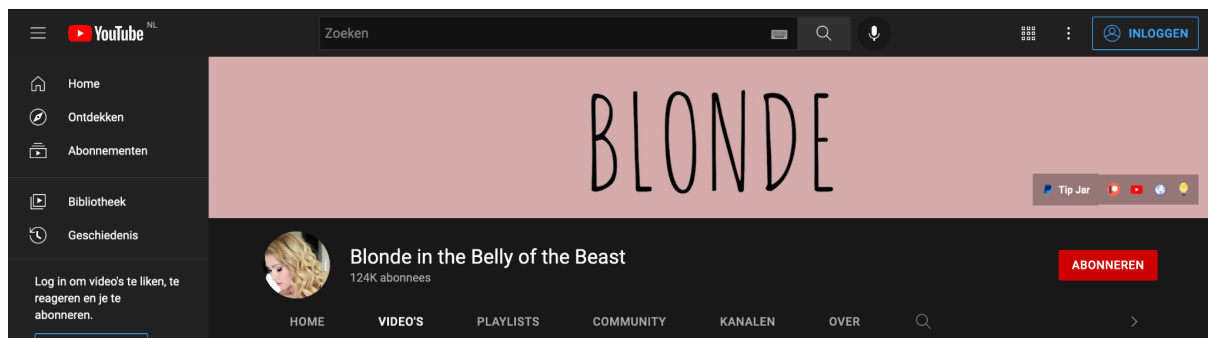
To analyse the first dimension, appearance, this section will look at her homepage on YouTube, the look of the video and her looks including hair, make-up and clothing.

With one click of a button, one can go from one video to another on YouTube, and perhaps end up on the profile of Blonde in the Belly of the Beast. Her homepage looks mundane (Figure 1). The light pink header features the word ‘Blonde’ in black letters. Pink is generally associated with women, and more specifically: girls. This way, the colour can be interpreted as feminine, and perhaps as innocent through its childish connotation. The

word ‘Blonde’ emphasises this girly feel. Machin & Mayr (2012) argue that choices in words and visuals have meaning. As she could have chosen many other names, the name ‘Blonde’ has a certain effect. She does not use her actual name but a physical characteristic: her hair. Blonde is often associated with a certain kind of woman, thinking for example of the expression ‘blondes have more fun’, which refers to the “common belief that men are more attracted to women with blonde hair and give them more attention” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). The name thereby associates with women with specific features, further emphasised through the profile picture put next to it, of a woman with blond wavy hair.

Figure 1

YouTube Header Blonde in the Belly of the Beast



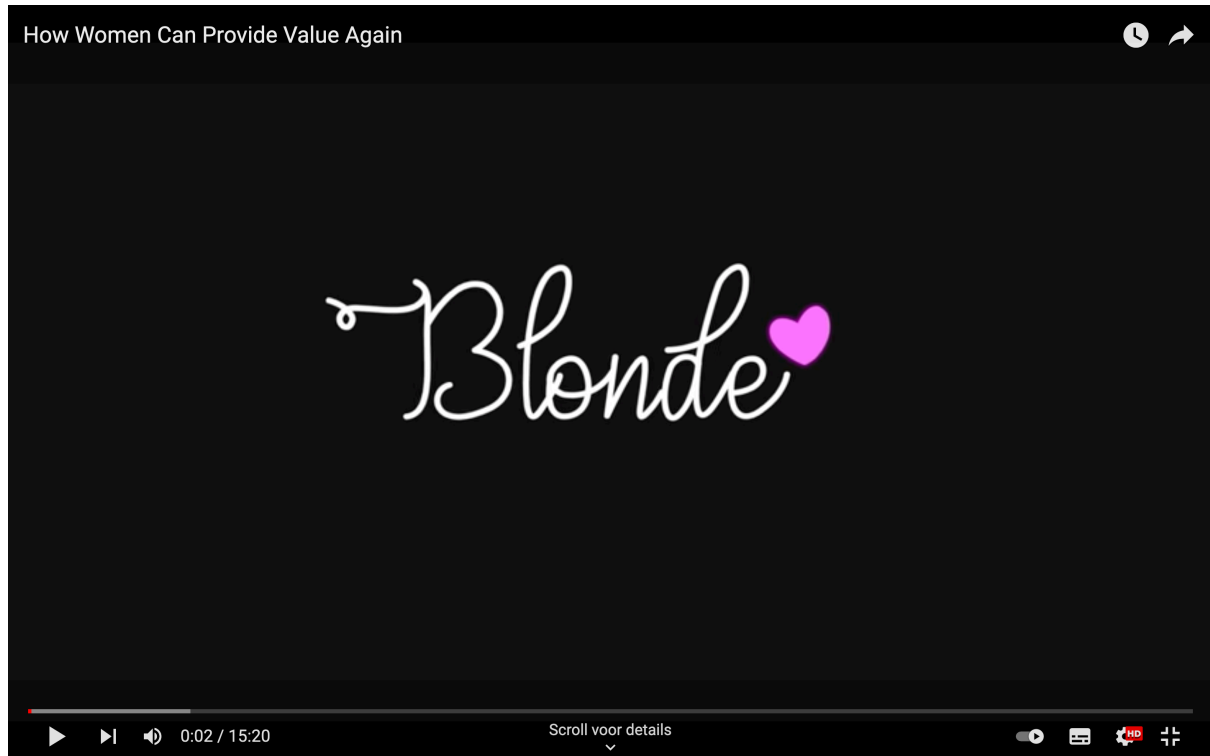
Note. Screenshot from *Playlists* [YouTube channel], by Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, n.d., YouTube. Retrieved May 18, 2022, from

<https://www.youtube.com/c/BlondeintheBellyoftheBeast/playlists>

The video itself opens with her standard opening ‘jingle’, where ‘Blonde’ is written in white on a black background. The scratchy sound of writing and a tingling sound were added. It is written in ‘handwriting’ that is round and flowy, with curls and a pink heart next to it (Figure 2). This visual effect falls in line with the feminine look of her heading.

Figure 2

Opening screen video Blonde in the Belly of the Beast



Note. Screenshot from *How Women Can Provide Value Again* (0:02) [Video], by Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, 2018, YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQ3Xdb-wvBs>

All the above elements are already transmitting meaning to the viewer. The visuals and text complement and emphasise each other in their stereotypical girly presentation. This way this page looks harmless and might create the feeling of ‘girl talk’. This is complemented by a complete ‘neutrality’ of the background in her video: no signs, icons or images. Nevertheless, this neutrality might actually be used to distract from, or soften, language that is uttered (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.9).

Blonde is a White woman with smooth skin, and is sitting in front of a white background. She is wearing a black V-neck sweater and has her blonde hair in a ponytail with one small braid, neatly combed over her left shoulder. She is wearing make-up, including shiny eyeshadow, mascara and pink lipstick. It looks like she has put effort into her appearance. A focus on looks, including hair, clothing and make-up is something traditionally seen as feminine. Her looks emphasise her femininity and thereby the importance of it. This way she presents herself as an ideal traditional, ‘feminine’ woman (Schmeichel, Kerr & Linder, 2020, p.15).



It is important to connect her looks to what she says in the video. When talking about a dating experiment for her male podcast co-host, Blonde tells her viewers: “it is the most depressing pool of women that I have ever seen” (0:24). The women on the dating app gave her “visual evidence that this is in fact a real epidemic” (1:21). She came to a “grand total of about 12 matches, four of which weren’t grotesquely ugly” (1:49). In describing her selection criteria and her matches, she presents a clear ‘ideal image’ of women through saying what is *not* ideal: “... the vast majority were either very overweight, covered in tattoos or were single moms. All of which should be non-starters for any self-respecting man” (1:47). Later on, she explains that this is not the fault of these women themselves, but a consequence of them being raised by “feminist mothers and broken beta-male fathers” (3:52).

What she does here is creating categories based on appearance and judging them on their worth, through structural opposition and generalisations (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.39-42). Beauty is often associated with good, while ugliness is associated with bad. This is something we learn from a young age, for example through Disney movies, where the heroines are often very beautiful and the (female) villains are ugly or masculinised (Sharmin & Sattar, 2018). In her video, Blonde makes clear what is ‘bad’ and connects this to ‘feminists’ and ‘progressives’. Subsequently, it is significant that she, as a conservative woman, visually falls in the category of ‘good woman’. Here, the visual and textual elements work together to create an ideal to strive for. Her own categorisation as ‘good’ is emphasised by her username ‘Blonde in the Belly of the Beast’, which seems to signal her entrapment in a dangerous environment. This belly of the beast, we learn in her very first video, is the ‘liberal heartland’ of the USA (Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, 2016). The positioning of good (beautiful) versus bad (ugly) helps her tell her story and subtly promotes her ideas.

Traditional gender role ideology

The second dimension of stereotypical femininity is concerned with traditional gender role ideology. Within this ideology, it is believed that women and men have distinct roles to fulfil, where women’s role is primarily in the home. In this section, it is analysed to what extent these ideas occur in the video and how she uses them.

The title ‘How Women Can Provide Value Again’ is representative of the video, and the description expands on this: “What women can do to begin to provide value again, not only to their significant others, but to society at large” (Blonde in the Belly of the Beast,



2018). This statement implies that women have once provided value, but aren't anymore. Additionally, it suggests that women *can* and *should* provide value, but only in a certain way.

From her rhetoric in the video emerges a conservative view on gender relations. She emphasises that marriage should go before career and she explains "what qualities are important to get and keep a man" (4:09). Qualities include cooking, cleaning, having no debt, being thin and being 'fertile'. She states: "The journey for self-improvement in Western women has to start with the simple question: what do men want and what do they need?" (5:31). Women and men, in her view, have different roles to fulfil:

Men need support, emotional and logistical. They need sex, they need food and they need to work. Of course, this isn't all they need but it's a pretty good start. The job of a good woman, and she knows this, is to do whatever she can to provide the necessities, to minimize the burden of cooking and housework and to help create a stable home life (7:12)

Her words reify the stereotypical idea about women and men and their gender roles. Women have to be compliant and mostly adapt to a man's needs and wants. Here, we see 'emphasised femininity', defined by R.W. Connell as "defined around compliance with ... subordination and ... oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (Connell, 1987, p.183). Through adhering to this kind of femininity, women help preserve a complementary and hierarchical relationship to men and masculinity (Schippers, 2007) and contribute to upholding a patriarchal system, which Love (2020) argues disproportionately affects marginalised communities. However, Blonde promotes these gender relations as something that is good for women when she says that "almost all women would be happier being mothers" (9:52) and focusing on their domestic life.

Through the lexical choices she makes, her ideas about gender roles sound mainstream. By stating that a good woman should know what her job is, she presents it as general knowledge everybody should have (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.161). This is accompanied by her linguistic choices when talking about what girls should be taught: "how very important their looks and demeanour are" (3:25) and "a career is secondary to finding a husband" (3:32). She presents this as a truth that mothers should reveal to their daughters. She uses her own experience as a daughter to explain what mothers nowadays lack: "If I



gained a few pounds she would be like ‘listen, you're getting fat’. This is what mothers should be doing. Not worshipping their girls simply for being born female” (3:13).

Although she presents these ideas as natural, she says that people are told to believe differently. For example, she says: “Allowing a bunch of Marxists to shape the way young women think in their most formative years seems criminal to me ...” (11:04). Through using words as ‘criminal’ and ‘young girls’ in one sentence, she deliberately makes a connection that could spark outrage or defence, as she presents it as something criminal and the connotation this has (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.3). At other points in the video, she also uses the term ‘indoctrination’ in this context, which suggests forced transmittance of ideas. This implies that people actually want or think something else, but are indoctrinated to see it differently (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.32). It claims that something is forced upon women, with bad intentions.

Next to the personal reasons for women to choose a conservative gender role, she also takes it into a broader importance for ‘Western women’. Why these traditional gender roles are important, is based on a, for her, self-evident relationship between gender roles and the functioning of society at large, featuring in her “million-dollar question”: “what can Western women do to begin providing value to men again so that we can repair gender relations and start to build a more functional society?” (7:34). From her video we understand that Western women are affected by feminist views and in this quote she presents this as a danger to both young women and society at large. Furthermore, by using the word ‘repair’, she implies that we can and should return to a time where gender relations were ‘better’ (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.4, 153), which corresponds to the conservative character of the ideas of gender within the far right.

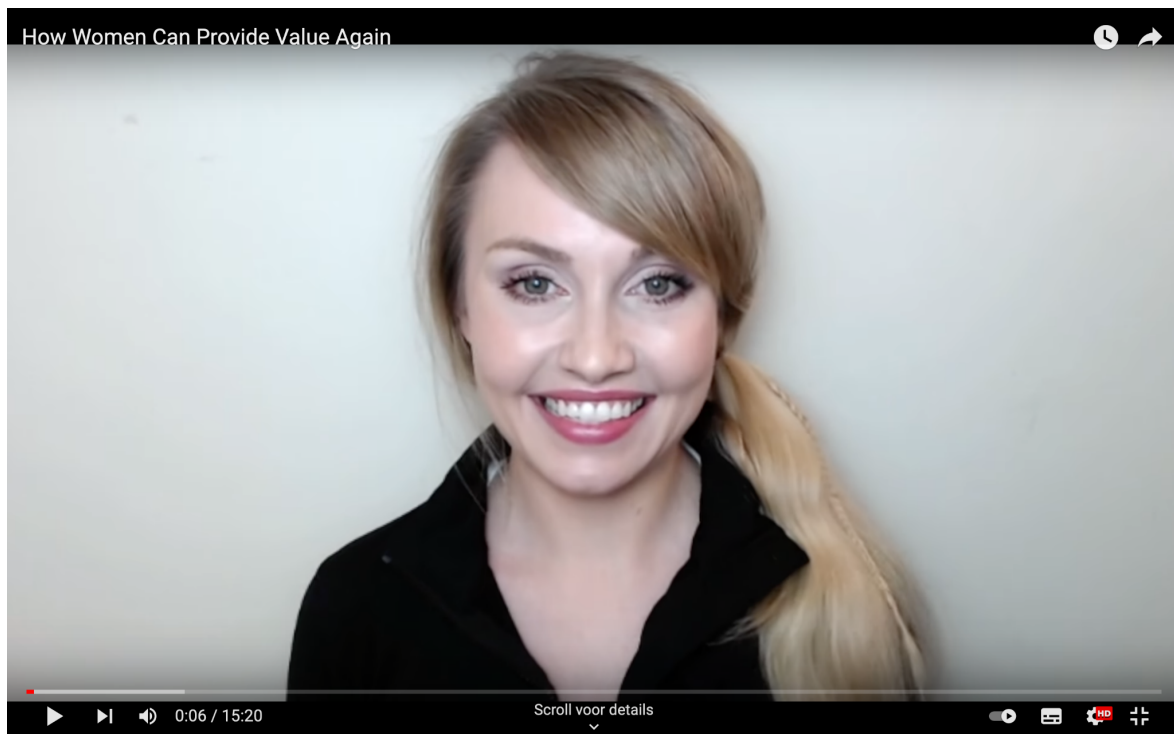
Presenting feminism and the departure of traditional gender roles as a danger to a functional society could provoke the feeling in viewers to want to protect it, especially when it is also connected to the happiness of (young) girls. The family is presented as the cornerstone of society, which is central to the conservative, nationalist ideology. Furthermore, by emphasising women’s ideal role, she creates a responsibility for women in the fight for a functional society and perhaps also in the far-right movement.

It is however interesting that she does not rely on motherhood in any way in her presentation (see Figure 3). There are for example no children playing in the back, no pictures, no ‘home’ sounds or visuals. She does not stylise specifically as a role model of the ideas she presents: the image of the TradWife. This difference between the content and

language and the visual choices she makes are important to acknowledge. Because she does not show her motherhood she cannot use this as a visual strategy to cloud her rhetoric in a motherly look.

Figure 3

Video Blonde in the Belly of the Beast



Note. Screenshot from *How Women Can Provide Value Again* (0:06) [Video], by Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, 2018, YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQ3Xdb-wvBs>

Traits

The third dimension of stereotypical femininity is centred around character traits and demeanour. Traits that are considered stereotypically feminine are: being gentle, sensitive, caring, soft-spoken, delicate and friendly (Cole & Zucker, 2007; Helgeson, 1994).

Blonde opens the video with the words: “hey guys” (0:05), while casually waving at the screen (Figure 4). By using conversational style vocabulary, she brings an informality to her video. It provides intimacy and ‘suggests dialogue between equals’ (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.44). This is further enhanced by the way she presents herself in the video. She is sitting close to the screen, as if she is having a private conversation with the viewer. She gazes into the camera, which can be understood as a visual address, which encourages a

relationship with the viewer, or even demands a reaction (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp.70-1). The intimacy of the vlog is further emphasised by personal stories, when she says that she thought that she was projecting her own “self-loathing” (1:32) on Western women in general. She uses language that makes her vulnerable, by showing insecurity: “I’m not coming from a place of knowing at all. I had so much to learn” (4:43), and sharing that she was “bitterly depressed” (8:54) when still working in the corporate world. These personal anecdotes reinforce the intimacy of the vlog and her equality to her viewers, while also providing her ‘authority’ or ‘evidence’ based on experience to help strengthen her viewpoints (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Here we see the character traits of sensitivity and emotionality that are characteristic of stereotypical femininity.

Figure 4

Blonde waving at viewers



Note. Screenshot from *How Women Can Provide Value Again* (0:05) [Video], by Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, 2018, YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQ3Xdb-wvBs>

Because she has established a relationship with her viewers, through an intimate setting, the viewer can more easily empathise and identify with her. This relationship with her viewers can help “sell” her ideas (Lewis, 2018; Maly, 2020). Through how she presents



herself, her story of assuming the role of a conservative woman is not so much a push, as it is a pull towards becoming happy. This is also recognised by some viewers, as one comment says: “As a 19-year-old girl finishing high school, this video really opened my eyes. ... Thank you, I really aspire to be someone like you in the future :)” (julirosa, 2018). Blonde, rhetorically and physically, presents herself as an example of how good one can look and feel when one follows her advice, which Champion (2020) argues can inspire other women looking for identity security or a sense of significance. This way, her story of ‘self-improvement’ and the outcome of her being happy, can be interpreted as advice and as something of a gift she gives her viewers.

She not only gives advice, she also emphasises responsibility. She seemingly takes up the role of mother or educator when she talks directly to ‘teenage girls’:

Don't adopt this attitude ‘you have all the time in the world’. You really don't. Start learning how to be an excellent cook, how to control emotional outbursts, how to really listen to somebody. Start educating yourself on political matters, read for pleasure. Just make yourself better. Genuinely a better, more useful, more learned person. (10:22)

Here we see the relationality or caring attitude stereotypically expected of women. What she says sounds really positive and seems meant as ‘good advice’. By using the word ‘you’ often, she aims to create a connection with the viewer and encourages a reaction. On the one hand, she coats her ideas in advice, seemingly to care for others, but on the other hand she poses it by using imperatives. It is an advice, but also a push.

Conclusion

The analysis above shows how visual and linguistic choices together create a friendly and intimate setting in which Blonde can persuasively present her argument.

From the analysis of her appearance it appears that Blonde is strongly aligning with stereotypical femininity. Through using colours, a style of writing, and a certain look she can create an image that connotes ‘girliness’ and lightness. This way, her video does not show signs of anything extreme or hateful, which can result in people ending up on her profile expecting harmless content and stay to watch her videos. Furthermore, by adding her rhetoric



and the categories that she uses, she puts herself as ‘good’ in opposition to the enemy, creating an ugly and bad visualisation of ‘the other’; in this case feminist women.

In the analysis of the second dimension, traditional gender role ideas, MCDA has shown that she uses this dimension of stereotypical femininity mainly in her rhetoric, while it is absent from her visual presentation. She argues traditional gender roles will make women happiest and uses lexical strategies to present this view as natural. The subject of gender relations is something not generally seen as extreme. Meanwhile, however, she links it to a broader far right rhetoric by, for example, connecting it to the functioning of Western society and using words like ‘indoctrination’ and ‘Marxists’ that refer to a broader far-right discourse that we can uncover when looking at her other videos (Busbridge, Moffit & Thorburn, 2020). The description of her first video, for example, states: “How feminism, liberalism, Islam and Cultural Marxism are destroying Western Society” (Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, 2016). Even though this video is about gender relations and this theme could cloud her overall rhetoric, it is hardly a cover for all the videos.

Lastly, the third dimension of femininity: traits. Through speech style, content and demeanour Blonde produces an effective environment to package ideas into a ‘gift of advice’. Through the intimate setting she interacts with the viewer directly and creates a feeling of connection, which makes her rhetoric feel less threatening. By emphasising relationality and sensitivity, she is aligning to stereotypical femininity, while at the same time contradicting it by using harsh words and acting like an ‘expert’ presenting facts. Although she primarily acts like a ‘pull’ towards becoming happy, she also ‘pushes’ women to act in a traditionally feminine way and emphasises the danger of the indoctrination from feminist people. Lastly, she also presents an interesting understanding of the agency of (young) women, in which they are victims of indoctrination when she talks about the ‘enemy’ while they are agentic beings when following her advice, making the movement more attractive.

In short, through both visual and textual means, Blonde uses many aspects of stereotypical femininity to spread her message. Nevertheless, she does not fully align with it.

Lana Lokteff

Lana Lokteff, so-called the ‘most prominent woman of the alt-right’, is an active broadcaster of far-right ideas (Mattheis, 2018; Champion, 2020, p.7). She makes regular content on the platform Red Ice TV, that she runs with her Swedish husband Henrik Palmgren. She is of Russian-American descent and according to the ‘About’-page on their website, she is



“passionate about European identity politics, ancestral traditions and health” (Red Ice, n.d.). In October of 2019, the YouTube channel of Red Ice was banned from the site. They now host their videos through their own platform and on alternative platforms like Odysee. When still on YouTube, they reached more than 120.000 subscribers (Darby, 2017). Most of her videos centre around the European or White ‘race’ and identity and the threats they allegedly face. The video chosen for this analysis was uploaded on the 5th of November, 2021 on their Red Ice website. The title is “‘Equity’ Means Institutional Racism Against White People’ and it was viewed over 4.000 times at the time of writing. It was liked 441 times and it had 96 comments. The title of the video gives away Lokteff’s message that equity is ‘race-based communism’ and a way to discriminate against White people.

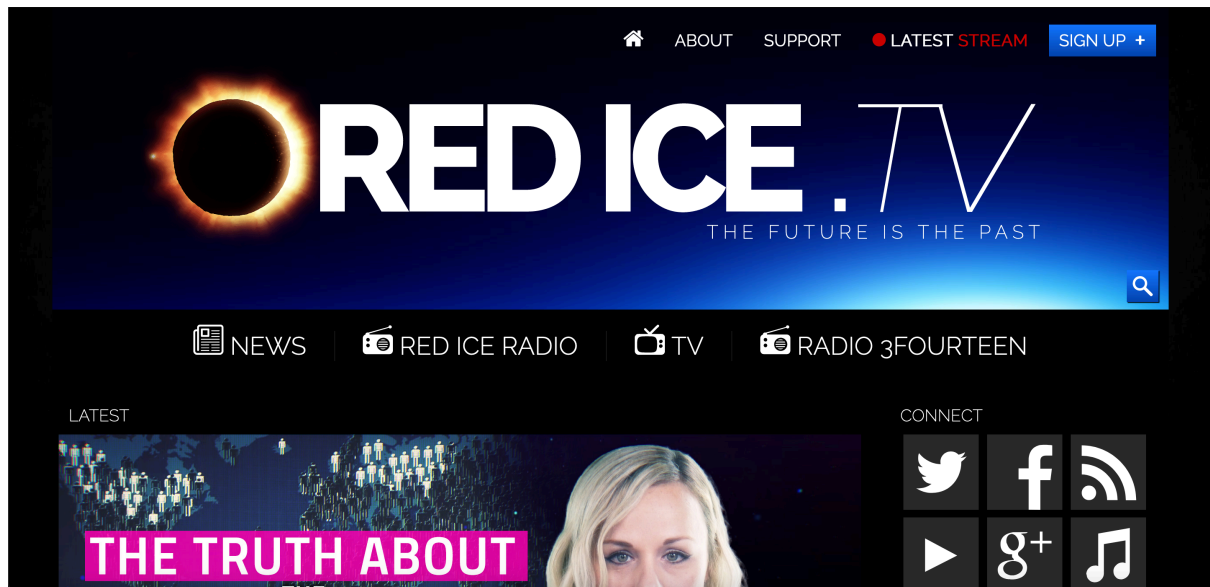
Appearance

In this section her appearance will be analysed, including clothing, make-up and hair, but also her digital ‘home’. This is considered through looking at the video itself and the homepage of Red Ice.

Firstly, the theme of her personal page is dark (Figure 5). Black is the dominant colour, combined with blue and red. The font that is used is prominent and has sharp edges. The white elements contrast with the dark background. Black is not typically associated with femininity. Darker colours often signal danger or the unknown (Machin & Mayr, 2012). These colours help present the message they want to convey: Western civilisation is in danger. The dark colours convey the seriousness thereof, instead of lightness that is considered more feminine. The white elements convey the opposite, namely truth or positivity (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The subtitle in the header, ‘the future is the past’, is contrasting with the black. The subtitle signals their reactionary position, understanding this term as opposing progressive movements often including feminism, social justice and left-wing politics (Lewis, 2018). The combination of a dark colour palette and sharp fonts makes the page look ‘harsh’ as opposed to the gentleness that is associated with femininity. Lokteff therefore does not use stereotypical femininity in the decor of her digital home.

Figure 5

Header homepage Red Ice



Note. Screenshot from *About* [Website], by Red Ice, n.d. Retrieved May 24, 2022, from <https://redice.tv/>

The dark theme continues into the video. The background consists of a combination of blue and red, reflecting the colours of their name ‘Red Ice’. Although lighter than the homepage, the video still has a dark look. The video starts abruptly, without an intro or title and shows Lokteff sitting in a chair facing the camera. Her appearance is in contrast with the dark background. She seems to shine because her hair, skin and t-shirt are light-coloured, which give her a softer feeling. Her t-shirt is white, which often represents innocence, like a bride wearing white or a white flag being presented as surrender.

Her look, including her hair, skin and make-up, reflect the stereotypical beauty ideal of the White woman. This beauty ideal also occurs later in her video, through a combination of visual and discourse choices. When she talks about inherent inequality between people, she contends that equality means identical and that we as humans simply are not identical. She makes the comparison that “some are fit, attractive, smart and capable and some are not and never will be” (0:56). While she says these things, pictures are shown in the background that illustrate what she tells us, by showing pictures of ‘pretty’ and ‘ugly’ people, creating categorisations (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Presumably, it is no coincidence that a young White woman is shown in relation to the word pretty (Figure 6). By linking this, a White female aesthetic is put up as something desirable or worth pursuing.

Figure 6

White woman in video Lokteff



Note. Screenshot from “*Equity*” *Means Institutional Racism Against White People* (0:58) [Video], by Lana Lokteff, 2021, Red Ice. <https://redice.tv/news/equity-means-institutional-racism-against-white-people>

It is significant that the ‘pretty’ woman is very similar to her and even represents something more specific, mentioned by someone in the comment section of her video: “It should be a crime to simp for any woman... except Lana! She is our Nordic Ice Queen” (FeddievandHalen, 2021). This idea of a ‘Nordic Ice Queen’ is a recurring role assigned to women by far-right organisations, especially those with a racist character. In the role of goddess/victim they can be presented as ‘Nordic goddesses’, with blonde hair and milky white skin, embodying the archetype of White womanhood (Blee, 2002, p.115). Often, this role is combined with the role of women as victims, that need protection by strong White men against ‘dangerous non-White men’ (Blee, 2002) The presentation of ideal White womanhood can be used in two ways, both in presenting yourself as an example, as Blonde does, or as attraction for men watching these videos. Other comments also mention approval of Lana’s appearance, calling her a ‘babe’ and ‘cute’. This is arguably something she is aware of, as she spoke about this in a speech at a conference: “What really drives men is women. And let’s be honest, sex with women” (Lokteff, 2017). She argued that women could ‘inspire

men' to fight for the future of White civilization. Arguably then, the explicitly feminine look she presents is a means to relate to her viewers in a specific way.

Traditional gender role ideology

To what extent traditional gender role ideology can be seen in the video by Lokteff will be discussed in this section.

In her video, Lokteff mainly talks about how the 'White race' is under attack, as she is convinced we are living in "the day of hysterical and psychotic anti-Whiteness" (2:15). Meanwhile, she shows news articles and statements (mostly by Black people, which is emphasised by her) about White people. An example is the title "When Is It OK to Kill Whites?" (2:28), accompanied by a black-and-white picture of three White children, one of whom looks directly into the camera and thereby at the viewers (Figure 7). Titles and pictures like these can shock the viewer and provoke fear.

Figure 7

Video Lokteff



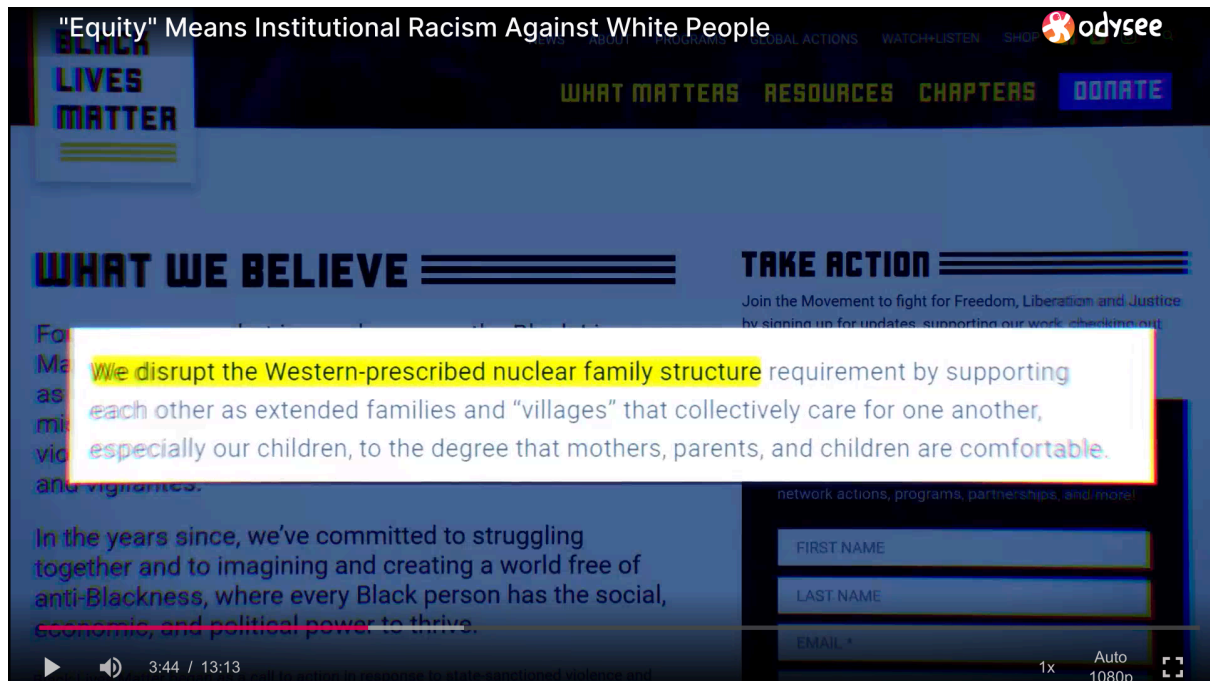
Note. Screenshot from "Equity" Means Institutional Racism Against White People (2:29) [Video], by Lana Lokteff, 2021, Red Ice. <https://redice.tv/news/equity-means-institutional-racism-against-white-people>



Mentioning of motherhood and children occurs implicitly again when she continues talking about the treatment of White people. She says that a lot is taken away from White people and given to ‘non-White’ people. As an example, she says that “your family will be broken up” to even things out with people that did not grow up in a “nuclear family” (03:39). By saying this, she presents the nuclear family as an ideal everyone wants and people should strive for. This is a mostly Western ideal, particularly for North America and Europe, consisting of a father, a mother and their children. The nuclear family, when articulated within the far right, is often connected to racist ideas, as it is seen as essential to preserve one’s own race (Busbridge, Moffit & Thorburn, 2020, p.725-6; Träbert, 2017, p.282). In her visuals, this ideal of the nuclear family is accompanied by an idyllic, bright image of a White family, sitting in nature, the mother feeding her youngest child. This is juxtaposed to a screenshot of the Black Lives Matter website where a sentence is highlighted (Figure 8). The image is darkened, signalling disagreement with the message (Machin & Mayr, 2012), and only the part including the word ‘disrupt’ is highlighted. She emphasises the viciousness thereof through stating that they ‘break up your family’. By using these words, she seems to suggest violent or forceful actions, which could create fear in the viewer.

Figure 8

Screenshot Black Lives Matter website



Note. Screenshot from "Equity" Means Institutional Racism Against White People (3:44) [Video], by Lana Lokteff, 2021, Red Ice. <https://redice.tv/news/equity-means-institutional-racism-against-white-people>

She further strengthens the threat to the family, and more specifically children, when she says: "they're already teaching our kids to be White traitors and to ultimately embrace White abolition, which means the full eradication of White people on the face of the earth" (11:23). She mentions a 'genocidal spectrum' of White identities, and concludes that the only option to make you a good White person is "your own eradication" (12:07). Through using the words 'our kids' she creates a common identity with her viewers (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This could either mean connection through motherhood or parenthood, or it could mean through being White people. Women are often associated with motherhood, so this is a strong message. This woman, who is a mother herself, cares about your children too and warns you for impending danger. Words like 'eradication' emphasise the violent character of the implied attack on White people. She uses children to underscore the gravity. Who could be opposed to protecting kids? This way, she uses the traditional role of women to spread her message, but in her stylisation it is absent.



Traits

The third dimension is about character traits, or demeanour. It contains traits such as being gentle and sensitive, caring, soft-spoken, delicate and friendly.

In spite of the stereotypically feminine appearance in her clothing and make-up, the way she acts in the video cannot easily be labelled that way. In the video, she discusses serious themes. The video is about equity and the interpretation Lokteff gives to the term: “Equity has replaced equality. It is the new political buzzword used to push race-based communism and actual institutional racism against White people” (Red Ice, 2021). Her first words are: “One of THE most socially controversial things you can discuss today: contesting the modern idea that we are all equal. Say we’re all equal or be shunned from society” (Lokteff, 2021, 0:11). She says that inequality is a big problem for ‘liberals’, and that they use “racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia or white supremacy, or some other made up excuse to deny the reality of things” (1:20). She states throughout that elites are treating common people ‘like crap’.

She presents these things not from a personal viewpoint per se, but as broader societal ‘developments’, especially by using high modality (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This way she acts like a news anchor or political commentator. In this role and through her lexical choices she portrays rationality, stating ‘facts’ and arguments (Machin & Mayr, 2012). For example, she explains what ‘natural rights’ are (“courtesy of White guys” (1:48)) and she mentions the French Revolution, which give it the air of an intellectual undertaking. It also keeps the viewer at a certain ‘professional’ distance. This more rational approach is more commonly associated with stereotypical masculinity. This way, it gives her a more authoritative position, which could be effective to convince her audience of the truth of what she’s saying. This way she does not use femininity, thinking of traits like emotionality, to tell her story.

In her language, the distance she creates with the air of intellect is continued in her use of humour, sarcasm and irony: “But fighting over equity doesn’t exist in a non-White vs non-White situation. No [the ‘o’ lengthened in a sarcastic tone], it only applies when a White person is in the mix” (4:40). Irony, sarcasm and ‘humour’ are increasingly used by the far right, specifically to cloak extreme content or make them able to distance themselves from it (Miller-Idriss, 2020). Miller-Idriss (2020) calls the extensive use of humour and specifically ‘memes’ a ‘weaponization of youth culture’ and she argues it is an important strategy of the far right to mainstream their message. In the video, Lokteff makes explicit use of memes that often make her language more explicit (Figure 9). For example, when she shows ‘equity’

personified as a woman, cutting down a man labelled ‘you’ by the feet. The man can be heard screaming loudly. It invokes the feeling that equity is a violent phenomenon. As the beaten person is labelled ‘you’, it presents the viewer with the idea of them being in danger, through identification. However, it is cloaked in a meme-style that is supposed to be fun. The use of harsh humour is generally more associated with masculinity and applicable broader to the far right. In a way it softens the harsher messages it conveys, but it does not do that in a gentle or feminine way.

Figure 9

‘Meme-style’ image



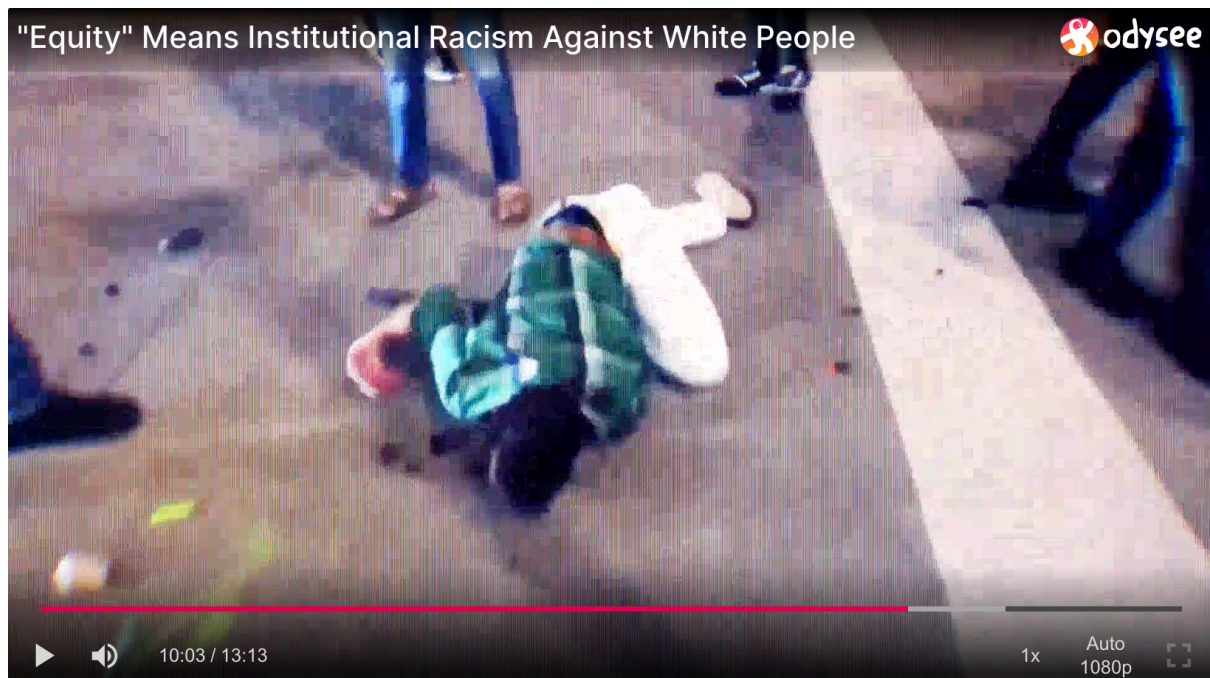
Note. Screenshot from “Equity” Means Institutional Racism Against White People (0:36) [Video], by Lana Lokteff, 2021, Red Ice. <https://redice.tv/news/equity-means-institutional-racism-against-white-people>

In her language too, she is also not always cloaking her message in softer ways. She does not shy away from words like ‘destruction’, ‘hysterical’ or ‘hate’, and she swears (‘crap’), working to exaggerate her message (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Femininity is, in the stereotypical sense, connected to characteristics like being gentle, sensitive, friendly and delicate. These words do not come to mind when hearing Lana Lokteff speak. The visuals she uses are not any softer than her language. Many visuals are violent. After talking about the “terrorist activities of Black Lives Matter” (7:30) and arguing that “crimes of Non-Whites

today” (9:45) are let slide and Whites do not get any sympathy for “hate crimes done to [their] race” (10:01), she supports this with ‘evidence’. For about a minute, fragments of video are shown where we see fire, men beating men, looting and people bleeding in the street. This is graphic footage. A lot of violence is shown, accompanied by ‘dark’ ominous music. At the end we see a White man lying on the ground with bloody scratches on his face (Figure 10). All this creates an ominous feeling for the viewer and an image of the ‘enemy’. Again, the use of these visuals cannot be considered a gentle way to prove a point.

Figure 10

Footage of wounded man



Note. Screenshot from “Equity” Means Institutional Racism Against White People (10:03) [Video], by Lana Lokteff, 2021, Red Ice. <https://redice.tv/news/equity-means-institutional-racism-against-white-people>

At one point she mentions that she has unequal access to services ‘just because she is White’. This could be seen as invoking the role of victim, as is often assigned to women in far-right movements. However, it seems to be connected more to her skin colour, not to womanhood or femininity. She expands victimhood to ‘Whites’ as a whole and calls upon her viewers with the message:



If we don't put our foot down now and say no to this dangerous trend of equity, they will continue to push this insanity until there's a point system for life equity. And if you're White, you don't have enough equity to live. (11:05)

This signals an existential danger to White people. In this way, she could be seen as focused on relationships and the community. As caring for her community and creating an in-group versus the enemy. But again, the focus is more on the 'enemy' than it is on the community itself. There even is a more active narrative. She aims to warn her viewers for what is (allegedly) happening to White people. As seen, she does this with extreme language, explicit visuals and being direct, as opposed to softening her message (Machin & Mayr, 2012). All this, the warning, leads up to the final part of her video, where she engages with her audience directly, where she asks her viewers to "put their foot down" and "say no to this dangerous trend of equity" (11:10). She ends the commentary part of her video with the words "the time of being fearful of being called a word is over" (12:25). The remaining part of the video, she talks about the importance of the Red Ice members, for them to be able to fight the "massive and corrupt system seeking to close in on all of us" and that they "will prevail together" (12:42). Through stating this, she even seems to take up an activist or even leadership role, which is often associated more with masculinity.

Conclusion

The above analysis shows how Lana Lokteff creates a dark and serious image, both in content and visuals, to present her ideas.

The analysis of the dimension appearance shows contradicting elements, seeing that her own appearance and the context are very different. Where her looks could lead into a page with mundane content, the context causes a different expectation. She appears stereotypically feminine through her hair and make-up, which connote the idea of a White goddess, combined with that of the victim that needs to be protected (Blee, 2002). As she seems to use her look purposefully, she arguably aims to attract men to the cause and at the same time cover her rhetoric with her "ideal" feminine look, putting herself in a positive light.

The second dimension's analysis on gender ideology, shows that there is no explicit sign of traditional gender role ideas. Lokteff does play on the fears of parents by specifically addressing what is, arguably, done to their children and she glorifies the nuclear family as a



(Western) ideal. However, she does not show it visually through her own appearance or the background of the video. Lokteff does not rely on the visual performance of stereotypical femininity's second dimension to spread her message. Indeed, the opposite is embodied. Perhaps here as well, she counts on the association of women with motherhood, to make her message stronger, as a woman talking about caring for children.

Lastly, the analysis of the third dimension, traits, showed that there is no clear evidence of stereotypically feminine traits used by Lokteff to share her message. Indeed, it could be argued that it is entirely the opposite. She uses more traditionally masculine traits like assertiveness and rationality to put weight to her arguments. She calls for action and in that way could even be seen as taking a leader-like position. Her message is not cloaked in advising rhetoric, as we've seen in Blonde's video. She does not use emotionality from herself, but she does seem to want to provoke it in her viewers as she talks strongly about the impending danger for White people.

The analysis shows conflicting results. What could be said to be most interesting from the analysis of the video of Lana Lokteff, is the fact that besides her own look, considering hair and make-up, she does not self-present as stereotypically feminine. Indeed, in her demeanour, she even relies more on characteristics that are associated with masculinity. Her digital home as well, does not look like an intimate space for light girl talk, as we've seen with Blonde. At first glance then, Lokteff does not seem to use femininity to cloud her rhetoric, but she hints at the opposite in a speech from 2017: "Since we aren't physically intimidating, we can get away with saying big things" (Lokteff, 2017).

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the results of the analysis will be discussed in relation to the research question: *to what extent and how do women in the far right use stereotypical femininity to spread far-right ideas in videos online?* The analysis provides a complex picture of their use of stereotypical femininity, outlined through three core findings that this thesis puts forward below.

Femininity as a strategy

The first finding discussed here concerns the strategic use of a stereotypical appearance by women in the far right.

The analysis of the first dimension showed that both women look very much alike. They both stylised themselves in line with stereotypical femininity and by combining their visuals and rhetoric, created categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ based on looks. This way they put themselves up as ‘good’ as opposed to others while simultaneously promoting a White female beauty ideal. From the comments we learn that their self-presentation is appreciated by viewers. It can attract men, but it can also be an example for young girls or other women looking for a role model (Campion, 2020). Their looks are the result of effort, and they are aware of the effect. Blonde says in one of her videos: “When there are a bunch of normal-looking, well-spoken, married women involved it's much more difficult to convince the general public that only friendless isolated basement-dwelling Lou would associate with the dissonant right” (Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, 2019). And Lokteff too stated that because of women’s non-threatening look, they can get away with saying “big things” (Lokteff, 2017). These statements signal a consciousness of the effect of their femininity. This thesis thus argues that they stylise their look to trigger the expectations that come with them, including them not being dangerous or shedding a positive light on the movement.

This effect is based on stereotypes of women and femininity, and makes this discussion complicated. On the one hand, it is a fact that people have stereotypes, and stereotypical femininity is connected to certain characteristics. But on the other hand, this only exists through our associations, because it is a construct, like Butler (1988) argued. The looks of these women only have a certain effect because we have those stereotypes. These stereotypes are important to acknowledge, as they are also still prominent in scholarship (Schmidt, 2020; Sjoberg, 2020). By looking especially stereotypically feminine, the women in the far right can try to use the stereotypes that we have of women as non-violent and



peaceful to shield themselves and spread their ideology. This can work for recruitment of new members, but can also cloud judgements of scholars and policymakers. Through keeping up these stereotypes, and not critically examining them when writing about these women, we might even support them in their strategy.

In short, this thesis argues that women in the far right deliberately use a stereotypical feminine appearance to trigger the stereotypical expectations that are related to it, like women as non-violent, harmless and peaceful. It is important to keep this in mind when writing about women in the far right, because when these stereotypes are not questioned, scholarship and media could perpetuate them and that way maintain the effectiveness of their strategy.

The danger of underestimating femininity as a strategy

Where the previous finding addressed their appearance, this finding concerns the diverse strategies based on traits women use and the possible underestimation of the role of women.

The articles addressed in the literature review mentioned women as broadcasters, strategies and a soft introduction, arguing that women normalise and mainstream the far-right ideology. This assumes a univocal view of women's self-presentation using femininity. However, the analysis of the second and third dimension of stereotypical femininity showed that both women approach the spread of the far-right ideology very differently.

The video by Blonde in the Belly of the Beast shows strategies that strongly rely on stereotypically feminine traits. She creates an intimate atmosphere in her video and connects to her audience through being vulnerable and showing emotions and insecurity. Furthermore, she talks about gender relations, which comes off as relatively harmless as it is generally seen as a 'private' issue (Ebner & Davey, 2018; Mattheis, 2018). The atmosphere she creates by using these traits and that content is 'soft' or seems harmless. However, this again is based on the associations we have with these traits. She gives advice in a soft-spoken manner, where is the harm in that? This is possibly the reason women are named to be effective in 'normalising' the far right ideology.

The video by Lana Lokteff shows an overall different approach, as the design and visuals of her video create a dark and ominous atmosphere, and her content and lexical choices more strongly align to stereotypical masculinity than they do to femininity. It goes beyond the scope of this thesis, but it could be interesting to see if this difference in characteristics is the reason that Lana Lokteff was removed from YouTube, while Blonde is still active. Both these women share far-right rhetoric, of which the core, if we follow Mudde



(2019), is ‘anti-system’ and ‘hostile to liberal democracy’. This way, the ideas that they spread using whatever strategy, are harmful to individuals and society as a whole.

This thesis thus argues that there is no univocal self-presentation of women. Labels for this group as a whole are thus inaccurate, as women align to stereotypical femininity to significantly different extents. The analysis of their ‘traits’ showed that generic labelling of women as a ‘soft introduction’ for example, is also not accurate. This means closer attention is needed to the individual strategies of women within the far right. It may be useful to differentiate between women and feminine characteristics.

Furthermore, when women are called an ‘introduction’, ‘strategy’ or even more explicitly an ‘auxiliary’, this implies that their role is not as important as others. However, is that based on their femininity, or on their actual role? Would men spreading the ideology also be named an auxiliary? Schmidt (2020) argues this is not true, and that these roles would be assessed as threats when they would be fulfilled by men. Characterising the role of women this way then runs the risk of rendering them less important, especially in a world and field still largely dominated by men and thus overlooking other perspectives or actors (Tickner & Sjoberg, p.185)

This thesis follows Schmidt (2020) and De Leede (2020) in arguing that we overlook women and their critical role when we base our assessment of them on stereotypes and if we only focus on “frontline attackers”. Strick (2020) furthermore argues that online networks need to be taken more seriously, as they have important connections with other, offline movements. He points out that this movement “may operate online, but nonetheless shapes real-world perceptions, actions and feelings with ever-growing influence” (p.228). If this is true, women play a central, not auxiliary, role within the far-right movement. This is even argued by Lana Lokteff herself, when she said that she says “big things” and when she stated: “when women get involved, a movement becomes a serious threat” (Lokteff, 2017).

If we want to counter the spread of these ideas, we need to focus on the methods used and not only in the attacks that result from it. When we underestimate stereotypical femininity, we underestimate the role women play and if we want to take the ideas more seriously, we should take the people that share the ideas more seriously. Perhaps, we should even take women (or others) using feminine characteristics more seriously, because using stereotypes may create a more unobtrusive way of sharing the rhetoric.



In short, this thesis thus argues that we need to take feminine characteristics more seriously. Furthermore, the words used for the role of women in the far right do not cover their diverse strategies and substantial importance to the movement.

Influencer as a new role

As the discussion of the previous findings showed, these women's appearances are very important. This arguably signals the importance of their presence on social media, as visuals are a central feature here. If the spread of far-right ideology is to be taken more seriously, so is the presence of women in these videos. In this regard, the analysis of the second dimension, traditional gender role ideology, provided a noteworthy insight.

In both videos the nuclear family is presented as an ideal to strive for, and in Blonde's videos the traditional gender role ideology is promoted explicitly. However, in both videos it is not performed visually. Indeed, the fact that they make videos at all, especially about these subjects, is something that is not in line with the traditional view on the role of women. This way, they do not at all align with this dimension of stereotypical femininity. This is interesting, as they practice differently from what they preach, but that does not keep their viewers from watching. Perhaps with these videos, women have carved out a new (visible) role or place for themselves.

It could also be that the way they flexibly interpret this dimension of the ideology makes it especially effective. It provides other women, who could potentially be recruited, with a vision of a role for themselves in the movement (Campion, 2020). Mattheis argues "social media and contemporary online platforms, including blogging, online radio, and vlogging, allow women to connect in virtual public space while they remain in the private sphere at home" (2018, p.153). This way, they might actually use femininity and the traditional gender role. They can simultaneously contribute to producing and reproducing a certain White feminine beauty ideal (Caldeira, De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2018), while the fact that they make these videos and how they do this can change the possibilities of women to participate in the far-right movement. Caldeira, De Ridder & Van Bauwel (2018) even argue that the "simple visibility of women's self-representation" on social media platforms can be seen as a form of "everyday activism" (p.31), even though in their content they reify traditional gender stereotypes and roles. While making these videos is showing agency, which is stereotypically connected to masculinity, the fact that they make these videos as a



woman is a way to use their womanhood within a male-dominated movement, to diversify its image and perhaps mainstream it.

In short then, on the one hand they do not use femininity explicitly, but on the other hand they do. These women could therefore be seen as a recruitment ‘strategy’ or ‘broadcaster’, although they also make an active choice to show agency and produce their own following. This complicates a simple answer to the research question.



Conclusion

This thesis aimed to give insight into the self-presentation of women in the far right, and specifically how they use stereotypical femininity to spread the far-right ideology in their videos. A multimodal critical discourse analysis has shown that the answer to this question is complex, especially because of the discrepancy between textual and visual elements and the difference between the two women analysed. This thesis argues that stereotypes around femininity are central to their strategies, but are not used in the same way by both women. Any straight-away answer would thus be inaccurate. However, the analysis did reveal several ways that the women use stereotypical femininity. Three findings specifically were highlighted that shed light on the question and the literature on women in the far right to date.

Firstly, the women use their stereotypically feminine appearance to both promote a White female beauty ideal to frame themselves as good and to trigger stereotypes that could shield their rhetoric, make them seem harmless and risks viewers to overlook the danger of their ideology. Secondly, the diverse alignment with feminine traits questions a singular narrative in literature arguing that women normalise or soften the far-right ideology. On the one hand, women use feminine characteristics, but on the other hand they defy this stereotypical femininity by using traits that are generally associated with masculinity. Furthermore, the words used in literature to date to describe women in the far right imply they only play an auxiliary role and label spreading the ideology as ‘supportive’. This thesis argues that this does not accurately reflect the importance of their role and that this reflection is based on stereotypes of women. The third and last finding that this thesis highlights, is the fact that both women preach a domestic role for women, but do not align to this themselves. On the one hand, the act of posting videos on social and political themes defies stereotypical femininity. On the other hand, it may be especially effective when women do this, as it could appeal to other women. The role of ‘influencer’ could be a new way in which women are navigating the far right movement which is generally male-dominated and often misogynistic.

The above findings signal the importance of questioning the words we use to describe a phenomenon. As poststructuralism argues, words have meaning and bring into existence a certain reality. Because the numbers of women in the far right are increasing, it is important that scholarship pays attention to women and their important role within the far right. Meanwhile however, it should consider the way that it does to ensure that they do not perpetuate stereotypes. Because, not seeing these women as having a central role prevents us from tackling the problem at the root.



In short, on the one hand, we need to take women and (stereotypical) femininity more seriously, as it is effective, and at the same time we need to be highly critical of reifying stereotypes. It is arguably better to talk about feminine characteristics, or even strip that from each other and talk about the actual methods these women use. But it is difficult, as their methods work *because* we have stereotypes.

It has to be acknowledged that this research is limited, so cannot by itself provide evidence for any phenomenon. But it can be situated in the larger debate started by feminist scholars to take women's contributions more seriously and to critically question (unconscious) gendered concepts and language. As said by feminist scholars for a long time, we cannot count on a simple categorisation of men and women, and following poststructural scholars, we cannot count on a certain dichotomy that matches that binary. When we do this, we simplify the complicated picture that was uncovered through the thorough analysis of the performance of these women. Furthermore, this thesis also showed that without either the visuals or the content, these videos cannot be accurately described. While MCDA is only one method to analyse the strategies of women online, it has proven especially effective, showing that visuals play a central role in the strategies of these women. By using multimodal critical discourse analysis, a more complete picture of the methods of these women was provided.

This thesis suggests several directions for further research. It could be useful to broaden this research and include more cases to see if this shows the same results. Furthermore, it could be interesting to include women from other countries to see how the strategies of women perhaps differ across borders and how they relate to each other, especially now that the far right is increasingly internationalised. This is also important because this thesis has taken an explicitly western stereotypical idea of femininity, and it is vital to not automatically generalise this, but to see what other strategies are used elsewhere. Thirdly, this thesis suggests research into comparing women and men in their strategies online, to see if they actually differ or if men perhaps also use strategies that mirror those used by women. Lastly, in further research it would be fruitful to look into the arguably changing roles of women within the far right, as they seem to be carving out one for themselves online. This is especially relevant because social media is essential for the far right in their spread of the ideology.



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