Alt-Education: Gender, language, and education across the right

Catherine Tebaldi
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2

Part of the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons, Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons, Linguistic Anthropology Commons, Social Justice Commons, and the Social Media Commons

Recommended Citation
Tebaldi, Catherine, "Alt-Education: Gender, language, and education across the right" (2022). Doctoral Dissertations. 2490.
https://doi.org/10.7275/27242519.0 https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2/2490

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
Alt-Education: Language, Education and Gender across the Right

A Dissertation Presented

by

CATHERINE TEBALDI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2022

College of Education
Alt-Education: Language, Education and Gender across the Right

A Dissertation Presented

By

CATHERINE TEBALDI

Approved as to style and content by:

Kysa Nygreen, Chair

Julie Hemment, Member

Lynnette Arnold, Member

Elizabeth Krause, Member

Sally Campbell-Silverman, Member

Ezekiel Kimball
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs
College of Education
Acknowledgements

Thank you to my chair, Kysa Nygreen, and to my committee, Julie Hemment, Sally Galman, Betsy Krause and Lynnette Arnold. Your support and expertise would make even the most red pilled conservative reconsider.

Special thanks to Alfonso Del Percio who made me too confident a scholar to be a trad.

Thanks to all the friends who supported me when the fachosphere was too much, with valuable insights, readings and friendship. Especially Justine Pierce, who scoped out the conservative teachers and discussed them with me, and Dr. Tara who was there in fieldwork. Rae Jereza, Christa Burdick, Jen Delfino, Katy Hight thank you for listening to me cry when I failed tradwifery or succeeded in semiotics, and thanks for helping me be a better person and scholar. You all are too cool.

Thank you to the cop who ran me over, as suing the police paid for some of this research. Thanks to all the men of left tinder who think tradwifery/male supremacy/social darwinism looks good after three beers, and to the few who didn’t thanks for the gin and tonic.

To the men who let me say some of my best friends are men- Brendan Rogak, Aaron Foote, Peter Browning also brought Percy Pigs. Thanks to Dolan Morgan for reading my stories, and the old NYU friend group still zooming during the pandemic even though we all hate screens.

And thanks to my family, to my dad for the support, my mom for the inspiration, my brother for the friendship. I love you.
I explore the ideologies of gender, language and education in conservative, Christian Nationalist, and White nationalist mothers groups. I draw on my own family history, as well as on two years of blended ethnographic research in online right wing communities and one year of fieldwork in New Orleans, Louisiana, to look at homeschooling, online schools, and public teachers’ social, linguistic, and educational practices -- what I call Alt-Education. Alt-education is of course a play on alt-right, and refers to the far-right ideology; but it also refers to an alternative to mainstream education, and to education through a broader range of materials and practices such as popular or media education. Alt-education is the ensemble of practices that conservative groups use to educate. It is who teaches, what is taught, how, and how education is discussed. It is how motherhood and femininity shape what is a good teacher. It is how female submission and white male heroism are transformed into facts, and how they are taught through creative and “natural pedagogy.” Last is the ideologies of education, the ways in which its value and practice are understood and used politically.

In the first findings chapter, I focus on gender: the ideology of womanhood as motherhood, and mother as natural teacher, and the ways these can link our everyday media use with the fringes of the far-right. Next, I explore education: their opposition between mother and school, and between natural pedagogy and socialist indoctrination. In the third and final findings chapter, I explore far-right curriculum: the world as god’s story, language as a battle for the beautiful, and men as history’s heroes. In between each chapter I include auto-ethnographic “anti-biographies” which draw on my multiple and shifting positionalities as a White woman who grew up with the same kind of alt-education I describe in this text. In the conclusion, I look at the ways in which this conceptual framework helps trace the mainstreaming of far-right ideas, and can be applied to research on misinformation that has become crucial to efforts from public education to public health. Finally, I call for more critical and thoughtful research on the right, one that avoids tropes of the ignorant slack jawed yokel or the wild eyed fundamentalist, and recognizes its intersections with the mainstream.
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction, Context  
1.1 Introduction ...................................................... 5  
   1.1.1 Why Alt Education ................................................ 7  
   1.1.2 Structure of the Dissertation ..................................... 7  
1.2 Context .......................................................... 9  
   1.2.1 New Orleans ...................................................... 11  
   1.2.2 Far-Right Online ................................................ 11  
   1.2.3 Historical Context ................................................. 14  

Chapter 2: Literature, Theory, Methods  
2.1 Literature Review .................................................. 20  
   2.1.1 Femininity ......................................................... 21  
   2.1.2 The White Right .................................................. 26  
   2.1.3 Media and Public Pedagogy ....................................... 30  
2.2 Theoretical Framework: Ideology and Ideological Effects ............... 35  
2.3 Methods  
   2.3.1 Methodological Frame ............................................. 40  
   2.3.2 Research Questions ............................................... 43  
   2.3.3 Study Procedures ................................................ 44  

Anti- Biography 1: Into the right ........................................ 49  

Chapter 3: Gender, Media, Mainstreaming 52  
3.1 Gender ............................................................. 52  
3.2 Mainstreaming .................................................... 55  
3.3 Media ............................................................... 60  

Anti- Biography 2 ....................................................... 79  

Chapter 4: Alt-Education  
4.1 Alt-Education ........................................................ 82  
4.2 Moms vs Schools .................................................... 87  
4.3 Education vs Schooling ............................................. 91  

Anti- Biography 3 .......................................................... 102  

Chapter 5: Reading the Race’s Story  
5.1 Conservative curricula ................................................. 105  
5.2 Reading the Story You’re in: Ideologies of Language and Education ...... 109  
5.3 God is a Man ......................................................... 118  
5.4 Hermeneutics of Transgression ....................................... 120  

Anti- Biography 4 .......................................................... 124  

Chapter 6: Conclusions .................................................. 126  

Appendixes  
1 Tables of Observations and Data ....................................... 140  
2 Interview and Survey Questions ....................................... 145  

References .............................................................. 147
Chapter 1: Introduction, Context

1.1 Introduction

In my first semester of graduate school I was required to take a course called introduction to research, which did what it said. In one of the first courses, the senior professor in the department taught the difference between theoretical orientations, frameworks and methodologies by drawing a series of umbrellas on the board. The largest, at the top, was labeled Orientation (positivist/constructivist), underneath a medium sized umbrella was labelled framework (post-structuralism, CRT) and under this was a smaller umbrella labelled methods (qual/quant), underneath this hierarchy of umbrellas lay our research questions and design.

I was mystified, why were there umbrellas? She explained that the first authority, the first choice you made was which vision of the world you belonged to - the positivists or the constructivist - and then within that, you chose your group, post structuralists, the critical race theorists, and then your methods.
It was only later, conducting this research, that I realized that this framework was drawn from fundamentalist Christianity’s umbrellas of authority - also known as the “natural order” of the family. Popularized by proponent of biblical patriarchy and homeschooling Bill Gothard, in this system the biggest umbrella is god, then man, then woman, then child. This expresses the dictum that women should love their husbands the way their husbands love god. Their idea is that life exists in a hierarchy, there is no natural equality between men and women any more than there is between man and god. In some fundamentalist churches, it also expresses the idea of being “under authority,” the umbrella expressing the protection that comes from submission and obedience to who is above you — and the suffering if you do not.

So what was this submission umbrella doing in my research methods class? In a university once called UMarx, teaching CRT and the stuff of conservative moral panics to at least one dirty socialist? A public university in a blue state, my class should have been a left educational space. At least that’s what Breitbart and Limbaugh would say.

So what was a Jesus umbrella doing in my nice education course? This wasn’t just borrowing an image; it was a trace of biblical gender roles. The professor was using ideals of gendered submission to help explain authority and belonging in research. Gender was there to help illustrate and make hierarchy comprehensible. Just like a child was under the authority of a mother, you were under the authority of constructivism. You would be saved as long as you used qualitative methods and a post-structuralist frame. This trace of feminine submission might echo with other elements within education; the gendered hierarchies of school organization, the vision of teaching as a calling, a kind of care work, an “other-mothering.”

And why didn’t I know what this meant? Far-right femininity is everywhere, but it is not often obvious. The right’s constant demonization of teachers and public schools, for example, obscures the conservatism of much of teacher education. Our idea of a good teacher is so deeply bound up in gendered ideals of good -that is, white - motherhood. One of the aims of this research is to explore the ways in which conservative gender ideals shape their vision of education, in order to illuminate these same ideologies within the mainstream. A second, more theoretical, is to trace tendrils of far right femininity from the mainstream to their boldest expression in the far right.

In this dissertation, I explore how the stuff of far-right femininity has threads in the most unlikely places - some subtle, some sexy, some beloved, some banal - and how these are wound together, naturalized, and invested with meaning in right wing women’s discourses. I look at their surprising connections with educational research and practice, and the ways these form a new kind of alt-education that is gaining increasing currency across the right.
1.1.1 What is Alt-Education, and why does it matter?

Alt-education is of course a play on alt-right, and refers to the far-right ideology; but it also refers to an alternative to mainstream education, and to education through to a broader range of materials and practices such as popular or media education, Alt-education is the ensemble of practices that conservative groups use to educate. It is who teaches, what is taught, how, and how education is discussed. It is how motherhood and femininity shape what is a good teacher. It is how female submission and white male heroism are transformed into facts, and how they are taught through creative and “natural pedagogy.” Last is the ideologies of education, the ways in which its value and practice are understood and used politically.

Alt-education is important especially because discourses of motherhood and education are central to right and far-right politics. They frame schools as marxist indoctrination centers, ripping children away from their natural teachers, mom. Yet this vocal opposition to public schools is ideologically important, it hides a deep commitment to, and careful practice of, education on the right.

Alt-education then is more than just homeschool curriculum, although it is that, but can also incorporate far-right propaganda, YouTube videos or cooking with your mother. This broad spectrum view of education draws on research in critical pedagogy and cultural studies, which extends education beyond the classroom to media and social life.

This framing of right wing media and politics as a kind of education matters, because it helps denaturalize the right and some of our assumptions about them. First, focusing on right wing media and ideology as an educational practice we challenge visions of the right as school-hating fundamentalists, ignorant slack jawed yokels, In fact, Aho (1999) showed that the most common major in the far-right groups he studied was education!

Framing the right as educating, also asks us to question its distance from mainstream liberalism, the belief that the right is on the intellectual fringe or the depths of the backwoods. This vision of far right ignorance also makes conservatism seem innate, natural. By seeing right wing ideologies as taught, transmitted and normalized through a series of sophisticated intellectual processes - we understand that these ideologies are not natural, but naturalized.

1.1.2 Structure of the Dissertation

In the rest of this chapter, I locate these women who teach and advocate for far right education within the social and historical context of this research. I first review the history of far right women activists; showing how right-wing activism has long used an opposition between natural mothers and evil public schools. I then explore the contemporary social context of my two research sites; New Orleans and the growing world of online popular education.
In the second chapter, I review the literature, theoretical framework, and methods for this dissertation (without any Jesus umbrellas). I review three bodies of literature I use to help understand alt-education: traditional femininity, the white right, and media and metapolitics. The theoretical framework defines my understandings of ideology, drawing on Gramsci and Stuart hall, drawing in particular on the latter’s analysis of women and conservative ideology in *The Hard Road to Renewal* and the analytical concepts I use: differentiation, circulation, normalization and naturalization. In the methods section, I explain the blended ethnographic methods I developed and the ways in which online and off-line research inform each other. I detail study procedures, participants, and limitations, but also my ethical considerations and my relationship to this research as a white woman from a conservative background.

In the first findings chapter, I focus on the gender ideologies across the three groups studied: populist public school teachers, Christian conservative homeschool moms, and white nationalist women online. I begin with their ideology of womanhood as motherhood, and mother as natural teacher. In the second part of the chapter I explore the ways in which this ideology is normalized and transmitted in social media with a close study of right-wing instagram. I look at both the visual styles which can feminize and normalize far-right content, and the themes and “rabbit holes” which can link our everyday media use with the fringes of the right.

In the second findings chapter, I explore the educational ideologies across these three groups. In particular I focus on two core dramatic oppositions and narratives: the opposition between mother and school, and between natural pedagogy and socialist indoctrination. I present my findings with two ethnographic fictions (Ghodsee 2011) which condense multiple participants' stories into a single narrative, and then unpack the themes with data from interviews and media analysis. I then explore the ways anti-education discourses are deployed by conservatives, and conclude with an analysis of the ways themes and practices circulate between left and right wing education.

In the third and final findings chapter, I explore the language ideologies present in far-right curriculum: the world as god’s story, language as a battle for the beautiful, and men as history’s heroes. I draw on six homeschool curricula, two from each of the groups, as well as a study of far right media as popular education. In this chapter I look more deeply not only into what the right teaches, how they understand what knowledge is supposed to be and what it is supposed to do.

After each of the chapters, I include auto-ethnographic “anti-biographies” (Reed-Danahay 2009). These draw on my multiple and shifting positionalities as a White woman, the daughter of a far-right mom, and a researcher questioning her own femininity. I grew up with the same kind of alt-education I describe in this text. This writing is designed to provide a more intimate, visceral sense of “what it's like” to get a right wing education: the shocking provocation and embarrassment, the full throated and cringey patriotism, the romance and idealism of their media. While the findings draw on ethnographic
research to analyze broader patterns in right wing discourse and ideology, these sections complement them with highly personal reflections - my own angry brain within these spaces. I include four moments: my arrival in New Orleans, attending a Tea Party Christmas party, my own Christmas at home, and the feeling of leaving the city. These sections focus on entanglements - between southern racism and northern liberal racism, my own life and my research subjects. They center vivid and personal descriptions, rather than analytic writing, to show the researcher as affective and affected - closeness, discomfort, distress, or anger not only give a sense of immediacy, but also to call into question the role of the objective researcher of the right who catalogues them like artifacts, or who, like Indiana Jones, flies in to defeat the Nazis.

In the conclusion, I trace what I hope are the major theoretical and practical contributions of this work. I look at the ways in which this conceptual framework helps trace the mainstreaming of far-right ideas, and how research on alt-education can be applied to further research on misinformation that has become crucial to efforts from public education to public health. Finally, I call for more critical and thoughtful research on the right, one that avoids tropes of the ignorant slack jawed yokel or the wild eyed fundamentalist, and recognizes its intersections with the mainstream.

### 1.2 Context

Bre Faucheux is a former fantasy author and the host of alt-right 101, an educational video series about the far right for YouTube. With a rasping voice that sounds like powdered sugar, she tells the audience the importance of women who “add value again” for men, virginal pure girls that make them feel like heroes, and soft mothers who raise strong men. Her hands flutter as she begins a tirade against feminism, her face softens and stretches in grimaces of agreement and appreciation as her onscreen partner Marc Collett explains the finer points of Fascism.

In Bre, both traditional femininity and alternative education come together, in the form of a South Louisiana belle. The New Orleans native has long reddish hair and fair skin, wearing a medieval inspired necklace and bright pink lips and nails. White Southern women are known for being the most socially conservative (Maxwell 2019) and having the smallest voting gap between them and men. Bre is this, but more so, with a voice like a beignet.

#### 1.2.1 New Orleans

New Orleans is a racially diverse city with predominantly white and conservative suburbs, a division that reflects racialized landscapes in other parts of the United States. Of those suburbs, I focused on Metairie, the largest nearby suburb, which is middle and upper income, and Kenner, suburb to the west of Metairie which has an industrial downtown as well as wealthy new subdivisions. Both of these suburbs voted heavily republican in 2016 and in the 2019 special election.
Landscapes in New Orleans are shaped by the history of slavery and present racism. Plantation history is interwoven in conservative ideologies as well, visions of land ownership and liberty as the right to own human property (Maclean 2017); as one of my respondents noted, early plantation owners supported slave patrols and today we support police. This entanglement is also literal. While New Orleans’ monuments to the white supremacy have been recently removed (watching the sun set on the empty Robert E Lee memorial is lovely) the names of cities, parishes, and streets still reflect this legacy. To the west of New Orleans is a parish named Jefferson Davis. The suburb of Kenner, like many others here, is named for a family of slave owners. Residents of New Orleans casually refer to “Jeff Davis” highway, or Lee circle.

I chose fieldwork in New Orleans because it is a mixed, urban area in a state frequently imagined to be full of rednecks and swamps. Although it is in one of the “reddest” states in the nation, the governor is a conservative Democrat, John Bel Edwards, who supported medicaid expansion but not abortion rights or a strong social safety net. That said, the state is strongly conservative. Louisiana is a right to work (anti-union) state with minimum wages in the service industry of under 3 dollars. Only one congressman is a Democrat, Cedric Richmond, and the rest are Republicans known for their strongly conservative views, such as their very vocal opposition to LGBT marriage, and to the 2019 equality act that prohibits gender and sex discrimination. Similarly, at the state level representatives are very socially conservative. In a 2017 courts ruled the governor could not enforce anti-discrimination ordinances against sexual orientation and gender identity, and in 2019 Louisiana passed its 89th abortion restriction law banning it in almost all cases.

People who describe themselves as southerners are more likely to strongly or very strongly identify as white (Maxwell 2019), have an extremely positive view of white people (ibid) and to have high scores of racial resentment (ibid). Religious white southerners are also the most likely to report a belief in “reverse discrimination” that whites are discriminated against, a key element of white identity politics (Jardina 2019). Finally, they have the highest scores on measures of modern sexism, or resentment of women for transgressing normative gender roles (Maxwell 2019)

Gender norms, and ideal southern “magnolia” who is apolitical, domestic and submissive to men, who protect and cherish her, are held to by women as well as men. Southern white women are significantly more conservative than women nationally, express higher levels of sexism and express belief in traditional gender roles (Maxwell 2019). While in other geographical areas a gender gap persists with more women voting democrat, southern white women are as conservative as men. In fact, when sex is central, as in opposition to abortion and gay marriage, they have the most conservative views of any group - even southern white men. Interestingly, unlike all other groups, their level of conservatism does not change with education.
New Orleans Schools

New Orleans schools are well known for being replaced by charters in 2005, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In this dissertation, I do not look directly at neoliberalism and charters but consider this as one element in the broader “conservative restoration” (Apple 2006) in public schools which unites neoliberalism, conservatism, and authoritarian populism. Following Apple and Melinda Cooper (2016), I see this neoliberalization as intimately linked to the promotion of socially conservative values.

In addition to charters, educational reforms provide vouchers for private schools and greater freedom for homeschoolers. In 2014, 92 percent of New Orleans’ students attended public charters. Since 2012, any student at a “failing” public school can also receive a voucher for a private school. In suburbs like Metairie and Kenner, there are public schools and private schools which are most often catholic, as well as a few charter or magnet schools. In many of the surrounding parishes, like St. Tammany, towns have one public school and one catholic school.

The present take-up of charters and vouchers for religious or homeschooling networks also reflects the history of opposition to integrated public schools in Louisiana. In 1960, Ruby Bridges and three other elementary school children were the first to integrate schools in the working class 9th ward. The integration of schools initially provoked massive resistance (Lassiter xx, Benowitz xx). Forces from the mainstream, such as the Times Picayune newspaper, to the far right white citizens council, supported protests; mothers were organized in gangs of “cheerleaders” to block the entrance of desegregating schools (Weider 1987). Massive resistance gave way to white flight into suburbs such as Metairie and Kenner, and to the creation of segregation academies — private schools also known as “choice schools” which offered affordable private schooling to white students whose families did not support integration. In New Orleans and Southeast Louisiana many of these were Catholic schools.

Many of the homeschooling programs and blended schools like those that I study reflect a growing trend within conservative and religious education away from public schools and towards homeschooling (Kunzman 2009). Some of this is motivated by Christian Reconstructionist doctrine’s shift towards homeschool (Ingersoll 2016), by changing economic conditions and rising costs of private education, or by the growing sophistication, flexibility, and creativity of home and alternative education programs. Louisiana also offers several blended home-school programs including the possibility to register your home as a private school, enrolling in virtual charters (one of which I studied), or enrolling in a state sponsored home study program, where students receive a high school diploma and are eligible for scholarships to state universities.

1.2.2 Online

Despite popular images of gamers and basement dwelling neckbeards surviving on Mountain Dew and hot Cheetos, women are central to the contemporary digital right. Women are images of pure
femininity in thrall to vicious social engineers, porn for white male resentment. They are nazi barbies who make racism and misogyny attractive, but also activist educators who normalize, circulate, and teach.

The digital right is an evolving network of white and male supremacist sites (see chart in place), across which a vocabulary, ideas, and media circulate. They see themselves as engaged in metapolitics, or the battle to change culture in order to win power. The alt right is sometimes characterized as rightist group that differs from mainstream republicans, who they call cucks or “cuckservatives”, because they have explicit white supremacy (Hawley 2017). The alt-light, on the other hand, focus on gender essentialism and a more covert racism, or white identity politics that is often used to recruit or “redpill” (Minna Stern 2019). Feeding into the alt light are a series of groups: the Manosphere, a group of women haters; Intellectual Dark Web, a group of racist and sexist evolutionary psychologists; and the antifeminist #trad or traditional wives, and others. They reach out to gamers, libertarians, Christians and others with a “red pill” of truth, a “white pill” of happiness, a “black pill” of despair, or a “god pill” of conversion (see Kutner 2021 for an elaboration of these terms and her own “glitterpill” of happy leftism).

The first far right website was the Neo-Nazi site Stormfront, founded by a former KKK member in 1995 (Berlet 2008). At that time, the websites served to draw in isolated movement participants and build community (Caren, Jowers, Gaby 2012). Today social media allows for these ideas to reach a much wider audience, permitting greater circulation and demarginalization. Far right messages now reach beyond websites like stormfront, and without explicit neo-nazi connection, can attract a wider white population (Winter 2019). Between 2014-2015 white nationalist sites grew from 1,500 to 11,500, and a 600 percent increase on twitter (Reitman 2018, in Winter 2019). The number of less extreme right sites, that advocate male supremacy or traditional gender, are even higher. Squire (2019) found 700,024 members of 1,843 right wing facebook groups. Among these were 180,000 members of neoconfederates, 30% of which are women, and 100 thousand members of alt-light/right groups, 13 thousand of which are #trad women. Youtube reaches an even bigger audience; the alt light Stefan Molyneux had over 900 thousand subscribers before his ban, Lauren southern 680,000 and Red ice has more than 300,000. Red pills reach a lot more people than swastikas.

Women, Men and the Biological Binary

As the name “manosphere” suggests, recent work in communication and media studies has seen white masculinity as central to community and identity on the digital right (Braithwaite 2016, Kelly 2017, Blogett & Salter 2018, Condis 2018, Ging 2020). Often these discourses revalorize traditionalist ideas of manhood as independence and strength (Kelly 2017), the cowboy or soldier. In Geek Masculinity (Braithwaite 2018) these traits are reframed through references to video games or computers, from soldier to player in call of duty. Gamer’s language and trolling emphasizes masculinity as humor and aggressive dominance (Condis 2018); but also a vision of maleness as heroic friendship (Schmidt 2020). The alt-light
uses evolutionary psychology to paint masculinity as polygamous hypersexuality (Minna-Stern 2019). Their reactionary academic wing the Intellectual Dark Web, praises men’s superior rationality (Doody 2020) and offers evolutionary explanations for white male genius\(^1\) (Pinker, February 2005). Apparently, white men should enjoy violent domination because they are a band of hilarious cowboy sex geniuses.

In the networked misogyny (Blogett & Salter 2018) of the alt-light and the manosphere, white masculine power is imagined in opposition to femininity and threatened by feminism. Minna Stern (2019) explained the alt-light’s first “red pill” is the biological binary, a belief in essential gender differences. Using evolutionary psychology and old fashioned misogyny, the alt light frames women as naturally hypergamous and as sexual gatekeepers, waiting to submit to a masterful alpha male. This sexual vision appeals to, and informs, an aggrieved masculinity that sees men as betrayed by women (Kimmel xx). Condis (2018) showed how gamer masculinity relied on a binary opposition of male players and female playthings, which was threatened by girl gamers and feminism. Ging (2020) explored geek “beta masculinity,” a romantic resentment politics which uses tropes of the jock and geek, the “chad and the virgin” to construct them as the victims of hypergamous women. Members of the manosphere blame feminism for social changes, suggesting that men are today’s true oppressed, as Kelly (2017) notes:

“Nostalgia for a mythic past of fixed gender dynamics and racial homogeneity is an important underlying tenet of popular social conservatism, but alt-right discourse brings this imagery to the unmissable foreground, while fusing such nostalgia with an explicit rhetoric of victimhood and betrayal. “ (73).

These discourses may express alienation, but they also legitimate antifeminism and make aggressive masculinity more natural, rebellious, and sexy.

To these Xbox heroes and gods with dad bods, who feel they lack the social and sexual power of the past, the women of the right offer a compelling vision of traditional marriage. Women’s only sites are called “wheat fields,” named for a description of an ideal ethnostate as a blonde woman in a field of wheat, and their members are #tradwives (Squire 2019). Women in these #tradwife circles emphasize traditional gender roles and the female side of the biological binary. Women present themselves as only truly fulfilled by the love of an alpha male, our purpose to love honor and obey. Emphasis on the latter. Most trad women have smaller subscriber counts than male media creators (from about 130 thousand to 5 thousand), but they play an important role in attracting new members (Minna-stern 2019), and building intimacy, and normalizing the movement (Maly 2020).

Alt-light women link the mainstream and the extreme. They build on mainstream ideologies of motherhood, to create alt-maternalism (Mattheis 2017) they engage in a revalorization of men that builds off neoconservative’s capitalist, jingoistic, visions of manhood (Kelly 2017). They use a gender binary to

\(^1\) [NOTE_LABEL] https://newrepublic.com/article/68044/sex-ed
attract members with promises of sexual success; they then use this sexist evolutionary biology as a gateway first to the virulent anti-feminism of the alt-light, and then to race science and white nationalism (Minna-Stern 2019). Traditional femininity is a gateway drug. It builds off a gender binary that is a core part of social conservatism, enshrined in everything from the Southern Baptist convention to the Wal-Mart toy aisle. Though often coded as tradition and family values, this is the insistence on patriarchy and male dominance, nostalgia not for childhood but for a white nation.

1.2.3. Historical Context: Conservative Women in Education and Activism

Conservatives care much more about education than educational research does about conservatism. While many educators and researchers assume that conservatism in schools is the result of cultural biases and institutional habits that value tradition, Laats (2015) explains, educational conservatism is an ideology that is fiercely fought for — often by women and mothers. This section traces the contours of educational conservatism, at how far right and conservative right ideals work together in anti-schooling discourses, and how women activists used family and femininity to resist progressivism, communism, and integration.

Educational conservatism (Laats 2015) or traditionalism in education is an evolving ideology. Most traditionalist visions center on the belief that traditional methods of teaching are necessary for family and national stability. They often suggest that the role of education is similar to that of the family, to instill patriotism, religiosity, and respect for authority. Conservative educators often see themselves in opposition to progressive education, and this educational ideology is developed and renewed through oppositional activism. Quite often, activists were women. Conservatives called on traditional women to “clean up” and restore order after educational crises.

To do this, women were conscripted both as activists and as symbols. Motherhood and family served as an alternative vision for education, and to soften and sugarcoat explicit opposition to racial and economic equality in public schools. Some of the first school reformers were the Daughters of the confederacy, who felt women were republican mothers, “charged with the crucial responsibility of training children to become patriotic, virtuous citizens” and whose own education was aimed to transmit the values of confederate culture (Cox 2003;122). Later conservative women’s clubs began to promote a maternal politics that framed women as community mothers and patriotic mothers of soldiers (Delgard 2011). Women were warned to guard against communism, which was believed to destroy the family by making women the collective property of the working classes. This anti-communist adaptation of racist rape myths saw womanhood as private property. Conservative women in the 20s pave the way for later capitalism and family.

Conservative activists used traditional gender roles to justify their activism. The Daughters of the
American Revolution supported an “Americanization program” that encouraged women to look out for subversive teachers and material, fight for housewife Populists (Nickerson 2012) and suburban warriors (McGirr 2001), and their mobilization of family to defend property from the welfare state.

Perhaps the most conservative among these was the newly formed Women’s Klu Klux Klan2. The Klan manufactured a narrative of educational crisis caused by immigration from Southern Europe (Gordon 2017) during the first Red Scare. It advocated public education for “one hundred percent Americanism”; federal schooling to preserve white anglo Saxon protestant America from catholics and anarchists and increase the cultural prestige of white protestant men (Feldman 2005). In response to this manufactured panic, women of the WKKK lead campaigns to improve school attendance and place “the altar of patriotism,” or flags and bibles in every classroom (Feldman 2005, Fox 2011). Not confined to the south, the WKKK attacked catholic teachers in Michigan (Fox 2011) and Indiana (Blee 2002); the Klan attacked French language and Catholic schooling from New England (Richard 2015) to the Cajun country of Southwest Louisiana (Brown 2006).

“Klu Klux theologians” (Laats 2015; 53) linked fundamentalist religion, patriotism, and white power to traditional education. At first, conservative activism focused on increased federal control of schools (private schools were for Catholics), introducing bills banning atheism in education; most famously in the Scopes Trial where a science teacher was accused of violating a Tennessee law prohibiting teaching evolution. However, in the 1930s and 40s public education became more democratic and “world-minded” (Nickerson 2012). The New Deal Government expanded education while anti-Nazi propaganda began to define Americanism as anti-racism; eastern colleges produced progressive textbooks that encouraged a pluralist, anti-racist vision of democracy (Laats 2015, Nickerson 2012). Conservatives, in response, took up a populist stance; they questioned progressivism as “elite” knowledge, and promoted a vision of democracy as upholding traditional values (Laats 2015). Somewhere between the backlash to the Scopes Monkey trial and the new deal, fundamentalist religion and anti government politics created a new right wing authoritarian populism (Apple 2006) that opposed government elites to families and religion.

A second educational crisis occurred along with the second red scare; for conservatives in the 1950’s sunbelt suburbs, progressive education was a Trojan horse for the socialist attack on capitalist Christian values. “Kitchen table activists” (McGirr 2001) and “housewife populists” (Nickerson 2012) used their identities as women and middle class mothers to fight against creeping communism. Mothers framed their activism in populist terms, arguing eastern elites attacked the family, challenged their role as mothers and control of their children's education. Women were tasked with opposing communist brainwashing.

2 The KKK in 1925 had about 5 million registered members nationwide. It was then considered a white fraternal organization, dedicated to white supremacy and brotherhood. It was also a fascist organization that acted with extreme violence to preserve racial, and sometimes gender, hierarchy. Perhaps it was the first white identity politics.
and elite indoctrination, defending patriotism, traditional values and teaching methods (Laats 2015). Pro America, a mainly female group in Pasadena California, fought for the “3 R’s.” In Houston, members of the anti-communist club the Minute Women joined the school board, vetted textbooks, and even conducted classroom observations (Nickerson 2012). Women understood themselves as “suburban warriors” against Communism, preserving family and property (McGirr 2001).

Far right activists played on parents’ mistrust of progressive educational change with a call for authoritarian classrooms and libertarian economics. If parents feared the elimination corporal punishment or report cards as loss of discipline, HUAC (House un-American Activities Committe) pamphlets reframed these changes as the first step to elimination of competition and imminent moral degeneracy, making kids fit only for a socialist society. Far right activists, such as Allen Zoll, targeted mothers with pamphlets titled They want your child (Laats 2015). Conservatives took this language but emphasized the value of discipline, hard work, and competition, to prepare students for the capitalist market and instill Christian values. The family became deeply tied to a capitalist vision of America; activists of the time argued that private property and the family rose or fell together (Nickerson 2012). This linking of traditional values and market competition defines conservative educational ideology. Family values meant private property, and property values —and the segregated schools that propped them up.

The 1954 Brown vs Board decision that outlawed segregation, sparked a huge rise in conservative activism - massive resistance in the south and “local control” and white flight across the country. Conservative women were central participants in massive resistance. Segregationist discourse often linked integration to miscegenation - this language gave women an even more central role. Southern mothers were responsible for upholding the segregated social order (McRae 2019). They educated children, transmitting southern tradition, culture, and racism; according to Lilian Smith they taught children like her “to love god, love our white skin, and believe in the sanctity of both” (Benowitz 2015;117). In these racist maternalist discourses, protecting segregation meant protecting white children - and especially white girls’ - safety and purity.

In Louisiana, white mothers known as “the cheerleaders” stood outside schools that were attempting desegregation. But support for segregation was not only southern or only far right; conservative suburbanites across the country resisted school integration under the auspices of tax hikes or lower property values (Nickerson 2012), explicit racism or with implicit reference to both “communism” and “federal interference” (Benowitz 2015; 116). Alabama Governor George Wallace did not only say “segregation forever” at the schoolhouse door, but also “they all hate black people...good god, the whole damn country is southern!” (Zwiers 2019;4).

If the populists of the 20s supported federal public schooling, George Wallace and the new authoritarian populists of the 1950-60s believed quite the opposite. Federal control became linked to
earlier fears of communist indoctrination. Massive resistance quickly gave way to private all-white schooling in segregation academies which were originally called “freedom of choice schools”. Economist Milton Friedman, who began to popularize the term “goverment schools” and the use of anti-monopoly arguments against public education (Maclean 2021) proposed voucher schemes to send children to private schools (1955), again under the rhetoric of parental control and choice. New right dog whistles opposed federal dominance and communist brainwashing to local control and parental choice - an opposition that grew stronger through the 1970s.

The 1970s saw the rise of the “Christian Right and resistance to gender equality and sexual education. Challenges to prayer in schools and a more feminist curriculum, inspired a movement towards Christian schools that preserved “traditional” gender identities. For conservative evangelicals, there was a divinely sanctioned gender hierarchy where the woman was submissive but symbolically central. This new right described Victorian era gender roles and hierarchies as god’s timeless truth, and created a family values agenda that dominated politics (Dowland 2015). Female submission was seen as a divine destiny, and women were at the centre of child rearing - something threatened by public schools that had grown increasingly distant, diverse, and secular (Gaithner 2009).

Some conservatives responded to these changes by fighting the public school curriculum. Mothers lead protests of sex education (Benowitz 2015) arguing it challenged their family values. In the Kanawha county strikes, both Christian families and coal miners boycotted schools to protest the new textbooks. They linked critiques of “dialectology” or incorrect language, and immoral texts, permissive teaching styles and evolution in a critique of the “humanist minority” who threatened Christian values (Laats 2015). Many evangelicals moved away from the public schools all together and towards private Christian schools. These were often not just segregation but sexism academies, that protected conservatives from 70s countercultural norms in clothing and social life. Academies advertised their traditional discipline and gender differences; “you can tell our girls and boys apart without a medical examination” declared one school (Dowland 2015; 232).

They fought for tax exemptions for segregated fundamentalist schools, framed defending from government attacks on Christian families (Dowland 2015). The new Christian Right ‘s family values linked libertarian economics and racial and social conservatism with a vision of the home as a natural, sacred, and private space. They saw the home, and education, as something to be protected from federal or secular interference (Gaithner 2009). In this they drew on earlier conservative anticommunism that linked opposition to government intervention with the family. Historian Michelle Nickerson explains the gendered links between anti-state politics and the nuclear family:

“Women thus gendered definitions of freedom that were becoming so central to the evolving concept of antistatism. Equating property rights with familial rights, [activists] drew on ideals of classical
liberalism to draw a boundary around the middle-class household, which they designated as sanctified space…Introducing government welfare institutions into this vision of the family, like introducing government regulation into the marketplace, corrupted it. Antistatism thus promoted a very hands-on approach to government control of leftist political expression in the interests of protecting a hands-off approach to the nuclear family” (Nickerson 2012:5) .

This link between social conservative legislation and neoliberal austerity will shape the ideologies of contemporary conservatism (Apple 2001, Cooper 2016)

The 1980’s education reformers saw “a nation at risk,” again manufacturing a crisis to reposition white men at the top of the educational hierarchy (cite this guy friends with Giroux wrote about back to basics forget his name). Cooper (2016) notes that neoliberal market values were also connected to traditionalist ideas of gender, as the lack of social welfare provisions depended on, and enforced, women taking on gendered roles as carers, mothers, and teachers. As schooling became more competitive and market driven, mothers and teachers were called on to reproduce the loving domestic sphere.

Michael Apple (2001) describes the era from the 1980s to the present as the Conservative Restoration in education, brought about a coalition of three groups: neoliberals, conservatives, and authoritarian populists. Neoliberals lead a charge for market based school reform that allowed conservatives to implement their own educational values: high stakes testing pushed traditional methods of drilling, discipline, and competition that conservatives had pushed since the 1950s; charters, vouchers and the language of choice supported the religious schooling desired by authoritarian populists; all three agreed on capitalist education, racial segregation, and the value of hierarchy in education.

Extending the segregationists’ opposition between federal control and parental choice, the new Christian Right also began to advocate Christian homeschooling. This moved in traditionalist, authoritarian populist and centered the mother as the children’s teacher (Hudnut Beumler 2018, Gaithner 2009). By 1980 20 states had legalized homeschooling, and by 1989 only 3 still outlawed it (CRHE responsiblehomeschooling.org). Today about 2 million students are homeschooled; 83 percent of these are white (NCES) and 75 percent are Christian (CRHE). 91 percent of these parents suggest the public school environment is bad, and 77 percent homeschool to provide a moral alternative (NCES). Paradoxically, the internet has made a more traditionalist education accessible, while emphasizing social divisions and fracture (Apple 2006). The growth of digital far-right media, then, has made for growing access to authoritarian populist homeschooling, along with gendered culture war discourses against public schooling.

The right used an opposition between the loving mother and the powerful state to naturalize, and soften their resistance to “paying for progressivism”. No longer a battle to exclude black students or preserve hierarchy, it was a battle between woman caring for her family and uncaring federal power.
Through these discourses, a figure of the traditional woman began to take form, as a pure girl who needed protecting from Black students, an independent domestic sphere that needed to be sheltered from the state, and a Mother who would cast aside her natural role in the home in order to defend it - becoming the Republican “grizzly mama” or the “viking shield maiden” of the Alt-right.

As women battled the state to assure their children’s education, far right and populist discourses intertwined with more mainstream conservatism. Through this a series of meanings were slowly added to the fight for Americanism in education. First, to a strictly racist and nativist charge, a challenge to progressivism was added; the 3R’s enlisted in the fight against communist indoctrination. Integration heightened populist challenges, linking federal education to communism, while the fundamentalist Right defied the fight against humanism and gender equality.

Today the digital far right can draw on these themes to assert apparently contradictory propositions. Schools are federally imposed communist indoctrination by radical feminists. Cultural marxists are stealing from your children to give to Black kids - or just flat out stealing your children. Federal social engineering is out to destroy gender, god, and the family. At the same time as they use digital media to oppose schooling, they also use it to educate. I call this virtual anti-progressivism reactionary education. In the next section I explore these discourses of reaction in the literature on the online right and right wing media.
Chapter 2: Literature, Theory, Methods

2.1 Literature review - Alt-Education

Apple (2006), in *Educating the Right Way* defines three major ideological threads within what he calls the conservative modernization in education. Conservatives, Authoritarian populists, and neoliberals. Conservatives are middle class professionals who seek to restore the canon to better prepare students for god and capital. Authoritarian populists often support home or religious schooling, and are also concerned with preserving fundamentalist religion and the patriarchal family from attack by secular public schools. Neoliberals, the dominant group within education reform see education as both preparation for the market and as a market itself; their focus on high stakes testing, data and tech driven reforms, charter schools, personalization and privatization; this movement has been well covered (ie Giroux 2002, Lipman 2011, Ball 2012, Savage 2017, Apple 2017, Hastings 2019), as have this ideology’s consequences for social, educational and racial justice (Nygreen 2017, 2019, O’Brien & Nygreen 2020).

However, if neoliberalism undermines grassroots organizing on the left, it has the opposite effect on the right. The conservative focus on market, god and discipline is well served by high stakes testing, while the neoliberal push for privatization is supported by home and religious educators as well (Apple 2015). Neoliberalism opens up space for an education which is deeply reactionary. Yet the conservative and authoritarian populist ideologies which are encouraged by these neoliberal reforms remain under explored.

Most studies of conservatives look at opposition to public schools; and while this is an important ideology, an exclusive focus on anti-schooling ignores how they actually educate. There are few studies of conservative education after Apple, and most focus on homeschooling as a movement (Detwiler 1999, Murphy 2012, Stanley 2012, Brown 2021). Far right studies and sociology tend to ignore education, while historians focus on opposition to teaching evolution (Binder & Wood 2012), sex ed (Benowitz 2015) or integration (Lassiter 2011), rather than looking at how religious and racist beliefs were taught, normalized, or circulated. This can frame the right as backwards, or anti-education fundamentalists, while also making conservative beliefs seem somehow natural.

Instead, I argue we can see the right engaging in a long project of *Alt-Education*. They do more than just homeschool; they draw on existing tropes of femininity and teaching as motherhood and powerful institutions for education and media. They are engaged in an ensemble of practices including homeschooling and alternative curricula, supplements to classroom lessons like the book *A Patriot’s history of the United States* and digital education in critical media literacy, alternative anthropologies,
historical revisionism. And of course, most often, the circulation of right wing ideological fragments or “red pills.”

The literature review that follows explores three key themes and bodies of literature I draw on to understand alt-education: first, it explores tropes of white womanhood from the Klan to the classroom; second, it gives a brief outline of recent literature on the “white right”; and last, it looks at right wing media as public pedagogy.

2.1.1 “Traditional” Femininity

Conservative women often refer to themselves as “traditionally feminine” framing embrace of postwar suburban gender roles as timeless femininity. Pearls and long hair, and hips and vacuum cleaners become signifiers of a biological or biblical woman. But femininity is an invented tradition (Hobsbaum & Ranger 2012). In this section I review anthropological and historical literature on white womanhood and then place this in conversation with literature on teacher education. A particular vision of womanhood was both mythologized and naturalized as biological truth. It was invented in opposition to men, but also to workers, and Blackness, and mythical femininity envelops and disguises relations of race and class

Through ideas of the good teacher which draw on femininity, these coded gender, racial and class norms are reproduced in education.

Traditional Femininity

Traditional femininity begins with the cult of true womanhood in the pre-Civil War South (Welter 1966). It emphasizes women’s difference from men, the woman was the “angel of the home” in a domestic sphere totally removed from politics, economic competition, and materialism. Her qualities included moral purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, in contrast to manliness and virility. This distinction was classed and racialized from the beginning. Domesticity and removal from the economic market were available only to the affluent, while distinct and gendered social identities were seen as a sign of racial superiority and an advanced civilization (Bederman 1995). The 1920’s KKK (Baker 2011) celebrated visions of patriotic white motherhood, a woman at whose knees children learned to love their nation, their god, and their race, and popularized this with romantic novels and films.

Biblical Gender naturalizes these different roles as part of women’s god given nature, and constructs traditional femininity as sacrificial motherhood (Jones 2009), selfless and submissive. Biblical gender celebrates the notion of male “headship” which says men are at the head of the family as in the church (Bjork James 2020).³ Her role is to value and canalize male energy into the stable home and family. Du Mez (2020) showed how religion has become intertwined with other cultural signifiers of gender,

³ (my ex once said it to me and I wanted to throw my zucchini at his face but instead I moved back to America and started this PhD)
celebrating a manly martial masculinity in contrast to a submissive, yet sexy femininity as biblical gender roles were reinforced through evangelical marriage and sex manuals. Biblical gender brings Victorian roles into the contemporary era.

Finally this vision of womanhood has been mythologized, the woman becomes a symbol of the nation. Farris (2017) explained how a white woman symbolized national purity and the national home, helping to bind people affectively to the nation and celebrating her as producing the next generation of men. This image undergirded early visions of the teacher as the “lady bountiful” a symbol of the new nation, a mother to her students who she would remake as Americans (Meiners 2002). This vision of the woman as a vessel of both physical and cultural reproduction remains part of both far right discourses (ie, the womb of the race) and mainstream anti-immigrant sentiment (Farris 2017).

Gender, class and whiteness

Historians and social scientists note the idea of true womanhood is white, yet whiteness often goes unspoken or unrecognized. Frankenberg (1993) in her study of white women’s identities noted few had any strong sense of racial identity and most saw it as neutral, comparing it to a bland food. Most lived in communities segregated by race and class, and saw it as an unspoken norm. Yet the southern belle at the heart of the cult of true womanhood was also white and upper middle class. Ferber (2017) noted white womanhood was constructed in relationship to blackness as well as masculinity, while Dorr (2004) saw the origin of white female purity in southern rape myths that went with lynchings. Bjork-James notes that family and gender norms are often used to make white supremacism and heteropatriarchy accepted (2020) while Mattheis (forthcoming) notes that this vision of femininity is often used to disguise whiteness, enfolding or encoding it as a gender norm.

Similarly, gender roles and norms are classed, and the reduction of many women to reproductive labor is the product of centuries of class domination (Federici 2004). The enforcement of femininity often came at times of class struggle when men’s economic chances were reduced, as in the Victorian era (Bederman 1995), or in deindustrialization and neoliberalism (DuMez 2020). The vision of women as separate from the public and economic spheres is essentially classed, but this can also be used to depoliticize gender (Scott 88). This means both women seem to be removed from the political, but also that which is associated with femininity - homes, motherhood, is also depoliticized. Gender can be used to make white, middle class norms acceptable or even desirable.

Multiple critical studies of femininity explain how white womanhood worked within systems of white supremacy in order to reproduce or impose white cultural norms. White women were portrayed as symbols of the nation or American progress (insert painting), as civilizing forces or victims or barbarian others. Nickerson (2012) explains how within Victorian maternalism, women used cultural tropes of femininity and motherhood as they advocated for programs that both supported and surveilled the poor. In
the United States they became “republican mothers” (Meiners 2002) who were responsible for disseminating nationalist values. In colonial projects, white women often took on the role not only of symbolizing civilization but of teaching and imposing European norms on people of color (Ware 1992). Women were seen as having a role of reproducing culture seen as an extension of their role as mothers, reproducing people (Blee et al. 2002)

White femininity and public education

These themes of rigid gender roles, erasing whiteness, colonialism and maternalism recur within education, which remains 80 percent white and 76 percent women in year 2917-18 and remains considered middle class (although not renumerated accordingly). Despite this explicit femininity, few studies in teacher education offer critical perspectives on gender and whiteness (Galman & Malozzi 2012). While there is attention to gender in k-12 schooling this has been absent from teacher education; gender in teacher textbooks is 1% of methods texts, 7% of intro texts, and often convey stereotyped information or generalities (Zittleman & Sadker 2002).

Teacher education instead tends to repeat stereotypes of femininity. Homeschooling associates the role of educator with the role of mother (Kunzman 2009) but a growing body of mainstream literature compares teachers to “other-mothers” (Casee 1997, Guffrida 2005), seeing their role as teacher linked to their role as mother. Teaching is seen as one of the most feminized professions and teacher education repeats Victorian discourses of domesticity, femininity and care (Drudy 2008, Weiner 2000).

Galman (2012) shows how stereotypes of female traits and a feminine “moral career” persist within our idea of a good teacher, tropes which echo the Victorian piety, domesticity, and submission. Studies of pre-service elementary teachers showed they believe good teachers should be other-oriented and selfless, kind, love children, and feel naturally called to teach, seeing the act of education as an extension of maternal love. Teachers should also be apolitical, concerned with welfare not power, sweet and pure in a way even victorians would recognize.

Meiners (2002) shows how this vision of the sweet female teacher is also bound up with class, colonialism and racism. The idea of a woman called to be a teacher is one who is not concerned with fighting for better material conditions, but one embroiled in a redemptive narrative of reaching and improving the lives of imagined others. Meiners notes many students spoke of their desire to reach and help people of color with language that echoed old civilizing missions.

American “lady teachers” would go abroad to spread American “universal education” as part of our growing imperial power (Zimmerman 2005), something that persists today with TESOL courses and teaching English abroad (Ahlquist 2011) which present a desirable career for American women yet reproduce neoliberal empire. Traoré (2004) notes that colonialism happens within American schools and curriculum, as well. Middle class Americans in programs like Teach For America, armed with little more
than a good degree and a performance of appropriate femininity (like me!), are sent to teach black and poor children. These teachers hollow out existing school communities and unions, and continue to link an idea of the good teacher to white womanhood.

This vision of the white lady teacher is further, bound up with the reproduction of nationalist and imperialist ideas in education. Public schools continue to present a narrative of America as a nation of immigrants on the march towards progress. Merry (2020) explains that notions of civic education are often used to justify schools’ use of textbooks that teach patriotic histories and erase slavery and imperialism. Further, the ideal of the democratic school, he argues, is undermined by economic inequality; instead, this belief in schools as teaching democratic citizenship is a modernization of the old myth of the republican mother.

The Victorian “angel of the home” directly influenced early definitions of teachers as what early school reformer Horace Mann called the “the angel of the classroom.” White femininity encodes white classed norms which are then reproduced in our ideas of good teachers, and in education. Looking closely at the roots of “traditional” femininity in American culture and in our teaching helps understand its persistence, and the women who believe in it. While conservative women have a much stronger, bolder, or more explicit embrace of these ideas, they are an extension of widely held social beliefs

White femininity and home education

If mainstream education grew out of visions of republican motherhood and the lady bountiful, conservative education movements embrace this idea of the mother teacher much more fully and more literally. For conservatives, mothers are a children’s first teacher, and for the populists in the homeschooling movement, they are the child’s only teacher.

Apple (2015) notes that homeschooling is a privileged educational option for conservative and authoritarian populist families, accelerated by the internet which both gives families a growing sense of social breakdown and the affordances to return to traditional schooling. Stevens (2012) and Murphy (2012) further point to the growing centralization and bureaucratization of public schools which alienates parents; the neoliberal privatization of education, similarly, offers both greater reason to stay home and greater affordances to do so.

Gender is a central concern in homeschooling. Gaither (2008, 2009) points to the importance of gender roles in the embrace of home education on the right; right-wing women are more likely to be stay at home mothers and have the ability to homeschool and the desire to teach these roles. Indeed, the National Home Education Research Institute lauds the fact that “home education honors gender difference” on its front page. Apple states populists seek homeschooling as a way to educate that respects gender and age roles within the family, something borne out by ANES data that suggests 81 percent of home educators seek more “traditional family values” (in Brown 2021). These women practice what they
preach; 81 percent of homeschooling mothers do not work outside the home, of the other 19 percent 85 percent work only part time (Murphy 2012). Homeschooling then is done by women and cements their gender role, and it’s aim is often to reproduce these gender roles.

Kunzman (2009) explains that homeschooling mothers use their role as educator to give depth to their place in the home; being their child’s teacher gives their identity as mothers more power and meaning. In some sense it offers a more professional identity. However, Stevens continues, this often leads to the invisibilization of teaching as an extension of the care and labor of a mother; the lessons and work of teaching, much like her other reproductive labor, becomes an extension of herself and her love for her child.

This type of maternalism can be linked not only to traditional gender but to conservative politics more broadly. Ingersoll (2015) shows how the homeschooling movement is rooted in Christian reconstruction; this is a belief in a theocracy with an embrace of “biblical gender roles.” Many also believe in a pro-natalist “quiverfull” movement which suggests women should have as many (white, Christian) babies as possible. Similar links between traditional femininity, education, and right wing politics have been noted in studies of the far right. Blee et al (xx) note that within far-right and nationalist circles, women often see themselves as engaged in both biological reproduction of the white race but cultural reproduction of white traditions. Again the role of mother and the role of teacher are seen as linked and functioning similarly.

Homeschooling fits neatly into many far-right imperatives, keeping women in the home and a “traditional” role, producing as many white babies as possible, and giving them an education in movement ideals. The role as educator is only possible as an extension of her role as mom, but it also gives these women purpose, meaning, and a chance to be lifelong teachers and learners.

2.1.2 The White Right

The white right is a term I take from anthropologist Sophie Bjork-James (2019) who uses it to refer to the broad spectrum of the nationalist right, in particular the white evangelicals and white nationalists who came together to support Trump. They share socially conservative, anti-government and libertarian views and racist politics, although with different ideologies and emphases. I divide the social science literature on the white right into three groups, roughly corresponding to the three groups in my study: white nationalist, Christian nationalist, and populist. All three groups share a vision of the holy white family, under attack by an elite who wishes to replace them with racial and religious others. The white nationalist frame this in explicitly racial terms, the Christians refer to god, and the populists to economics, but they share a vision of the true people as white, middle class, and with rigid gender roles.

2.2.1 White Nationalists
White nationalists, also called identitarians, are distinguished by their open embrace of white supremacist politics (Hawley 2017). Anthropological studies of white nationalists, note they share a deeply misogynist racist outlook centered on a utopian vision of a white nation and a dystopian conspiracy theory of white genocide or white replacement (Gardiner 2005). White genocide is a theory obsessed with the decline in white birthrates. In replacement theory the decline is caused by global elites, explicitly or implicitly qualified as Jewish, who are conspiring to replace the white race with weaker, deracinated, workforce who will be more docile. To save the white race, and the white nation, women must have as many white babies as possible. Because of this obsession, the white nationalist movement is deeply misogynist (Bjork James 2020a, 2020b), honoring women as symbols of the white nation while reducing them to their role in producing more white children. White nationalists in the United States are not an isolated group, despite their reactionary views, but part of global networks of white power (Geary, Schofield & Sutton 2020).

Within the United States there tend to be multiple overlapping groups of white nationalists, often referred to as The alt-right (Taylor 2020). This term refers to a loosely knit group of highly online white nationalists, often centered around message boards reddit and 4chan (Nagle 2017). Literature on the alt-right is often divided into two groups, the alt-right white nationalists, which includes neo-nazis and Neo-confederates, and the alt-light who emphasize misogyny, “men’s rights” and a softer “civic nationalism.” The alt-light are often a gateway to farther right positions, often relying on sexual frustration and dating strategy to recruit from the broader misogynist manosphere (Minna-stern 2019).

Central to this politics of white genocide are the tradwives. Tradwives are white women who link motherhood and “traditional” femininity to white nationalist politics. They are “white nationalist mommy vloggers” (Love 2020) who celebrate being a stay at home mother, honoring your husband, raising and homeschooling a large family. Their role is to celebrate their femininity, in the service of men; their goal is the elevation and rehabilitation of reactionary white masculinity (Kelly 2018), making men into hot heros (Tebaldi forthcoming). Some remain “alt-light” and focus on using gender and sex to attract men to nationalism (Minna-Stern 2019). However, many use traditional femininity as a theater in the war to save the white race, explicitly linking feminism to white genocide. They often are deeply homophobic (Tebaldi 2021), virulently anti-immigrant (Tebaldi 2019) and eye-wateringly racist. Their “alt-maternalism” normalizes far right politics as an extension of dominant beliefs about women and motherhood (Mattheis 2018) - which, to be fair, it is.

**Christian Nationalists**

The second group within the white right is the Christian nationalists, who have roots in the more mainstream conservative religious right (Wilcox 2018). Sociologists Whitehead & Perry (2020) define Christian nationalism as beliefs that the United States was founded as, is, or should be a Christian nation;
51.9 percent of Americans agree or strongly agree with this and found it was the single greatest predictor of support for Trump. In her ethnographic study, Bjork James distinguishes Christian from white nationalists with a stronger emphasis on patriarchy and fatherhood, rather than motherhood, framing the father-led family as the social and spiritual foundation of the nation (2020b).

The most extreme Christian nationalists are the reconstructionists (Ingersoll 2015). They advocate for a Christian nation founded on the model of the authoritarian patriarchal family. Reconstructionists follow the theories of Rousas John Rushdoony and other extremists and advocate for a theocratic state, a return to biblical patriarchy and biblical law including death for adultery, sodomy and being an “incorrigible child”. Many in this movement are also associated with the “quiverfull” movement, which asks women to have as many children as possible to be arrows in god’s quiver (Joyce 2009). Some are also associated with the neo-confederate movement, which links Christian reconstruction to the lost cause, and sees the US south as god’s chosen people (Potok 2020). While fewer share these views, they were highly influential in shaping the institutions of the conservative right (Wilcox 2018) including homeschooling (Brown 2021) which is the most successfully mainstreamed Christian nationalist movement.

Christian nationalism became mainstreamed within American politics as part of the Christian Right, by celebrating the language of family and morality. While more mainstream, it shares in the pro-natalist, gender essentialist, identity politics of the white right. Bjork James, in The Divine Institution (2021), shows how Christian nationalism is deeply embedded in a politics of the patriarchal family. This family structure, with the woman submitting to a dominant man, as replicating the structure of the holy trinity. This male “headship” and female submission is deeply embedded in a vision of binary gender, referred to as “biblical gender” or “complementarianism” which is oppressive to women and LGBTQ+ people. Christianity and masculinity intertwined in popular culture and evangelical religion (Du Mez 2020), so that biblical gender roles became tied to a vision of military masculinity. Men were rebels, cowboys, soldiers and Jesus. Women were mothers, helpmeets, meant to canalize this virile energy into the family.

White male supremacy becomes translated into this language of the family, while calls for social and racial justice are framed as attacking it. In Family Values (2017) Melinda Cooper shows how this elevation of the patriarchal family was used to justify neoliberal cuts to welfare. Welfare policies such as WIC or daycare were described as attacking the family, while the reduction in state services was seen as reinforcing conservative “family values”. While their language speaks of family, fathers, and god, the evangelical politics of the family is deeply racist. In White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America (2021) Anthea Butler explains that the history of this vision of the holy family has always meant the white family. Politicized Christianity, from the “religion of the lost cause” to the moral Mondays of the Christian Right, has been used to defend segregation and racial oppression. Studies of the Christian nationalists show how the language of family and home is used to defend and promote deep
investment in social and economic conservatism.

**Populists and White Identity Politics**

A final segment of the white right are the mainstream “populists” who support what Political Scientist Ashley Jardina (2019) terms “white identity politics.” She argues this is distinguished by positive support for white people and white interests rather than racial resentment (although, one might argue this is a distinction without a difference). These views combined nativism, economic protectionism, and social conservatism, and had fewer elements of libertarianism and more support for social programs (for white people). White identity politics was part of a growing study of populism, or right wing cultural politics with left (language about) economics. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) define populism as a thin centered ideology which can be mobilized in multiple ways but always features an opposition between an authentic people and a nefarious elite. Right wing populism most often features heroic and virtuous people, often a middle class, threatened by a racial other and a corrupt elite. While its language can address economic grievances, this vision echoes farther right discourses like great replacement theory.

Many studies of white identity politics focus on the tea party, and the construction of populist anti-elite sentiment. Cramer, *Politics of Resentment*, (2016) showed how workers in rural Wisconsin felt left behind by policies designed to support urban centers and how local economic and social grievances could be taken up in larger political discourses. Arlie Russell Hochschild (2018) in *Strangers in Their Own Land*, conducted ethnographic research with populist conservatives in South Louisiana. She found they had economic grievances (as you would expect in the second poorest state in the nation) which they translated into cultural “deep stories” of being left behind, or skipped in line by feminists or people of color. Westermeyer (2019) explored how the tea party made a religion of nationalism, worshipping the constitution like a bible. This allowed them to create an intensely meaningful “figured world” which linked whiteness and libertarian politics with a deeply felt identity as an American people. Rosenthal (2020)’s *Empire of Resentment* argued for multiple intersecting feelings of dispossession, not merely economic but cultural and gendered. He notes that the contemporary right shifted from embracing economic populism to full throated nationalism as a solution to this dispossession. This literature at times repeats folk ideas of racists as rural, isolated, and backwards; simultaneously excusing racism as rooted in economics and banishing it to those poor folks over there. However, they also show the way right wing discourses and cultural practices can translate economics and experiences into a politics of whiteness and masculinity.

**Christian and Classical Schools**

Christian schools were one of the early motivating factors for the beginning of the Christian Right, in particular the fight against taxing Christian schools which refused to integrate, like Bob Jones University. Christian schooling often emphasized gender difference and the imposition of Christian morality, in the
face of both blurred gender roles in the 1970s and the growing sex education movement (Petrelza xx). Petrelza explains how pushes against global education and sex education came together in a kind of patriotic Christian family values that celebrated the white nuclear family and the flag. Benowitz (xx) explains how this anti-sex education movement also galvanized conservative women, anxious to protect their roles and values. Christian Schooling portrayed progressive changes as moral and social decline.

Conservatives also showed progressive schools as engines of cultural and educational decline, which as Shor (1992) notes serves to bolster white men’s educational credentials. Apple (2006) notes conservatives seek a more classical education, deeply valuing the knowledge of past eras as coming from a more intelligent, beautiful past but also a more virile, competitive and combative culture. Classical education emphasizes canonical texts, classical languages, as teaching both moral values and mental strength. It also emphasizes high standards and competition, so it dovetails neatly with the broader neoliberal project in education.

**Homeschooling**

Homeschooling has begun to overtake Christian schools in both as a form of education and as a central element in movement conservatism. As Apple (2006) notes, homeschooling is most popular with authoritarian Populist families. These families seek to preserve traditional cultural authority, like the Bible, and their own relationships within the family. The opposition to progressive education begins with the teaching of evolution in schools (Laats 2015). Many are concerned as well with moral and cultural changes, as Laats (2015) shows in his study of the textbook strikes in Kanawa county, West Virginia. Traditionalist forms of education were linked to the preservation of parental connection to, and authority over, children.

Gaithner (1999) explains how homeschooling was central to the rise of the Christian Right, while Brown (2021) shows how it continues to be key to the success of Christian and Libertarian politics today. Homeschooling can normalize right wing politics (Detwiler 1999) but it can also radicalize parents. Kunzman (2009) notes that many of the homeschooling institutions, such as the homeschool legal defense association, were started by believers in this theory, which he argues further pushes homeschooling to the right. Brown (2021) argues for the feedback effects of these institutions policy language as well. Brown shows how homeschooling policy can be a feedback loop, as families become involved in alternative institutions which often are involved in right wing movements, and participation in homeschooling has identity effects which shape parents self-understanding as traditionalist, home educators. For parents homeschooling is almost like a movement education; they are more likely then to join right wing movements and participate in alternative social institutions.

### 2.1.3 Media, Metapolitics Public Pedagogy
After a locating contemporary alt right in a brief review of historical studies on conservative media and conservative politics I look at four ways in which theorists in cultural studies and anthropology have conceptualized this relationship between power, politics, and culture: culture wars, affective politics, metapolitics, and public pedagogy.

**Conservative Media**

Historical studies of conservative media emphasize media’s role in shaping conservative politics, in bringing together multiple coalitions and winning consent. Dailey (2005) showed how early sermons were central in linking God and whiteness in “Christianized racism.” Hemmer (2016) saw that conservative radio activists took a central role in shaping policy, bringing grassroots and elites in conversation and linking of social conservative politics and libertarian economics. Thrift (2014) showed how Jesse Helms’ and early conservative television was instrumental in shaping Southern segregationist politics as family values. Peck (2019) argued how the rise of a populist and affective style of address at Fox News helped brand conservatism as working class, and therefore shaped both what a working class identity was and what interests it supported. Neiwert (2016) showed how the aggressive, hate filled talk on conservative radio and television radicalized right-wing political attitudes and paved the way for the current moment.

Contemporary Alt-right, who are a broader coalition of neo-fascists and populists, also use digital media to create a more unified and normalized movement that links the far right to libertarians, Christians and misogynists. Binder & Wood (2012) link this regressive, reactionary postmodernism, to anonymity of online spaces and to a reaction against the perceived liberalism of academic spaces, especially public universities. Winter (2019) explains how the affordances of the internet permitted mainstreaming, while also producing new types of hateful discourse. Alt-right media is known for their provocative, ironic style which presented open white power and male supremacism as ludic fun (Greene 2019). They often also use sexuality, presenting their forms of knowledge as sexual strategy (Minna Stern 2019) and seduction tips, but these tips soon lead to “red pills” which present racist or misogynist “facts” as secret forms of stigmatized truth from the depths of the “intellectual dark web” (Tebaldi 2020). The digital far-right is not engaged merely in play, but in disseminating alternative histories (Valencia-Garcia 2020) that include revivals of traditionalist religion from fundamentalist Christianity, traditionalist Catholicism and orthodoxy, to fascist traditionalism from Alexander Dugin and Julius Evola.

This media then is engaged in a Gramscian war of position; it makes far right hate seem normal and attractive, shifting the “Overton window” and making fascism once again part of public discourse. Second, it unites multiple strands of far right ideas, much as earlier conservative media did, and circulates them. Theorists of cultural studies in education offer several different understandings of how this kind of media battle functions: culture wars, affective politics, meta politics, and public pedagogy.
Culture Wars

Angela Nagle (2017) argues that the contemporary alt-right can be seen as “the culture wars online.” The term culture war was coined by sociologist JD Hunter (1992), but like many things on the right it has an original in German, *Kulturkampf*. It refers to social conservatives’ struggle to impose their vision of the patriarchal and patriotic family across media, schooling, policy and politics. Other scholars also used it to refer to a growing sense of political and cultural polarization (ie Miller & Hoffman 1999).

The culture wars begin in the 1970’s as a way to bring white evangelicals into politics, first in defense of segregation and then the tax exempt status of segregated Christian schools (Butler 2021). The movement grew by centering on opposition to abortion, which permitted them to frame the movement as a defense of children, family, and religious rights (Lewis 2017). It then expanded to a broader defense of “family values” that brought evangelical values into many aspects of American life from politics to pop culture (Gilgoff 2007). The “pop culture wars” (romanowski 2006) peaked in the 1990, with Christian right concern over sex and secularism in movies, music and other media (Lyons 1997). This began as a moral panic over media and cultural shifts, but today they have grown into a large Christian popular culture empire, from books like *popologetics: popular culture from a Christian perspective* to Christian rock bands and Christian Netflix “PureFlix.” All these put struggles over schools and media as a “fight for our children” as WJ Bennett’s 1994 book puts it. Schools second only to the family as central symbolic and political areas for conservatives in this fight.

Education was a key site in the culture wars as fundamentalist Christians tried to impose a religious and socially conservative worldview on schools (Zimmerman 2009). Laats (2010) argues the culture wars had their roots in the scopes trials and the teaching of evolution. Petrelza (dd) explored the role of sex education in the culture wars, and the construction of a patriotic patriarchal family. Shor (1992) showed how a back to basics curriculum was part of conservatism’s project of restoring white male power, as new forms of testing created in response to manufactured crisis restored white male intellectual dominance. Adler (2016) explored how support for the canon was also a defense of white cultural power.

Affective Politics

Some cultural studies of media focus on the importance of identity and affect, and the role of media promoting affective investment in conservative politics. Grossberg (1992) explored how conservative media shapes what is considered political and what is not. Affective investment shapes processes of politicization and depoliticization; media panics make fried chicken sandwiches a political statement for the Christian right or make real environmental change outside of politics. Grossberg (2019) argued Trumpism remains part of this process, how his discourse promotes affective understandings that blur the borders of the political and how contemporary rightist media produces ever more affectively powerful ideology to make sense of current crises of capitalism.
Ahmed (2004) explores the role of affect in presenting white nationalists as subjects threatened with both a loss of something they love, and a loss of their subjectivity itself. Affect allows us to understand how hate actually works to bind together the white subject and the nation.

The average white man feels “fear and loathing”; the white housewife, “repulsion and anger”; the white workingman, “curses”; the white Christian farmer, “rage.” The passion of these negative attachments to others is redefined simultaneously as a positive attachment to the imagined subjects brought together through the repetition of the signifier, “white.” (118)

Hate produces identity and affective investment in whiteness, in a white national body; hate speech paradoxically produces something like love. These affective economies of hate and of fear circulate beyond individual bodies, aligning individuals with communities and becoming part of social discourses that describe immigration as a flood, sticking to racialized bodies described as terrorists, and blurring boundaries between extreme and mainstream.

Boler and Davis (2020) theorize affective politics in the digital sphere as the affective weaponization of information, exploring how affect like fear and hate can shape the circulation and uptake of information and be exploited. In their edited volume Hong (2020) explores how the far right “fuck your feelings” discourse is actually weaponizing the feeling of seriousness, while Roberts and Wahl Jorgenson explore how Breitbart uses warlike narratives of heroes and victims to attack mainstream media. Nadler explains how this has been effectively mobilized by “countercultural conservatives” like Rush Limbaugh, “shock jocks” who use a rowdy, raunchy, populist style to appeal and elicit affect.

Metapolitics

More recent studies of the right use the concept of meta politics to describe this kind of battle for cultural supremacy as a way to gain political power. Metapolitics comes from Gramsci’s theories of hegemony, or the use of cultural institutions like media and schools to make the dominant ideology common sense and win consent for ruling class power. The European New Right in the 1970s, calling themselves “gramscians of the right” took up the concept of metapolitics to mean winning power through culture rather than violent attack (Griffin 2000). Other understandings of metapolitics frame this as the philosophy of politics (Badiou 2005), as the conflict between different understandings of politics. It is a struggle to define the boundaries of the political, who and what is to be included and accepted as politics.

Recent studies of the far right explore the importance of digital media in far right metapolitics. Ico Maly describes this as “algorithmic activism” and shows how they exploit the affordances of digital media to circulate and normalize their views. Digital media is, he argues, an ideal site for the far right meta political battle. In this area women also play an important role. Maly (2020) also explored the role of nationalist women on YouTube, and how their lifestyle and romance videos are not just nationalist mommy vloggers but actively shape the boundaries of politics. By portraying marriage, romance, and whiteness under threat they explicitly politicize the intimate and friendly vlog style. Their focus on
feminine topics also genders politics, putting women back into a domestic sphere.

Other studies of metapolitics focus on the role of discourse. Switzer (2019) shows the metapolitical action of “reframing” when connections to blatant fascism are explored, and its importance for mainstreaming and normalizing these politics. Zienkowski (2018) argues for a broader focus on the metapolitical aspects of discourse, and their role in restructuring the political sphere. That is, it is not merely about normalizing fascism but a meta-political struggle to make fascist and illiberal politics part of the political sphere. Similarly, we should not look merely at nationalist mommy vloggers’ gender roles, but at their broader metapolitical struggle to remasculinize the political world. Metapolitics takes the culture wars framing at its word.

Public pedagogy

Cultural studies scholars within education see media as a site for public pedagogy. Public pedagogy has multiple meanings, first quite simply as pedagogy that exists beyond the classroom, understanding that education takes place in social spaces, cultural institutions, and corporate media among others (Giroux 2004). This is what Raymond Williams termed “permanent education” (2001). Second, pedagogy is linked to cultural politics, to relations between power, politics and culture, and sees pedagogy as a way of political power shaping and articulating the social world. For Giroux:

As a political practice, pedagogy illuminates the relationship between power, knowledge, and ideology, while self-consciously, if not self-critically, recognizing the role it plays in a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within particular sets of social relations. (2004; 500)

That is, public pedagogy is ideology in practice, influencing how the world is understood and what identities are interpellated, that extends beyond schools but describes the broader actions of power on society.

Media is a key site for public pedagogy, as they are “where knowledge and pleasure intersect”;689 (Giroux 2011). Media such as film can directly teach political content, but it also intentionally influences the meaning, subject positions, identities that are taught, and does so in a richly affective way. In this way ideological positions are taken up and invested in more easily; affect connects people to power. Kellner & Kim (2010) note digital media such as youtube can serve as powerful sites for critical pedagogy and approaches which counter dominant ideologies. Culture is pedagogical, and an understanding of public pedagogy extends the site of pedagogy - as power working to shape meaning and identity - to popular press, social media, video game culture, film.

Scholars explain both neoliberalism and Trumpism as a public pedagogy. Giroux (2019) explained neoliberalism can be seen as reactionary public pedagogy, a powerful group of ideologies and institutional forces designed to produce selfish individuals who are competitive on the market and the marketplace of ideas. This pedagogy is reactionary, designed to support Christian fundamentalism, neoconservative
empire, and corporate capital while positioning social equality and democracy as burdensome. Kellner (2016) argues Trump is a master of media spectacle, who provides a national “teachable moment.” Media spectacle is that which disrupts, sensationalizes, and produces affective chain reactions. Mike Cole (2019) instead sees Trump and his movement as engaged in more explicit pedagogy; the Alt-Right and Trump is a public pedagogy that teaches hate, racism and fascism. Trump’s speeches are themselves a form of public pedagogy that shapes the sociopolitical consciousness of the nation, bolstered by his use of twitter and the medium’s incivility, impulsivity and simplicity. The alt-right as well links social media sites such as reddit to more authoritative institutions, such as think tanks, providing an effective public pedagogy for their fascist views.

2.1.4 Conclusion

This study looks at femininity, media, and education across the “white right” and is grounded in an understanding of the right as engaged in popular education, in propagandized panics about public schools, and in a public pedagogy that mainstreams conservative gender roles and social hierarchies. Together the three bodies of literature in this review, those on white womanhood, conservative movements, and media and culture, informed my study of alt-education: who and what is being taught, for whom, and how. Studies of white womanhood inform this project’s exploration of conservative women teachers’ identities, and many of the gendered visions of family and community they teach. As the literature suggests, this vision of the “angel of the classroom” is much broader than the conservative movement, informing neoliberal practices like Teach for America, and even progressive teacher education. Basing this study in the critical literature on white femininity across a political spectrum also grounds my exploration of how femininity is an effective tool for the normalization of far-right ideas. The literature on femininity grounds my exploration of social media and gender roles in the first two findings chapters; chapter three, where I explore how womanhood is constructed in far-right social media and taken up by women. I build on this vision of womanhood in their construction of moral panics of education in chapter four. In chapter four I show how narratives of womanhood are used in discourses about education, and how these have real consequences for families and politics. In chapter five I look literally at how conservative media is used in home and public education and the lessons it teaches about language, nation and gender.

I center my study in ethnographic literature that sees the far-right as a spectrum of beliefs, groups, and practices which are connected to each other and to the mainstream. Studies of the right can often portray it as isolated groups, far from the mainstream ideologically, or physically. I am instead interested in how these groups connect to each other, how ideas circulate through the broader “white right” and become part of the mainstream. Both “traditional femininity” and homeschooling are ideologies, for
example, that have passed from extreme to acceptable center. By including research on the broader “white right” and looking at groups from extreme to mainstream, and basing this study in researchers who explore the right as a spectrum, I hope to avoid the type of research which exoticizes the right as a “repugnant other” (Harding xx).

Finally, I draw heavily on research which frames media as a cultural politics and a public pedagogy. Media teaches: it creates dramatic narratives, subject positions, and invests these with deep affect. It is taken up by women and taught, recirculated, in varied ways. I frame this study as alt-education, to understand the multiple ways in which rightist ideology is taught and taken up as part of people’s lives. I ask how the right educates in a very broad sense; beyond simply schools or curriculum, how does this knowledge circulate in and outside the classroom? How are alternative forms of knowledge constructed and circulated? How are they felt, taken up, and invested in?

Conservatives are frequently portrayed as dumb, isolated yokels, but they have created a powerful system of educating, reproducing and mainstreaming their ideas. It is important to see the breadth and sophistication of the conservative educational practices and ideologies, from family to homeschool, to media together as a kind of popular education. Then, perhaps, we can begin to undo it.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Like the right wing thinkers in this study, I draw on Gramsci’s work on hegemony and ideology. Gramsci’s work showed the right the power of culture, education, and the ability to shape common sense. His vision of cultural power informs the right wing “culture wars” their meta politics, their use of media and pedagogy to impose ideology. I am also informed by Stuart Hall’s work on ideology and ideological effects; what ideology is, but also what it does. His work on media also looks more closely at gender, and helps theorize how women are represented in rightist ideology, but also how they use this representation to give meaning and sense to their experiences.

First I define Hall and Gramsci’s ideology and ideological effects, the central theory for this dissertation. Second, I look at ideology in connection to other key concepts I use: education, drawing on Gramsci, and women and right wing politics, drawing on Hall. Last I introduce the semiotic tools I use to analyze ideology: naturalization, circulation, normalization, and differentiation.

2.2.1 Ideology and Ideological Effects

I use Hall’s definition of ideology as “the point where power cuts into language” (1993; 263). Ideology is an attempt to determine meaning from among the infinite possibilities of language, and to do so in the interest of a particular class or power. Ideology also has ideological effects; it does things with language. First, it interpellates, or constitutes people as particular kinds of subjects, and it represents, or
constitutes reality or the meanings given to it, according to dominant interests and categories. That is, ideology shapes the stories we tell about the world and ourselves.

Dominant ideology becomes what Gramsci calls common sense. Experiences are taken up and given meaning in this common sense, for example when the experience of motherhood is given sense by dominant ideologies of middle class white femininity which interpellate particular kinds of mothers and particular representations of her world. Yet this meaning is not total; the ruling class must win consent to its ideology, its stories, through institutions like media and education.

Its dominance is incomplete and it is itself fragmented and changing. Any element has no fixed class belonging outside of an ideological system and its meanings can be contested by other groups seeking hegemony (see Ramos 1982 for more) and this struggle creates new meanings. This means ideological elements, or parts of language in Hall’s formulation, circulate and can be taken up and given new meanings in multiple discourses. For example, ideological elements used by the left, like Gramscian ideology, can be taken up by the right with new meanings and new effects.

2.2.2 Gramsci on Education and hegemony

Education

In *The Prison Notebooks* essay “On Education” Gramsci describes education as an attempt to “organize culture” (24) to impose values and so to achieve power. Education under capitalism is instruction in natural laws and the laws of the state to best enable human work. To do this capitalism creates a proliferating variety of specialized and unequal schools, intellectual for some and vocational for others. Schools are in appearance democratic, but multiple specialized and classed schools create a kaleidoscope of social inequalities.

Education produces bourgeois common sense. Through educational differentiation, schools reproduce a bourgeois intellectual strata who produce a bourgeois ideology. That is, instruction takes experience and ideological elements and gives them meaning in a bourgeois discourse and a dominant ideological system. As this becomes broadly accepted as normal, natural, or true ideology ceases to seem like ideology and becomes common sense. However common sense is not fixed; it can be contested by discourses from different groups. Similarly in education, there is not one form of pedagogy which totally dominates-comprehensive, human, schools could produce organic intellectuals capable of contesting ruling class dominance.

Raymond Williams (2001) explains Gramsci’s vision of education this way; schools are part of the material processes of society just as workplaces are, and are also sites of struggle for domination. Through the conflict between the curriculum and personal experience comes understanding. This is
always linked to the material and to power. Ruling class hegemony is never total but domination is continually fought for and challenged.

Hegemony is the power to impose your ideological system as common sense or self-evident truth. Hegemony is never completely achieved, but is imposed through cultural institutions and won through struggles between competing discourses and groups. Ruling classes establish power through coercion, or state and economic power, and consent or ideological power. Coercion can be attacked through wars of maneuver, or attacks on state power, while consent is attacked through wars of position. Socially, this means the attempt to change dominant ideologies and institutions in order to take power; as when the right speaks about “politics being downstream of culture.” In discourse, this struggle means separating ideological elements from the discourses which give them meaning under a dominant system, allowing them to be taken up and resignified in other discourses and creating the possibilities for new ways of thinking.

2.2.3 Stuart Hall on Women and ideology

In *The Hard Road to Renewal* (1988) Hall looks at the relationship between gender and right-wing ideology. First, gender and the gendered idea of separate spheres, helps resolve and naturalize contradictions between the neoliberal and the social conservative within authoritarian populism. The neoliberal, hyper-competitive, extension of the market to all aspects of life is gendered male, linked to the masculine world of work. The social conservative, with its family values and conventional morals, is linked to the feminine domestic sphere. This shapes increasing authoritarianism as an expression of conventional morality and a defense of the family.

Therefore, in this ideology the figure of the woman becomes associated with domesticity as practicality and tradition. Women represent petty bourgeois ideology naturalized as morality and traditional wisdom; as when post-war economic practices become “family values.” In this ideology woman becomes the symbol of traditional wisdom and traditional morality. In politics and media discourses this atavistic woman personalizes neoliberal ideals, funding cuts become the frugal housewife, education reforms become the mother who needs more classroom discipline, law and order becomes defense of your women. These interpellate a particular kind of womanhood as natural and tradition, and naturalize right-wing positions as part of this timeless gender.

Womanhood as traditional morality is then used to shape authoritarian populism’s reorganization of the relationship between people and the powerful. Populist discourses interpellate one group as the people and another as power elites; authoritarian populist discourses, according to Hall, invert the relationship between the bourgeois class and the state so that capitalist power seems to be the people while the state becomes the elite. One way this happens is representing right-wing ideology as a woman, aligned with the
people, threatened by the governmental power elites.

*The Right in Crisis and Conspiracy*

Just as the family is always under threat, ideology is always in crisis. Ideology in crisis means a crisis of hegemony, a break in dominant ideologies and the progressive polarizing of society. Ideology is also ideology of crisis, how the crisis of capitalism comes to be signified and interpreted within these competing and fragmented ideologies. Ideology in crisis must move from consent to coercion through public discourse which “wins legitimacy by appearing to be grounded and connected, not simply in myths, fears and speculation but in the experiences of ordinary people” (1988;36) Family values must appear to be grounded in actual family. Hall argues this hegemony is sustained by displacing the people’s real experiences of crisis (of capitalism, the general awfulness of life) onto a series of manufactured moral panics. You aren’t suffering loneliness, or economic precariousness, there is a war on Christmas. At a second stage, all the individual moral panics become one big conspiracy, this is the elite, the cultural marxists, the white genocide.

Conspiracies and right wing discourses, in this view, are not merely facts to be debunked, but complex, fragmented and shifting reorganizations of the relationship between individual experiences, power, and social crisis. Ideology is taken up by people in complex ways, in conflict and coherence with individual experiences of the social crisis. Social problems then are experienced through these frames, but are not totally determined by them. Instead we can use textual analysis to see how ideological frameworks can be structured or imposed, but also use ethnographic methods to investigate the multiple ways they can be taken up, changed, and taught. The complex relationship between language, experience and power means ideological analysis is conjunctural, that is one that looks at the relationship between semiotic practices and structures of power. It looks not only at the particular, these texts, this isolated ethnography, or at structures of gender and class power but their intersection. It is also, crucially, one that looks at both economic conditions and an effort to defend and conserve the status quo (1988;) situating the current push towards rightist ideology within the economics of a failing neoliberalism.

**2.2.4 semiotics and ideology**

Looking at ideology as how power shapes language requires close analysis of semiotic practices. In this analysis I draw on tools from linguistic anthropology to understand how ideology is constructed and consented to, taken up in experience or contested. I use these semiotic processes in this analysis of right wing media and ideology: Differentiation, Circulation, Naturalization and Normalization.

*Differentiation*

Differentiation strategies help show how power organizes language. Gal and Irvine (2019) describe ideology in language as a regime of value structured through contrast. That is, things get values or
meanings in contrast to others: right wing women get value in contrast to feminists, masculine strength in contrast to feminine softness. These contrasts are structured through three semiotic processes of differentiation: erasure, fractal recursivity, and rhematization (earlier called iconization). Erasure structures a comparison by erasing differences within groups to highlight the differences between them; as when we erase the differences between women in order to construct a difference to men. Fractal recursivity shows how differences at one level are repeated fractally at other levels, as when gendered differences between public and domestic spheres are repeated at the level of household tasks when men mow the lawn and women do the vacuuming. Last rhematization shows how qualities come to seem iconic, to represent an essence of a thing. Beauty comes not only to be a quality of a woman, but to represent the essence of femininity itself. Rhematization is particularly concerned with the naturalization and embodiment of ideological characteristics, some essence of a person becomes represented as a physical icon, or a physical quality is taken as a character. Female slenderness for example, can become not only a physical attribute but “femininity”, an icon of womanhood.

This can be a cycle: a female role becomes embodied in physical qualities, like softness, which is then taken as a sign of submissive nature, which supports her gendered role. This cycle can be described as a process of enregisterment (Agha 2005); the process by which types of language become linked to types of people and social roles, and then take on meaning in an ideological discourse. You might think this is silly, but my mom says all the time men have big shoulders so don’t you just feel like they should be leaders!

Naturalization and Normalization

Naturalization and normalization help understand how ideology becomes common sense, as either natural truth or social norm. That is, how something like “traditional gender roles” come to seem actually traditional or how social gender comes to seem like biological reality. Naturalization looks at how social structures and power, difference and inequality, become imposed as natural or true. Bourdieu, in his study of masculine domination, describes this as symbolic violence legitimating itself and erasing its own work (1999). Bucholtz & Hall (2004), in their discussion of tactics of identity, show how naturalization operates through semiotic processes of authentication and denaturalization. Authentication affirms the reality of social categories as natural, while denaturalization works to highlight and challenge the construction of these categories. Naturalization gives ideological discourses authority, while at the same time denying ideology - as when the gender binary is defended as “biology”.

Normalization is often used in similar ways to naturalization. Krzyanowski defines it as: “when new norms and ideas of social order, strategically constructed in discourse, become – or are strategically assumed to become – part and parcel of mainstream or common thinking.” (2020:434) Normalization is the mainstreaming of a new vision of society and social practice, and gender and the family also function
to normalize and mainstream right wing thought (ie Bjork James 2021, Mattheis 2021). Far right studies of normalization put an emphasis on making right wing politics, and a conservative social order, normal or acceptable. Many focus on the take up of far right positions or language by mainstream right parties, or as the right desires it “moving the Overton window”. In studies of populist language, Wodak (200x) describes normalization as the take up by mainstream politics of far right language, through institutions such as schools or media outlets, and discourses like textbooks. Normalization functions to make right wing thought seem mainstream, normal in the sense of both acceptable and everyday.

**Circulation**

Circulation shows how ideological elements can move and be part of different discourses, which themselves circulate beyond their original audience. Circulation can explore the trajectory of language (Mazzarella 2003, Manning 2010) and which forces (ie commoditization and mediatization, Agha 2011) affect how particular discourses can travel. Circulation is often studied on the far right as a description of the reach of extremist ideas or fake news (ie Djonov & van Leeuwen 2018).

Gal (2006), however describes circulation as a metaphor:

> The impression created is that words, texts, or discourses “move,” “travel,” and “circulate.” The semiotic processes that create this impression are interdiscursive ones. In the tradition of Peircean semiotics, we can say that it is not words that move; it is speakers who take them up as signs by interpreting them, each from his/her own perspective, and reframing them in open-ended series. (2015;231)

Circulation then is not just about how far terms travel, but about how and what happens along the way. It is about how discourses (and ideologies) are taken up by speakers, and how this does not just spread the discourse but changes its meaning, ideological effects, types of speakers it is connected to. Social media is an important factor in this circulation and recontextualization. Sites like forums or Instagram, are “minor media” (Spitulnik 1996), where elements of discourse circulate broadly and are taken up in many other discourses. So, circulation asks how right wing discourses can travel and what effect social media has, but also how users take them up in different ways, either to reaffirm right wing ideologies or recombine and contest them.

**2.3 Methods**

**2.3.1 Methodological and Ethical Frame**

**Blended Ethnography**

In the Marigny, a well to do area of New Orleans known for bougie bakeries, hot yoga, is now a center for an anti-vaccine group. Along the wrought iron fencing outside tastefully renovated bungalows, nestled between the mardi gras beads, bejeweled index cards were strung with colored ribbons. On each card was a picture that looked like the warning on a pack of cigarettes- alerting the viewer to the dangers
Alone, these images were static-hidden, in the midst of the carnival regalia, on side streets - unless a hurricane came, they wouldn’t circulate. There was something hilarious about the anti-internet conspiracy made manifest, and sparkly. At first, I thought it was a way to spread your alternative knowledge if you thought the internet was satanic. Then I wondered, were they trying to make the virtual “red-pill” or hidden Easter egg of alternative facts into a real life Easter egg hunt? Were these meant to be photographed, tweeted about, spread by tourist insta-grams?

Blended ethnography allows me to explore these types of questions about the relationship between the virtual and the physical world, in particular relating to questions of knowledge production, circulation and affect. It allows me to deepen and ground the observations I made online with knowledge of the physical context, triangulating data with interviews and multiple forms of participant observation and media analysis. But more than this, blended ethnography is a way of capturing the “interindexicality” (Boelssdorff 2012) or the ways in which the virtual and the physical point to each other and co-construct meanings, both the gaps and the connections. It allows me to ask, what is the relationship between the online right and teaching, feeling, and identity of embodied users.

If as Hine says the digital realm is “embodied, embedded, and everyday” a blended ethnographic approach allows us to explore how it is embodied, everyday. We might also ask, if the digital is
embedded and everyday, what does that mean for the digital right? How do our considerations of digital extremism change if we see this not as a deep dark web but as something intertwined within or just next to our own experiences?

Just like we locate the right not in the swamps of Louisiana but in the suburbs as well, we can see the digital far right as not restricted to isolated forums in the nastier corners of the web. This thesis sees the digital right as a kind of banal nationalism (xx), part of online recipes and mommy blogs, field trips and Christmas parties, just as much part of the “fachosphere” as “whitepridehomeschool.net.” By looking at the right as having, rhizome-like, roots and connections well beyond Neo-Nazi sites like Stormfront, we can look ideals, affects, styles, or relationships that make its circulation and normalization possible. This is, I hope, useful in understanding the far-right’s impact and persistence.

**Ethics**

Corey Robin notes in *The Reactionary Mind* (2011) that conservatism, despite a long intellectual tradition and political fight, is often perceived as stupidity by the left. Instead we need to take it as a site of powerful emotional and intellectual investment. In exploring how it is felt and taught, we can find hope in understanding these beliefs are the result of a great deal of education and anything but natural.

Focusing on education, specifically, undoes this construction of the right as uneducated, backwards hicks, and the assumption that liberals are inherently better, smarter, more educated. The far right is not new, an exception, or an alibi for political or economic liberalism. I do not study Nazis to make Joe Biden look like Indiana Jones. In *Reactionary Democracy* (2020), Mondon and Winter argue that focus on the far right often serves to erase racism within liberal democracy. Even the terms “far right” and “extreme right” were created to emphasize their difference from mainstream conservatism and thereby legitimate it. Even Hochschild’s *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016), with its empathy walls and location of conservatism in far flung rural areas, follows in this production of difference. Instead of looking at the far right to prove how feminist liberalism is, this research follows works that look as much at how they overlap as the gaps between them (Moreton 2009, Cooper 2016, Holmes 2020). Where are these uncomfortable similarities with the mainstream, and how can I use my own identity to find them?

Second, it is not necessary or desirable to be a neutral observer of the far right. I am not a liberal professor coming in on high to categorize right wingers like so many exotic, poisonous butterflies. I may not be able to have a militant anthropology that destroys all the right wing, but for me counting how many times “cuck” appears online isn’t enough. I see this research as a problem space (Scott 2004), that tries to be aware of the consequences of research and one which I hope opens up the possibilities for change.

**Reflexivity, and the Right**

In this spirit I follow critical feminist approaches that emphasize my personal experiences, my
identities, and my own entanglements with these ideas. This is not “mresearch,” but informed by “anti-biography” (reed-danahay 2009), where reflective exploration of my own identity, reactions, feelings illuminate relations of power and how femininity supports white supremacy. My own knowledge of liberal, white American femininity, the ways in which femininity comes into play in teacher training, the elements of sexism and conservativism woven into spaces from conservative states to liberal college towns is a key part of my analysis and my authenticity and reliability as a scholar.

I grew up in a family of socially conservative democrats, who believed in gender differences, traditional gender roles, but also a welfare state, secular education, and civic institutions. As I returned near the family home for graduate school, I saw my mother had found Jesus and become a member of the populist far right - in part out of what she felt was disrespect for her role as a stay at home mother. From her, I began to learn about the far right - and see all the places it aligned with the mainstream femininity I was taught as a girl. What was the passage from “most women love kids” to “you’ll spend your whole life clearing up after a man” or “men are natural leaders, because their shoulders are so broad”? Trying to understand my mother’s path to the right laid the groundwork for this research.

2.3.2 Research Questions

This project uses far right media as a lens on women teachers’ connections to white identity politics. I am interested in how traditionalist images of white femininity, and horror stories of cultural marxist schools, attract, circulate, and normalize right wing ideas.

To investigate these broader theoretical questions about how right wing ideas circulate and are taught and normalized, I ask the following empirical questions:

1. How is traditional femininity represented in far right media?
2. How is education represented in far right media?
3. How does this traditional femininity appear in right wing discourses about education?
4. How do the women teachers in my study engage with right wing media’s ideals of femininity and education?

This project investigates conservative women, in particular traditionalist ideas of white femininity. Traditional femininity passes between broader socially accepted ideologies and the far right. Though changing, traditional femininity remains in widespread ideologies of the good teacher, or the good mother. On the right, traditional femininity becomes linked to anti-feminism and a rigid gender essentialism, that may serve as a gateway to radical right positions like “race realism” and white nationalism.
Despite the conservatism of much educational ideology, within conservative and far right discourses, horror stories of government schools abound. These institutions are seen as the prime site for feminist indoctrination, globohomo conspiracy and cultural marxism that aims at destroying gender, the family, and god. By exploring ideologies of gender and education, I look not only at how far right ideas are taught and learned, but the ways in which these highly affectively charged ideologies circulate, cross, or construct borders; between online and off, between extreme and mainstream.

2.3.3 Study Procedures

Digital Ethnography

I conducted two phases of digital ethnography, the first before my fieldwork in Louisiana and the second alongside it. Both look closely at the interindexicality of the online and office worlds, in different ways. The first phase was focused on researching femininity in right wing social media, bringing this in close connection to my own identity as a white woman and my own media use. The second phase, conducted in parallel to my fieldwork, focused on right wing community online: how could a woman use online resources to find conservative political groups, to find conservative curriculum to teach, or network with other right wing women and educators? This looked at how rightwing femininity was used, how women interpreted, transmitted, and taught these ideas. I supplemented these observations with computer assisted searches using MaxQDA and RStudio to scrape data from Youtube, Twitter, and Reddit.

Digital Ethnography 1 - Before fieldwork

I began with one year of digital participant observation, media collection and analysis. Following digital ethnographic methods I structured these observations to approximate the media use of a conservative woman. As I was interested in radicalization, I also structured media use to find my own path from feminine and slightly conservative to the far right.

In this, I began with Instagram, a site I frequently use in my real life, and which is more known for attractive travel photos, wellness tips, and beach bodies. However, I soon saw that many right wing women also used this platform, and created an account “second-rate white person” to follow them. I also posted about 30 pictures of smoothies in order to seem like a real user, but not contribute to the circulation of right wing images.

From Instagram, I found conservative influences, hashtags, and accounts to follow. These included accounts: Mrs. Stepford, White People of the World, and BiblicalGender Roles. I also followed hashtags such as #tradwives and #traditionalfemininity. I followed accounts for right media personalities, such as Lauren Southern and Lacey Lynn, and followed them to other platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. On Youtube, I subscribed to the feeds of far right women, including Robin Riley, Brittany Pettibone, and
Red Ice Radio. Through shared interviews and suggested channels, these lead me to more far right content creators, including Blonde in the Belly of the Beast and Intro to the Alt-Right with Bre Faucheux. I also followed these creators' links to other sites including private facebook groups such as “truly traditional homemakers” and “fascinating womanhood”.

All digital data collection was centered on my faux instagram account, and was recursive. As I found, for example, a far right homeschool youtube video, I made sure to follow the creator on Instagram as well. Or, Facebook groups lead me to other alternative education sites such as Prager U, which formed the basis for further discussion, and I would follow prager U as well. One of the most exciting findings was that homeschool mothers recommended a book about traditional femininity called fascinating womanhood, and I began to follow this group. At the end I followed 227 accounts on Instagram.

In the 2 years of research, I viewed and saved Youtube videos, comments, Facebook posts, Instagram photos and comments, and links to other curricula and websites. After viewing, I wrote daily digital field notes that explored my own reactions to the media, as well as recurring themes, tropes, and connections. At first, these were a list with brief comments, but as I went deeper into ethnography, the field notes gained in detail, analysis and personal involvement. In my own way, I was drawn in deeper and deeper to this media, its nearly impossible to view this highly affective media without a strong reaction.

Digital Ethnography 2 - Along with fieldwork

When I moved to my field site, my digital data collection also shifted. As any conservative new to an area might, I joined Facebook groups for conservatives in south Louisiana. I used my personal Facebook account for anything where I might be recruiting participants. These included Louisiana Republican women, flyover country patriots, and university republican groups. I specifically sought out Facebook groups for conservative teachers. I joined Conservative teachers of America, Louisiana homeschool moms, and Southeast Louisiana Classical Conversations homeschool group which became central sites for data collection. I also followed teachers’ and homeschool teachers blogs, the most important being “Dissident Mama”.

Once I received permission from IRB I began digital participant observation. I chose three sites on Facebook that I followed and interacted with on a daily basis, using my own profile and no deception. These sites were: Conservative Teachers of America (public school), Classical Conversations (Blended home/private school) and Southeast Louisiana Homeschool. I also joined, but did not contribute to, Fascinating Womanhood and Flyover Country Patriots. These sites were chosen both because they provided an overview of different sites for conservative education, and because they allowed me access, while sites such as “truly traditional homemakers” or “Christian homeschooling mamas” did not.

I would introduce myself to the group, posting that I was a researcher and would like their help. Many
participants (40 in the conservative teachers group) would add their names to my post and say they were happy to help. I would then check on the group, noting who posted frequently, which topics came up a lot or earned a lot of responses, and how members of the group responded to common questions in education such as testing or class sizes as well as controversies such as “drag queen story hour.” I also posted a survey in both the homeschool and public school groups which received 38 (home school) and 16 (public school) responses. I posted one follow up survey on media use, but only one participant completed it. Classical Conversations declined to permit me to post a survey.

Working within these groups, I tried multiple modes of participation and data collection. I collected 8,738 documents in total; on an average day I would collect about 10 -20 posts with 50-80 comments, paying attention to key themes and most frequently liked posts. I also posted 20 messages myself, which received 5-10 comments each spoke with 9 people through messenger chat, posted three surveys with 36 responses, and solicited further interviews with 12. In some groups I was first greeted with suspicion, but most were at first kind and relatively disinterested. However, as I engaged more with the groups and became one of the more frequent participants questions arose. I found that gaining a certain amount of interest and responses, lead to some people treating me with more suspicion. At the end of my research, some people were convinced I was a godless socialist (true) and an “agent provocateur [sic]” designed to make them get in trouble with censors (not true).

Finally, as a new teacher or parent might, I collected online information from homeschool curricula, blended (half home half charter) schools, and Louisiana public and private schools. I found homeschool curricula that ranged from the traditionalist “classical conversations” to the far right “Christendom curriculum”. I also noted several conservative schools including the blended Christian school “Logos academy”, and the far right charter Heritage Academy. Where possible I visited digital open houses, used their online curriculum, and read the media recommended by teachers and participants.

Using these two types of digital fieldwork permitted me first a more personal and solitary exploration of femininity online, which drew reflexively on my own position and identity. Second, and a more social experience that showed me the ways in which conservative women’s groups, educational resources, build community and connect to the local area. In this way I could focus first on femininity, and then on education and transmission of these ideas, I could also then understand multiple ways digital media might be used and taken up by the conservative women I interviewed and talked with online.

Data storage and computational search with MaxQDA

In addition to digital ethnographic methods which emphasized my own personal use and reactions to the materials, and interactions with members, I used the MaxQDA software for data storage, coding and further searches. While I stored (xx) saved posts directly in instagram or facebook, eventually these were
imported into MaxQDA to be coded. I developed a corpus of 8,738 documents in total along with 900 Instagram posts.

MaxQDA advanced allowed me to import data directly from Youtube, Twitter, and to clip pages from the web. In particular this allowed me three useful functions: 1) import videos with them include all the Youtube comments, 2) search a specific hashtag and save all twitter results, 3) clip and include web pages and educational resources that were referenced by participants. These allowed me to contextualize my own observations with data about how other Youtube viewers interpreted videos, or how other social media users understood hashtags such as #tradwives.

_Ethnographic Fieldwork_

In September 2019 I moved from Massachusetts to New Orleans, Louisiana's 7th ward. I drove through the south, visiting roadside peach stands, confederate memorials, and museums, documenting the journey with photographs and field notes. See the table in appendix 1.

Once in New Orleans, I began participant observation in conservative institutions and public spaces that reflected the diverse religious and right wing communities in the area. These ranged from tea party meetings and holiday parties, confederate museums and monuments, catholic and baptist services, to dive bars outside strip malls. At each space I talked to as many people as possible and participated, including singing along at the tea party Christmas caroling session. I documented these with photographs, field notes, and collected materials for analysis.

To begin to understand the educational landscape, I spoke with local parents and teachers of all ideologies about schooling in New Orleans. One parent kindly provided me with the city’s information booklet about all New Orleans schools, which parents use to decide where to apply. I met with teachers on all sides of the charter school debates and those who wanted to take down and those who wanted to preserve confederate monuments. I also walked across the city, noting the physical landscape of public charter and private schools and documenting with photographs. My favorite was the sun going down on the plinth where the statue of Robert E Lee had been removed.

_ Interviews_

I solicited interviews at conservative functions and educational sites, as well as in online communities, and from the websites of public and private schools. I asked survey participants if they would be available to talk further, posted requests on group pages, and emailed principals from 20 schools in Jefferson, Orleans, and Tammany Parishes. From these I conducted 13 interviews of one hour each. (See table in appendix 1) I asked participants about their own teaching experience, their attitudes towards media, and what curriculum they used, and when I had established a connection we spoke more about
views on gender and politics (See appendix 2 for interview questions and surveys). With four participants I remained in contact and we conducted text chats on topics connected to my research and home education. All participants identified as highly conservative, but they ranged from a more libertarian digital teacher to a conspiratorial populist or a traditionalist Christian. Conservative identities, and attitudes towards learning, are complex.

**Limitations**

At the end of carnival season, the pandemic lockdown began. This limited my ability to attend churches and conservative meetings, or to visit areas in northern suburbs or more of Louisiana. I was obviously unable to conduct in person interviews, or more informal bar chats. There were few large conservative events with the exception of some churches which refused to close, and some Tea-Party anti-lockdown protests. I refused to participate in the anti-lockdown protests out of ethical and health concerns.

With this pandemic, the balance of my research shifted towards online data collection, digital participant observation and interviews. The majority of interviews were held over zoom or telephone, and I began posting questions in online forums to solicit a greater variety of responses. While in some respects I regret not being able to physically observe conservative teachers or integrate into a conservative charter school, digital data collection has also provided valuable insights into the ways in which the virtual is used in alt-education. Future research in this area could explore the role of online right wing schools (ie the John Birch Society’s Freedom Project academy), far right charters and Christian nationalist schools, and global homeschooling networks as a political vehicle for the American far right.
Anti-Biography 1: Into the Right

I’m sitting with my dad and all my worldly possessions in the subaru, he’s driving south down some highway or another named after some good ol boy lined with thin pine trees, long stretches of yellowing grass punctuated by auto accident and anti abortion billboards. You can decide what to do with your car, but not your body. cool. I record the trip for instagram. My dad plays podcasts and boomer music and I grit my teeth quietly. He takes me to an old country buffet the fine exporter of southern culture to your local strip mall. We stop in Georgia, I get some peaches, they are beautiful but mealy. We eat an ice cream next to a Sons of the Confederate Veterans memorial. Above us a billboard advertises local school board elections, an impressive level of community engagement in the machinery of segregation.

We hit the Mississippi line and I play Mississippi goddamn as I record the view for my Insta story. We stop at a roadside gas station-buffet, with sunbeaten 50s signage and a broken down shed that looks like it committed murder. Inside, several couples with a gaze older and older than their fried chicken and ambrosia salad stare until they irradiate my back. I flee to the shop in search of snacks to find not Rap Chips and moon pies but boiled peanuts and rows of confederate flag merchandise, shower curtains, towels, hats in pink for her. An ethnographic feast, stomach turning but sort of fun. I’d found every Northerner’s idea of “the far right” or perhaps just “the south” with Cleetus the slack jaw yokel and his fat wife.
And the truth is, the south is built on enslavement and white supremacy: confederate memorials, banking centers build on old slave auction houses, plantation houses, waffle houses staffed by black folks making 2 dollars an hour. Everywhere the civil war is an absent presence, ups drive down Lee highway, or to Jefferson Davis Parish. Woven into the landscape, like Spanish moss covering trees in the ghost of lynchings.

You drive by plantations offering tours and 4th of July parties long gone by. Its here that the idea of the belle, with her southern charm and beauty, began the slow process of dressing up whiteness as ideal womanhood. This is the old cult of domesticity, the romanticization of segregation by the angel of the home, today's family values and feminine charm. Southern women are the most socially conservative of any group, and with every “god bless” I feel like I can smell it.

But its also true that the Deep South is a trope, the incinerator where good northern girls leave all the racism, blaming it on poor benighted rural folks who never got their liberal arts education. It's a class slur, like when a woman walking down the street near UMass who referred to a poor neighborhood as “basically a red state”. I don't want to be a kale toting supercilious northern lib looking for a red (state) woman, a fat blonde Other, a chick fil a guzzling Jesus loving momma who shops at Dress Barn. I didn’t want to repeat Arlie Russel Hochschild’s cliches of racists as long lost people behind an empathy wall, on
top of a salt bubble filled with industrial waste. Not all racists are strangers.

Massachusetts has conservatives too: social darwinist doctors sipping Negronis and relating just so stories about the Pleistocene or duck vaginas to justify women’s subordination, folks yelling racial slurs at my date or smiling like they accomplished something by approving of us, farmers market puritans using the language of evolution and nature instead of Jesus and gospel. My dad doesn’t accept abortion, or trans rights, loves pretty women and would prefer a wedding to a dissertation defense- and he’s the liberal parent. My parents raised me in the cult of domesticity, well groomed, soft spoken, male oriented. I was never very good at it, but it's as much a part of me as it is the southern beauty queen. Here I am, with my daddy, looking for pro-patriarchy women — the irony should not be lost on the reader.

I can tell when we hit Louisiana, a sprinkle of Cajun in the place names and the road slowly submerged until it's not land or water. Its beautiful, another world as we drive along a floating highway. I'm undeniably excited to leave Massachusetts behind and go somewhere warm where someone might possibly say hello to me. We pull into the city of Mardi Gras and Katrina, gay pride parades called southern decadence and southern belles, one of the largest socialist organizations in the US and one of the deepest red states. We pull up to the shotgun (a house, so named because you could shoot a gun through it) I will share with old college friends, surrounded by flowers, my high ground as I explore the right.
Chapter 3- Gender and Mainstreaming

3.1 Women on the right

I remember the moment my mother became a racist. The out loud kind. The eugenics kind. She was sitting in my dad’s rocking chair with the thick green cushions, laptop balanced precariously on its wide arm reading a natural health blog. Out of her mouth fell something about different “haplotypes” that characterized different ethnic groups. I was sure this site just talked about pouring apple cider vinegar on everything from my eczema to my brothers’ foot fungus.

She went on to continue that some racial groups, including the Irish and the slavs, inherited both auto-immune diseases and genius. She had gone from psoriasis to white supremacy, in a beat. Many of the online communities around natural health and peak oil I had presumed to be full of leftist hippie moms, were in fact sites for traditionalists and far right groups who wished to turn back the clock on liberal, globalist, urban, educated living.

The Traditionalist internet gave my mother ways to explain her boredom, lack of social status, her neuroses, the lulls in her marriage, in terms of racial superiority, true womanhood, and access to privileged knowledge. She was no longer a moody housewife with an honors degree from a state college, who loved Jane Austen and had a talent for figurative sculpture, she was a genius. No longer was she “just a housewife” and devalued by the inflation in other women’s accomplishments, she was in the vanguard: women must return home cooking natural foods, making babies, and returning to the land. She read the world’s stigmatized truths: men and women look different because they ARE. Different races are DIFFERENT. She began to jokingly yell “The JEWS“ when she would drop a spoon or break a cup, but soon she would tell me the Khazars rule the world and steal our white babies. The first of these self evident truths was gender; men’s broad shoulders just mean they’re leaders, she’d tell me, our hips just mean we make babies. You can feel it in your bones.

Her idyll was sustained by dreams of returning to the old white traditional world, complete with phrenology and anti-semitic conspiracies. Racism seemed to give her old gender roles meaning. At first it seemed as if she became a nazi overnight but looking back, there were many beliefs, desires, onto which this discourse could hook and propel her into white nationalism.

Much like the 2016 election, when over half of white women and even a greater share of married white women voted for Trump, women’s conservatism can come as a surprise. Yet traditionalist ideas of femininity have long supported conservative politics. The right’s appeal to women has been described in a quartet: marriage, mutual funds, mortgages and motherhood. Here, the idea of (white, suburban) home ownership, fiscal conservatism of the thrifty housewife, and the celebration of marriage and motherhood honor one idea of women. This idea appears, and is exaggerated across right wing and far right media.
**Traditionalist Women**

The central idea of womanhood on the far-right is represented by the Tradwife. She is someone who consciously embraces “traditional” roles of wife, mother and housekeeper and rejects feminism, individualism and work. Her role is to support her husband and create, nurture and educate as many white children as she can.

meme widely circulated, can be seen for example in reference to education on: https://twitter.com/KEBrightbill/status/1308527657764741120?s=20

In this meme the tradwife is shown as the natural, authentic woman. She is slim, pretty, naturally made up. She is devoted to her family and her country. She is sometimes shown as religious and always shown in opposition to the feminist (see section 3.4 for more discussion of this opposition), as a pure, fertile, young woman opposed to the leftist modernist slut.

Because she is defined by nature and god, and unselfish, she is outside of society, politics, or the economy. This also makes her morally pure. Because of this purity and other-centered nature the woman is a natural teacher. She is the keeper of tradition. She is an atavistic repository of cultural and racial wisdom, and in raising her children with traditional values she reproduces the culture and the race.

The far-right tradwife shares much in common with the right wing Christian ideal woman. This woman also rejects work, individualism, and feminism and with her complementarian beliefs sees herself as her husband’s helpmeet who is bound to serve all men and create as many Christian children as she can.
(Ingersoll 2016). This isn’t just parenting, the woman, meant to give up herself in a vision of “sacrificial motherhood,” her lesser status as a woman redeemed by her child. As Bjork-james (2020) points out this vision of women as mothers, submissive to husbands is a shared characteristic of both mainstream Christian “family values” and the far right.

Women across the right, from my mother to white nationalist you tubers and conservative teachers, share a fixed idea of womanhood as motherhood. The white nationalist videos on womanhood and conversion to the right I collected all shared an idea of womanhood as linked to a mother’s role in the home. They often had a “housewife resentment politics” that suggested feminists and working mothers were unfairly praised in our society. In her video on what a good woman should be, white nationalist media star Brittany Pettibone (now Sellner) suggested women were naturally humble and other directed, while feminists were selfish and only out for social praise⁴. Homeschooling mother Ayla Stewart suggested feminists forget motherhood is woman’s true power while Lacey Lynn accuses schools of erasing motherhood and attacking the family.

The women I interviewed also shared a fixed idea of women as nurturers, and in a binary opposition to masculinity. This was often expressed in how they described teaching as a kind of parenting and themselves as naturally caring for their children. Being a teacher was being a mom. Sometimes this was expressed through school subjects, they liked English and their sons or husbands liked math. They would focus on home, family, and care for others as core parts of women’s identities and all of them stayed home with kids for part of their lives. Often, like my mother, they would suggest that this identity is undervalued by modern education, or when I struggled to formulate a question about gender without being too leading would reply with “you don’t have to be PC with me”.

This fixed view of themselves as just moms, contrasted with their actual varied political and social interests. One pulled her children out of school because of the teaching of gay rights. Another was antifeminist; she related her teaching the taming of the shrew with a barely suppressed joy and a smirky, well why should a woman be the head when she can submit to a man. All were bright, politically interested, and had more hobbies than I do. Many were book lovers, and one quizzed me on how many of their homeschooling books I must have read since I had a degree (answer, few). Another asked me if I had read Arlie Russel Hochschild’s book about Louisiana conservatives and shared with me her critiques - Hochschild missed out on the right wing’s love for freedom and what it means.

Closely linked to their vision of motherhood was anti-institutional politics. The homeschool mothers shared a suspicion of the state and liberal institutions like media and school, coupled with a love of learning. One homeschooling mom became a big anti-vaxx advocate and suspicious of science after

⁴ see for example Housewives are Lazy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SlN8K4_Kbc&list=PLtc6aeAW8mlCtiml08jFIEjAfAAJ-QGS8&index=2 or this piece about media mocking housewives: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ckh_pe3jX-U
having suffered a long illness. Another was a crusader against fake news; she suggested I subscribe to a far right religious newspaper. Many were lovers of classical literature and religion, and chose to homeschool to immerse their children in this world of beautiful books. Some members of my study reported being homeschooled themselves, others choosing this for their children because of the degradation of public schools. Proud of their erudition and ability to find and absorb critical media, often they framed homeschool mothers as lifelong learners quite like Phd students. They even had weekly office hours with their children.

Together both these women, and my own mom, shared a fixed idea of femininity centered on natural family roles and in opposition to visions of social construction and socialist indoctrination. Often, and even more strongly in far right media, there was an interconnection of racism and gender roles, arguing that a traditional family was important for society, the nation, or the white race. Lastly they had a suspicion of traditional schools and media, and a belief in researching and disseminating alternative forms of knowledge that supported their identities.

Everyone I spoke to mentioned the centrality of social media, connecting them with other homeschool moms or providing them with right wing news, encouraging their conversion to the right or helping them share these beliefs with their children. In the next two sections I dive into this media myself - and the metapolitics it represents. I begin with Instagram, the photo sharing platform that seems to be nothing more than shallow selfies but in fact provides a network of links to the right. In the next sections, I look more closely at right wing media to explore these feminine alternative facts, these tactics in the right wing war of position and how they create a “metapolitical intimacy” (Maly 2020) that normalizes rightist ideology and allow it to circulate.

### 3.2 Instagram Styles and Mainstreaming

In this section I compare my personal Instagram with the Instagram I used for this research, in order to look at the similarities and differences in style. Instagram is interesting for the study of right wing women and women’s media, not least because it is a social media account used primarily by women (56% cite) and with an ever larger proportion of active users, influencers and posters are women. Instagram is largely seen as a female, shallow and image focused, and apolitical site - an excellent site for delving more deeply into femininity and how it can be used to normalize right wing ideas.

My personal Instagram follows a few communist accounts (Dixieland of the Proletariat), some center leftists (Babes for Bernie) some cats (bodega cats), art museums, and friends. Overall the account is left, urban, and culturally marxist. The right wing account follows confederate accounts (Identity Dixie), women for Trump (Conservative Peach), rural life (Country Babes), military (Curves and Combat Boots), along with the traditionalists and identitarians who make up the bulk of this study. Overall, the account
goes from trump to far right, is rural and suburban and proto-fascist. Yet despite their ideological
differences, quite often they look the same.

Here we can see a photo from my instagram (L) and a right wing woman from my alter-ego’s
instagram feed (R). We use the same mirror selfie, eyes gazing downwards at our phones, the same
minimalist style in our houses and soft makeup look. Yet her next post is about cultural marxism, a
far-right version of “culture wars” which refers to the belief that an elite of marxist intellectuals wish to
destroy the West. Certain codes, poses and styles circulate across instagram. Flattering poses will circulate
across instagram, the mirror selfie, the squat shot, the leggy outdoor photo. Bright lighting for colorful
food, sunny lighting and minimalist interiors. Monstera ferns. Styles and filters will move from avant
grade to traditionalists, as when vaporwave moved from techno and communists to ] Fascist gym rats.

Two common styles I saw circulating across right wing media, and which had an effect of
normalizing and making this media seem regular, everyday, and nice were a kind of basic chick chic and
an earthy crunchy ethos.
In this image taken from the same far-right influencer, Bernadine Bluntly’s Instagram we see a sort of basic chic, a focus on minimalist style at home in a yoga studio or California bungalow. The kind of place that has a simple couch with one too many throw pillows, and one of them says something cutesy like “but first, coffee” or inspirational like live laugh love. This is a hipness without any edge, or query. Soft, well lit, spacious and affluent. Bernadine is a housewares designer who takes this aesthetic and creates tees and throw pillows that are twists on this pottery barn style. But instead of “eat pray love” it’s “kids church kitchen”. The pastel ombre writing and macrame wall hangings make her decor, and her reactionary ideas, look more like vintage, trendy and appealing. She uses similar color schemes and styles in many of her posts about the evil of Marxism and feminists, giving these also the soft apolitical look of a bed bath and beyond.

A second depoliticizing style is an earthy crunchy ethos that is often used in traditionalists’ Instagrams. This emphasizes beautiful shots of nature, old farmhouses or fall leaves. Sometimes they feature women in cute fall clothes (ie Christian girl fall) families or couples with arms enlaced. Photos can also feature gorgeous organic produce from farmers markets or gardens.

The picture above is Crimson and Clover farm, where I got a farm share exactly once. However it could be on any far right woman’s Instagram, to illustrate recipes for fermented veggies or her grandma’s borscht, or accompanied by an ode to simple rural life. These images of natural beauty and health are often used to make traditionalism seem attractive. Right wing women use common styles on Instagram,

5 49.5k Instagram followers
and how this permits them to make their lifestyles or political positions seem normal. They quite simply look like everyone else. There are, however, a few styles that distinguish right wing women from others on Instagram. They very often reuse images of 1950’s and 40’s America, especially images of suburbs associated with old advertisements for home goods. This propaganda choice is not an accident. These images of a suburban home and a male headed, white, middle class family were a part of an earlier governmental and corporate push to emphasize women’s place in home after the second world war (Coontz 1992). It has since become associated with the American ideal, tradition and domestic bliss.

The update of this style might be called Fashy Family. It takes the aggressively wholesome and old fashioned photos and paintings and often pairs them with slogans taken from protofascist and traditionalist writers like Julius Evola (author of handbook for right wing youth). These often visually portray a strictly conformist lifestyle but verbally suggest this is the real counterculture. Others take a more 1850s than 1950s style, and will post images of women with braided hair in fields of wheat (indeed, wheat field is the name for a right wing women’s group). These use a lot of pioneer imagery, paintings of log cabins and women in aprons.
Here for example, images from two homestead trad instagams, the neo-nazi farm site, hearth and helm, and the trad influencer ballerina farm’s Instagram. Even if it seems that perhaps the apron is merely functional, the “make traditional women great again” hashtag assures us this is a political accessory as well. We see men with flannel and axes rather than suits, women with prairie dresses or 50’s clothes. The variety of styles, from suburban organization man to Davy Crockett, suggest that these traditionalists want less a return to a particular time and more a revolt against modern values — or a return to a particular love of white manhood.

A second style might be called bikini nationalism. In these shots women may use some of the poses of an Instagram fitness model, but they do it with Trump flags, American flags, thin blue line flags and other symbols of nationalism or reactionary politics.

Images like these take aggressive sexuality - often with large fake tits and tiny tops - and blend it with patriotic displays. One such account is curves and combat boots, which shows soldiers in and out of their uniforms. Others take different emblems of Americanness, big trucks, guns, fishing, and pair them with tiny tops and daisy dukes. Overall the effect is one of lusty love for their country and for emblems of white American masculinity. Their sexiness also serves as an implicit rebuke to the leftists they presume to be angry and not sex positive. Sites like milfs for Trump portray a more sexualized version of the trad family - one that also shores up and supports American manhood. Even the more evidently traditionalist images use normalizing themes of family and love, or beauty and sexuality, to convey their troubling ideas. Instagram and the trappings of superficial femininity are central elements in a new right wing meta politics of intimacy, where images of relationships, connection and care are used in a right wing war of position to win acceptance for political ideas and redefine political roles.
3.3 Tracing white nationalist womanhood

In the final part of this chapter, I extend my discussion of how style and femininity can be used to normalize right wing ideas with a closer look at central themes in right wing media targeted towards women. Here I look not only at how style can be used to normalize, but at central elements of femininity connected to rightist metapolitical ideas. I found five key themes, or pipelines into the right: wellness, food, beauty, love, and family. I used a tactic of “six degrees of separation,” a game where beginning with Instagram, I explored how far into white nationalism you could get in six links or connections. Each theme is narrated beginning with mainstream media tropes and styles, and diving deeper into anti-feminist and identitarian thought.

Instagram is primarily a feed of photos that you can scroll through vertically on your phone. It is the most popular app for women ages 18-34 and the most popular app for men 18-24 and is praised by white nationalists for its ability to normalize and mainstream (hope not hate.org). I would begin each search with these photos. It offers several ways to find new content. First through comments and likes on each photo you can become aware of other connected accounts. For example, following @happyhomemaker, I could come across another person who follows her @patriarchywife and see her account. Second, photos are tagged with hashtags, like #traditionalgenderroles; clicking on these brings you to a list of top photos with this tag and you can also follow them for similar content. Last, Instagram has two recommendation algorithms, one that suggests people you can follow based on those you interact with, and one on the
search page that recommends topics and products based on your interests. Clicking on any image in the search page brings you to a feed of related images, whether that be sleeping kittens or white nationalist beauties. This is a look down right wing rabbit holes, in order to see core elements in their gender ideology. Many of these themes are broadly shared by me and perhaps my readers. Far right ideology wouldn’t persist if it did not connect to human concerns and mainstream beliefs, even as it then provides a new and extremist frame for their interpretation.

Wellness

Wellness conjures up health, happiness, and inner peace often associated with 57 photos of sun kissed women with yoga pants. In Instagram photos it is often associated with photos of women doing yoga on beaches or brightly lit lofts with houseplants and buddha heads, as well as well lit photos of specific food kale, charcoal or turmeric mylk lattes; hashtags and themes around nature and spirituality, #gratitude, #manifestation, #embodiment, #glow with the #flow, and aesthetics, posts with millennial pink or avocado green, sunny filters, and marker script font. Imagine a spiritual brunch. The first thing you might notice about wellness is that it is a gendered space. It uses soft colors and script fonts traditionally associated with women’s media. It is filled to the brim with foods designed to make you radiant, healthy, and very slim, minimalist millennial interior design, spirituality and beautiful vacation photos, and above all women with toned abs, tight two piece altheisure, glowing skin and hair in long blond waves. It seems to represent an aspirational, “natural” femininity. As Julie Gottlieb (2002) explains, this sublimation of sexuality into natural and athletic femininity is a characteristic of fascist femininity; it is taken up across the contemporary far right as well.

If you follow wellness accounts, eventually you will come across a post with a discussion of the light, or a hashtag #savethechildren accompanied by a photo of a towheaded child. Wellness culture’s signifiers of aspirational femininity have been taken up by a group called Pastel QAnon (Term coined by researcher Mark Andre Argentino https://twitter.com/_MAArgentino/status/1300974361491406849), influencers who borrow the feminine spiritual aesthetic and language to attract women to the QAnon conspiracy theory. QAnon, briefly, is a meta conspiracy theory that argues democrat pedophile elites are abusing and killing children and Donald Trump is saving them. Influencers may use the wellness aesthetics to frame it as mothers caring for children, or use wellness language around radiance, glow, and light to frame this as a spiritual battle for the light.

If you click on #savethechildren softer version of QAnon, you may find other hashtags like #WhereWeGoOneWeGoAll or #deep state which link to the full QAnon meta-conspiracy. This conspiracy frames the democrats and the larger welfare state as a child pedophile cabal, a deep state designed to prevent Donald Trump from saving the children. The cabal is a shadowy network of elites, from George Soros to Hillary Clinton, connected to 13 bloodlines the most famous of which is the Rothschilds. This
opens up into a multiplicity of conspiracies: the elite are harvesting children to make a secret cancer cure, called adrenochrome, from their blood and terror; elite feminists are actually transwomen and are transgendering children to lower white birthrates; flouride, flat earth, hollow earth with nazis, lizard people.

Clicking on one of the links for a turmeric lattes recipe may well bring you to a food blog with links to anti-vaxxer conspiracy theories. Wellness encourages healthy food, herbs and exercise and some people take these to cure more serious physical and mental illnesses. Wellness communities may consider their suppression a pharmaceutical company conspiracy. As with QAnon’s adrenochrome conspiracy, many suggest elites want to keep you sick and dependent on them (they do, by not giving you medicare for all).

Anti-vaccine sites may bring you to Natural News, less a pipeline than a superhighway from wellness to white nationalism. Natural news’ boasts it is defending life, health and liberty; it clearly advertises itself as a site for new knowledge when it asks its readers to subscribe and join them in fighting for human freedom, human knowledge, and awakening. It describes both masks and Covid 19 vaccine as a hoax, with the headline: it’s not science, it’s compliance. This online news site attacks the production of mainstream health information, offers alternative health stories and sells supplements, and also offers news of anti-trump conspiracies and the left’s “war on WHITEY”

Wellness is not a mere borrowed aesthetic to normalize or hide right wing views, however. Just as gyms can serve as spaces for the production of militarist masculinity, yoga studios can feminize fascism. Influencers, often predisposed by race or class position as well as gender norms, genuinely connect concepts in wellness to far right ideas. Themes of nature, beauty, and family normalize but also dovetail with longstanding right-wing ideologies — and conspiracies. Yoga, spiritual bodies, chakras, crystals and meditation now form part of the QAnon conspiracy. We can see this in the great map of Qanon, “the great awakening”.

---

This is a Map of the QAnon Conspiracy, sold on www.thegreatawakening.com, - which moves from Wellness at the top to the deep state cabal at the bottom.

Using discussions of spirituality and meditation, or food and health the wellness community circulates alternative forms of knowledge. Wellness’ search for radiance can become poisonous, can link to opposition to institutional knowledge of medical or mental health, as in anti-vaccine or herbal medicine movements, or when the search for food or meditation based cures for daily ennui are applied to serious mental illness. Far-right conspiracy theorist Alex Jones sells nutritional supplements to boost male vitality and female force, turmeric latte and collagen, and fake covid cures. Anti-mask conspiracies may borrow the language of empathy and wellness to oppose social distancing measures.

This creates a fertile breeding ground for the “stigmatized knowledge” that characterizes conspiracies from QAnon to Anti-Vaxxers and Anti-Maskers. This type of populist mistrust of state institutions and authorized knowledge is a key element of the current right, and is closely tied to traditional gender roles. Right wing women were “housewife populists” who took homespun knowledge to the fight against elite control of everything from fluoride to public schools (Nickerson 2012). In Big Sister, Erin Kempker (2018) explains conspiracy theorizing is central to right wing constructions of gender; 70’s anti-feminist discourses framed women’s liberation as conspiracy by elites and social engineers destroying the family. Wellness, passing through anti-vaxxers and save the children, begins with avocado toast and child’s pose and ends up in well worn right wing tropes about social change and institutional knowledge as conspiracies against the (white) family. These visions of radiant women battling conspiring social engineers animate much right wing educational discourses.
Beauty

Beauty for me means not just images of attractiveness, but rules and methods for looking good: fashion shots, makeup tutorials, and skincare gurus. My own Instagram recommendations are filled with suggestions for “dark academia” fashion choices, eyeliner tutorials, and skincare videos. These images reflect a (perhaps slightly quirkier) version of mainstream standards for beauty; the women are predominantly young, white, slender, brunettes.

If I switch over to my right wing Instagram, the biggest differences are more blondes and bigger breasts. Because I followed some sites like Babes For Trump, I am given more tutorials about getting blonde highlights and embodying a kind of country beauty with daisy dukes and cowboy boots. Babes For Trump and others often celebrate affluence with poolside bikini shots, but this is well within the standard of Instagram (I have a couple myself). We can move from sites that embody mainstream beauty standards to those which actively celebrate white beauty.

These include Instagram accounts like @WhitePeopleOfTheWorld. Here they celebrate white beauty, often linked to ethnic background or to tradition. They might show a pregnant blonde in a field of snow, cradling her belly in icy fertility. They might show a woman in a wheatfield, blond smiling and holding her hand out for a traditional man. Often they use the language of diversity to protect whiteness, suggesting that within whiteness are multiple diverse beauties - redheaded Scots and blonde Swedes, freckled Kansans, dark curled Circassians - about to be destroyed. Here we move from the beauty standard to full white supremacy.

If you dive into the comments sections of these photographs, you will inevitably tumble onto comments criticizing any change in beauty standards. Some of these are mainly anti-feminist, and focus on beauty as thinness and feminism as making women seem more masculine. They will depict modern society as degenerate, because women might have bigger legs than men. Beauty, for these anti-feminist traditionalists is about embodying gender difference. Men should be big, strong, and dominant; women should be little, soft, and dependent. So the body type they celebrate for women is slender and girlish, and these women will offer long critiques of body positivity. They link being beautiful with being submissive, and being feminist with being ugly - indeed some women even use “going feminist” to mean gaining weight or paying less attention to their appearance.

The alt-right link beauty to antifeminism, saying feminism is for ugly women (a view that is sadly not as fringe as it should be) as in Blonde in the Belly of the Beast’s video Feminism is For Idiots and Uglies. Others extend this, arguing that women naturally want to be beautiful and this is proof they want to attract men and to submit to them (see Mattheis 2018 for more). Beauty reveals a woman’s preoccupation with her role, the home, nurture and taking care.
Another current you might find is the celebration of white beauty and whiteness. Here they complain not merely about body positivity and weight, though the icon of white fertility is girlish slender or the fascist athletic ideal rather than Gaia’s childbearing hips, and more about modern media’s celebration of racially diverse beauty. This is often presented in pseudo-scientific or eugenicist language. Alt right youtubers like Lauren Southern or Lana Lokteff will present white female beauty as the natural ideal. Any move to celebrate a different color, physique, or feature will be reframed as the lunatic left’s totally irrational beliefs, or as an attack on white women. At its extreme, this is linked to conspiracies about white genocide and white beauty is often presented as a reason to protect and defend a whiteness under threat by globalism, media, or multiculturalism.

Beauty culture on the right overlaps strongly with mainstream beauty ideals, but it also is central to the project of white supremacy. Nell Irvin Painter (2010) reveals that the idea of beauty was central to the construction of whiteness and white supremacy. Anglo-German explorers of Europe and Asia would try to rank women, deciding that Circassian women were the most attractive. They linked this ideal of white skinned woman from the caucasus mountains to the whiteness of greek statues to shape an ideal of white beauty; linking this to a belief in genius and moral superiority, produced the new idea of the white race. Beauty might seem apolitical, but for white nationalists it is central.

Food

Food, closely linked to wellness and beauty, provides a very easy path to the right. You might begin on a recipe blog, you know the kind: a 6 ingredient recipe and a 15 page description of the weather the day she first had it in Provence or Vermont or her grandmas house, gorgeous photos of a vintage stand mixer or farmer’s market ingredients spilling over a rustic table, photos of a slender woman in an apron or a handsome hubby in flannel.

Very often these blogs, while their creators may travel and earn good money, reproduce gendered labor and gendered ideologies, traditional roles and traditional foods. Food can bring concerns about diet, weight, and health. It can evoke domesticity, family, care and serving. It can evoke traditions and cultural heritage. All of these are deeply embedded within mainstream and yet so easily connect to the very far right.
My own Instagram has a few shots of friends’ cooking special meals, or farmers market harvests or experiments with sourdough. I might google Smitten Kitchen or My Tiny Paris Kitchen for a recipe if I’m feeling fancy. Among these it is easy to fall into recipes from bloggers who have more conservative gender roles, housewives or mothers who spend spare time making food blogs aren’t uncommon. Some of these are members of the far right, like Lacy Lynn.
Lacey is a tradwife, an antifeminist who promotes homeschooling and cooking. Her first videos showed her cooking recipes from Julia Child to impress her husband. Now, cooking Julia Child is not a particularly far right activity - there was even a popular movie called Julie and Julia about a woman who cooked all her recipes. The differences between Lacey and Julia are subtle. Her videos will end with a discussion of how much she enjoys cooking for her husband, or show her packing him lunch because he works. Similarly, her Instagram will feature beautiful shots of pies or jam, juxtaposed with hints of her more conservative views from images of 1950s TV shows to a picture of militant anti-feminist Phylis Schlafly’s cookbook.

Lacey uses food to sell an idea of a return to traditional gender roles, where women cooked and served husbands. Her 1950’s aesthetic further draws attention to this, but this builds on existing gendered ideas about cooking and consuming foods. Many of us may have ideas about some foods, like desserts or açaí bowls or salads, as feminine, and others like beef jerky, as more masculine. Meat eating in particular is seen as masculine. Cooking, and even more, baking remains a female gendered activity. It is not my purpose here to show all the gendered food ideologies, but to point out that the right builds on gendered ideas which are part of our experiences. The right can call feminine men Soy Boys in part because Dannon sells Bro-gurt - the yogurt for men.

Following Lacey led me to another Instagram called hearth and helm. While Lacey’s food was a bit sweet and pie-heavy, this food looks like what I grew up with. Here, many images of freshly grown tomatoes or beets dug out of the ground look just like a weekend at my brother’s house. She shows a bowl of homemade granola, the old signifier of “crunchy” or “lefty” views - yet her politics are anything but. Interspersed with these beautiful images of traditional foods are her homeschooling books celebrating the

confederate south or Asatru— the nordic religion associated with the neofascists. Her celebration of organic veggies is part of a return to tradition, not just a tradwife but a call for a Traditionalist society associated with some of the most radical elements of the far right.

Hearth and helm\(^9\) is not alone in linking healthy foods to unhealthy politics, using food not only to symbolize traditional gender roles but a return to white traditions. Blonde Butter maker is another Instagram and Youtube Tradwife, with white blonde hair and rosy cheeks, who offers videos on natural health, cooking, and traditional food preparations. Her recipes focus on northern european foods such as beet kvass, especially fermented foods which are touted for health benefits.

This provides a way in to discussing white racial as well as cultural identity, presenting earlier European traditions as a lost strong, healthy physical culture. Hers is not the only recipe to link to European identity. Many of us link food and tradition - I am very proud of my family’s Italian food - but these recipes position that tradition as linked to a better physical and mental fitness that is close to eugenics.

\(^9\) 1.2k YT subscribers, 892 followers
This sounds extreme, but many diets popular today such as the Paleo and other low carb diets were explicitly linked to eugenics (Johnson 2015). One cookbook which links traditionalism, health, and racist pseudoscience together is Nourishing Traditions. Based on the work of Weston Price, who analyzed population health through dental health, it advocates for traditional Northern European foods - chiefly butter and pickles - to be strong, happy and healthy like our Anglo-Saxon ancestors. I grew up with the Nourishing Traditions cookbook. Today their foundation website supports Covid denial.

Foods’ link to tradition, culture and family, or to weight beauty and health makes it such an important issue for many of us - and a common way the right normalizes their politics. We might assume that the right only eats unhealthy food, like when Chick-fil-a became associated with homophobic politics. However, many on the right are very concerned with food for health and thinness, a return to nature and white culture. Many use food to make antifeminism seem like a return to maternal love and domestic bliss. Others use food to link cultural practices to genes and health, deepening their construction of white racial identity and genetic fitness.

Love
One afternoon, I opened my facebook to see the ad below.
This image shows mainstream romantic advice rooted in old-fashioned “men are from mars, women are from Venus” style heteronormative self-help discourses. The image of a happy couple in wedding garb, woman leaning on the man, oozed heteronormativity as did the term male/female polarity or the assumption it was women’s job “a girl skill” to attract the right man. Yet I had just gone through some romantic turbulence, and here was an ad explaining to me how to stop attracting manchildren. If being a socialist feminist was not my biggest turn on, would I have been tempted?

The advertisement explains it was a course in becoming more feminine to attract strong and masculine men. This view is based on the belief in a gender binary, which defines male and female genders as opposed, but also in the centrality of this binary to attraction and satisfaction in relationships. That is, femininity is what is least masculine and so to be most attractive you must be least manly. Relationships, as well, need this polarity of gendered natures, gender roles and gendered complementarity.

The classic in this genre is Fascinating Womanhood the 1974 self help book by Helen Andelin. Her daughter, Dixie (yes, dixie), looking like the ghost of southern housewives past, continues to make Instagram posts and youtube videos about increasing your femininity and pleasing your man. The book offers very detailed advice on how to perform femininity from fabric choices (with the inimitable phrase, “nobody likes a professor in chiffon”), colors and hairstyles to gestures and vocal qualities. Femininity is described as difference - men are strong and big and wear dark colors, women should appear little, girlish, soft, unserious and passive — but it becomes clear it is submission to men. This becomes obvious when it comes to work (women shouldn’t)and conversation. She advises women not to think so hard they forget appreciate the man who is talking, and for women to not get more invested in their talents than their husband. If this is bliss I don't want it.

Fascinating womanhood is the basis for much of the modern tradwife and antifeminist community. Its ideas continue to circulate on multiple Instagram accounts and hashtags, often with a sexy modern update. These often celebrate traditional gender roles as the same thing as romance, selling them as a way to find love or renew a relationship. Romance can often sell an attack on feminism and women’s rights, as in the Instagram image from @tedandgracie below:
This image uses a happy couple to show the joys of patriarchy and a man’s love, but the subtitle and hashtags take the viewer to still darker places. It suggests that wanting love shows that feminism isn’t a woman’s real desire. Next the hashtag, which even within them show a path from romance to racism. At first they celebrate romance and marriage, then call for traditional roles and values while dogwhistling racism with #traditional lives matter’s appropriation of Black lives matter. Finally they end with calls to #obey him and #submissive wife, and #taken in hand which refers to a practice called domestic discipline, a kind of biblical BDSM that lets husbands physically and socially dominate their wives.

The white nationalist right builds on this idea of wanting beauty and love, to link antifeminism with racism and white identitarianism. It wraps up the whole of western civilization into a man’s love for a woman, the whole of western civilization’s beauty and progress from the Palais Royale to Penicillin is a gift from man to woman. Lastly, women must be beautiful to embody the west and prove themselves worthy of men’s love - fertile, nurturing and submissive - to give him a reason to defend it. Here, this is an extremist, nationalist romance - ordinary women get jewelry you get to be the jewel in the crown of civilization. We want to be beautiful and we want to be loved, at least, I do. The right is very wrong that we all want the patriarchy or a traditional marriage, but many of us want relationships to work and be fulfilling. That the right uses these as ways into their politics, or confuses love and romance with submission and gender roles, is effective and deeply pernicious.

Family
Instagram is filled with sunny photos of pregnant moms or mischievous toddlers, parents sharing tips for childcare or photos of first birthdays. On right wing Instagram, this love of the maternal and domestic is taken up to 11. Parents will celebrate very large families, with photos in the kitchen of mom and her many children lighted up like a modern day von Trapp family and just as blonde (but less inclined to resist Nazis). There are many photos of mothers with children from a soft conservative account like xx to the fascist account white people of the world. Of course parents like sharing photos of their kids, the differences between a right wing account and personal one, a proud boy and a normal proud poppa are twofold: an emphasis on maternity and an idealization or politicization of this image. Mommy bloggers and videos about everything from child’s hairstyles and baby bento boxes to homeschooling fill up Instagram and Youtube. Media still presents childcare as the work and interest of women.

As Mattheis (2018) points out this is one of the strongest areas where right wing ideology overlaps with the mainstream, which still links womanhood and motherhood and values women for it. Right wing women manipulate this explicitly, sometimes by using glam shots of themselves as pregnant or caring for children to make their accounts seem sweet, soft and caring. They often follow the tropes of mommy bloggers or videos in their media, for example Lacey Lynn uses the “ten reasons to homeschool” style video common to many mainstream conservatives and uses it to discuss anti-feminism and cultural marxism. Copying the style of mommy bloggers and family photos allows them to present their views as less political, more acceptable - more about a future for their kids.

Once you dive deeper into these sugarcoated and pastel world of the alt-mom, you see this emphasis on maternity is an idealized and politicized discourse. In anti-feminist discourses, this appears as a kind of maternal resentment politics. They say things like Bernadine Bluntly’s “I’m 30, married, and have three kids and that’s ok!” They do not mean anyone said that being married and having children was unacceptable. What they really mean is that it is better and long for a return to the days when it was the norm.

However, presenting themselves and their lifestyles as the victims of feminism allows them to more easily present motherhood as sacred and feminism as social engineering. They use the images of mommy bloggers to argue that family is the truefulfillment denied to you by feminism (and not by low wages, high rents). This resentment politics positions women as totally defined by their roles as wives and mothers. They explain women as relationship and other oriented, humble and not individualist. They offer Instagram posts like “men create society, women create children” in pink and blue font, that justify both a stay at home mom lifestyle and a rigid gender binary. Motherhood is woman’s real nature, her sole fulfillment, true desire, and her real purpose. Everything else is cultural marxism. While some discourses suggest men and women are different but equal, there is a clear hierarchy as shown in this image from Bernadine Bluntly’s Instagram:
Here the biblical order of the family suggests a male head of household, whose wife is under him just as he is under Jesus. This vision suggests a deeply hierarchical family where the father is in charge and the mother is a teacher and carer for the children. (Some go so far as to suggest that the category of adult is a marxist or satanic construction that gives men and women false equality!) This image of the woman as sacred mother is especially central in white nationalist discourse (Bjork James 2020). Here the woman is not just a mother, but the womb of the race and the mother of the white nation. Motherhood serves a symbolic function, less about how to actually raise a kid, and more about creating and strengthening whiteness.

These discourses often link pronatalism, antifeminism, and racism into conspiracies like white genocide. This theory argues that globalist elites are trying to attack whites with lower birthrates through feminism and cultural marxism, and replace them with other races through diversity education, immigration and multiculturalism. White nationalist women call for patriarchy, reprising women’s “traditional” roles of honoring their white husbands by early marriage, less formal education and more babies. This is a restrictive role, but it allows them to play the symbol of the victimized white nation and its fertile savior.
Together these themes of love, family, food and beauty can work to make some right wing ideas seem quite normal or even good - as though they really were traditional family values. They can make tradwives seem like a movement for healthy children, beautiful moms, and happy homes. These are a shiny lighter glossier version of the right, no skinheads in steel toes here. Some areas, like wellness, may provide points of access to those who suffer from illnesses, others, like food and beauty, may show us how close our own views of and desires still are to this traditionalism, or like their views on love, take up human desires for connection and turn them to the service of reactionary social order. All can make right wing ideas seem accessible, attractive, and normal allowing them to circulate far beyond the bounds of a Neo nazi forum.

3.4 Gender ideology on the right

Food, beauty, health and wellness, love and family are all common, broadly accepted values linked to ideas of white women’s “traditional gender roles.” (This term was itself how Delehanty Edgell and Stewart (2019) secularized evangelical discourse, language designed to give religious meaning to social issues). These feminine themes form winding paths to the right’s very strict definition of womanhood, as gendered role and as ideal of traditional cultural purity. To conclude this chapter, I introduce a semiotic explanation for how the right pulls on these threads and shapes a rigid vision of traditional femininity, drawing on Gal & Irvine’s (2019) work on differentiation. I end with the way this is used in rightist political thought.

3.4.1 Differentiation and Naturalization

The gender binary is a core element of right wing ideology, from the Christian Right to the white nationalist. Gender roles are defined by the gender binary, where the post-war social structure became understood as god-given immutable characteristics. For the right all gender is on this binary, it is as evident as basic biology and as important as god’s truth. Men are big, strong, quiet, serious, logical, individualistic, compartmentalizers who are naturally endowed with leadership. Women are soft, small, emotional, nurturers who are naturally endowed with submission.
Because of their differences they naturally have different roles: men work and compete, while women stay home and nurture. These differences are expressed in all the threads of femininity shown in the right wing media above; the focus on home, wellness, care, expressing a role in the home and a soft, nurturing nature. Far-right discourse on gender takes up these elements, which may be embedded in broader anti-feminist social norms but could also just be recipes, and gives them meaning in a rigid system of gender difference as gender hierarchy - where each gendered characteristic comes out of physical sex or reproduction — Women are not only valued as mothers, but are defined rigidly through this capacity. For example, women are described as “receptive vessels” linked to their reproductive function.

This definition of women’s whole character through sexual difference and reproduction through what Gal and Irvine term regimes of value and systems of differentiation. In right wing ideology gender serves as a central axis of differentiation between humans, mapping directly onto a binary of dominance and submission. Male means dominant, Female means submissive.

This binary is fractally reiterated, so that the major difference between men and women is repeated in a series of smaller differences - in personal, physical, and behavioral qualities which are all linked back to sex. Women are described as physically yielding while men are hard, a binary which uses qualities associated with sex to characterize dominance. Some express submission through beauty; books like the far right romance guide fascinating womanhood encouraging women to be feminine with soft clothing, silky fabric or fuzzy knits, soft speech, quiet and questioning, and soft bodies which are slender and girlish.

Gal and Irvine refer to this move between the perceptible and the imperceptible as rhematization, where something we might think of as merely a sign of femininity, say a dress, becomes instead an icon that somehow is femininity - as when a frilly pink dress somehow just is femininity itself. In particular this occurs when sensual qualities, like softness, come to represent imperceptible ones like submission. Within far right gender discourses this becomes a cycle of rhematization; physical differences are rhematized as personal qualities and then personal or ideological qualities are expressed as physical differences. For example, the physical difference in reproductive organs is rhematized as women’s essential “receptive” or submissive nature, which then is in turn rhematized as women’s role as gentle listeners to men after work. This move from perceptible to imperceptible, physical to psychological, turns around the right’s ideology of gendered submission.
Importantly, it also helps to naturalize it - locating this inequality in the body and in the act of sexual reproduction. This process takes qualities, acts, images and styles and imbues them with the deep meaning of gendered difference and gendered hierarchy. Using gender to prove a natural difference or instill investment in “intimate hierarchy” is a central part of far right ideology - but it isn’t limited to the white nationalists. Conflating difference and dominance is common in Christian doctrines of complementarity, but far right anti-feminism deepens and naturalizes this binary.

They take threads which appear across media and modern life, and invest them with meaning in a political and social world, draw on forms of femininity which are already socially accepted - especially in conservative Christianity but not only - in a time of lean in liberals, second shifts, half achieved feminism and the misogynist push to both embody and denigrate femininity. they take femininity and motherhood, resignify and give them meaning in this worldview.

3.4.2 Ideal women and Right wing Ideology
And the woman does have meaning in this system; limited to this role but within it elevated as an angel of the home, a mother of the nation. Rightwing ideologies share an ideal woman, defined by nature, god or her reproductive function. Her biology is her identity and her destiny. The woman is a wife, a mother or a daughter. She is defined by her relationship to others, and is understood as fundamentally humble and other oriented. She not individualistic, she doesn’t seek to have her own glory, talents, or opinions but to please, serve and interest others.

The ideal woman is mobilized in right wing politics from white nationalist ideas of the nation as a racial family, to conservative family values. Both White Nationalist and Christian Nationalist discourses frame the country as rooted in biological ideas of the people as the national family, (ie, founding fathers) linked by race and religion. As one of my participants noted, nation comes from the word “to be born”. The nation is deeply gendered, with an ideal mother and a strong father. Founded on the hierarchical model of patriarchal family, priest headed church, and this model of masculinity as natural authority opposes a bureaucratic state, equality - sometimes even democracy (ie, Gottlieb 2000). The ideal woman represents this nation, its identity and purity, and she stands as the mother of the nation, reproducing the people and their traditions.
The gender binary and woman as mother is also central in right-wing and conservative politics. The right describes their politics as family values, combining a belief in gender difference and gender roles with an embrace of economic liberalism (Self 2012) - the private home becomes linked to private property (Nickerson 2012). Stuart Hall (1988) notes that the gender binary is itself necessary to manage these two contradictory tendencies of the embrace of the market and the neoliberal economization of everything and the call for social conservatism and moralism. Contradictions are resolved by mapping them onto this gender binary. Here women represent the moral, the home and hearth that need protecting. Men and masculinity represent the forces of law and order and economy that will compete for her, protect her, and provide for her.

3.4.3 Threatened womanhood

Idealized notions of femininity also depend on those who fail to meet this standard, or those who threaten it. Far right ideas that see women as the soul and embodiment of the nation also position both woman and nation as in need of masculine protection. This can be literal, as in pro-war discourses of nationalist masculinity (Kelly 2017) or anti-immigration discourses that describe refugees as rapists (Ferris 2017). Gender roles are central in patriotism, nationalist pro-war discourses. More often it is figurative, as when far right nationalists characterize any opponents as family destroyers (Wodak 2017). Changing roles and responsibilities from those popularized after the second world war is reframed as an attack on tradition and a breakdown of the family (Briggs xx, Bjork James 2020) Although the second world war was actually a time of great state intervention, conservatives frame modern state not as providing social supports but as attacking traditional values.

On the far right this is framed as conspiratorial discourses about “social engineering” and government plans to make us obedient gender neutral citizens. But this is not confined to the extreme right, neoconservatives align with neoliberals to frame any type of government program as an attack on the family and the role of the father as protector and provider (Cooper 2016) while any type of progressivism from SNAP to public schools (Tebaldi 2021) is seen as creeping socialism that challenges family authority, gender roles, or the idea that women are women and men are men. Anxieties about the state and modernity are expressed in images of corrupt femininity.
The trad wife or ideal mother is always opposed to another kind of failed woman. This can be the student who drinks until her ovaries dry up, as one far right media personality characterized women like me, the “professor in chiffon” from -fascinating womanhood whose failed femininity emasculates her man, or the chubby fake bisexual modern woman from the tradwife memes. This is a woman who illegitimately takes on a male role, as in the female professor, who is too intellectual or individualist or dominant. This is a woman who fails to live up to the norms of womanhood by being unattractive or infertile, and who cannot legitimately assume a male role either.

Women, their speech and their roles, becomes a proxy for nationalist anxieties about modernity and the nation — women must embody tradition and national purity, men modernity and progress — (Inoue 2000). This anxiety around gender identity and gendered forms of expression can be seen again in right wing media, from the overwhelming concern for domesticity to the embrace of pastels. With this is a deep anxiety about social change, that women outside of their roles as wives and mothers is a sign of decadence and decline, or insanity and the “clown world” or social engineering and conspiracy. Public schools link together these anxieties around changing gender roles, female power and opportunity, and the bureaucratic state and become an intense site of contestation on the right. Formal education is often seen as opposed to traditional family life, from early marriage and the woman at home, to the gendered balance of power. Education is seen as the state’s social engineering, making an unnatural reversal of the order of things where women’s care for and authority over their children is replaced by government schools. These schools teach the wrong values, and they embody them. Public schools take children away and teach the wrong kind of womanhood, one that places women outside the home and in positions of social power. Schools are demonized by the right, but education on the right is revered and seen as truly important. In the next chapter I explore how the figure of the ideal woman appears in education, the battle between the ideal mother and natural teacher, and the feminist marxist public schools.
Anti-biography 2: A redpilling for Christmas

Faggot. The speaker intones from the couch, enthroned in purple wool blankets. The word breaks the soft silence of flames in the woodstove, contrasts with the heavy green of the woods outside. The sound echoes across the newly varnished floors, reverberating across the empty space of boho-chic-yet-spare living room with half cathedral ceilings. Seated in the smallest chair, at her feet, the ethnographer turns and blinks.

And then. N---I ---G.


Burning the veneer of the liberal family-- my family – with our solar roof to fairy tales that ended “and then she got a college scholarship”.

Is arrayed around the living room in coordinated yet carefully mismatched chairs, laughing The ethnographer, that is, me, is fucking stunned. The woman smiles, happiness stretching from marble kitchen island to the view of the Berkshire foothills out the sliding glass doors. The subject’s family turn. All eyes on her, lifted off the couch with excitement. My cheeks burn with waves of shame and disgust that I wish I could ride out of here. I fumble for a pen, a means to transform these feelings into observations. Clawing for distance. The room is all attention. So am I. This is the point.

This is the beginning of the redpilling.

Redpilling, is a term used by online alt-right groups to refer to the sharing of right wing truths. They are opening the minds of the unconverted. This process repackages ideology as a form of stigmatized truth. The term comes from a movie, The Matrix, where the main character is offered a choice of two pills - blue for illusion, red for the truth. The redpillers are no longer boorish, unreconstructed. They are secret, exciting, gathering in the hidden citadel of a reddit message board. R/Redpill is used by a heady mix of gamers and proud boys. Slobby pick up artist apprentices with red hot cheeto crumbs stuck in their neck fat folds, or men’s righters with crisp polos as white as their privilege. Either way, prophets in cargo shorts.

Calling out cuck, cuck, cuck, snowflake like an awful rendition of the children’s game duck, duck, goose.
Redpiller’s truth is more than a conspiracy theory, which invents ever more complex proofs of something unreal (9-11 was an inside job sponsored by FIMA and the pope), constantly shifts the boundaries between truth, revelation, and provocation. A redpilling is constructed from the juxtaposition of the deeply offensive with the seemingly innocuous, which to the mind of the converted serves as incontrovertible proof. Within the long monologue that builds in intensity as it interweaves the everyday and the abhorrent, borrowing from biblical hermeneutics or discredited science, the redpill makes 1950s ideology “edgy”

With her heavy eyebrows and strong jaw, the speaker seems at first to be an unlikely prophet for the life changing power of gender norms. At age 40 the speaker found Jesus. At 50, reddit. Jesus spoke and in his wisdom he declared the jews are in a conspiracy to take over the Christian world, transgender their children, and control their mind. The proof was incontrovertible, self evident, in the words themselves: Government means mind control. Govern. Ment. The redpilling begins with provocative language which she explains thusly, and without a trace of irony: When they use slurs the 4chan aren’t being racist. They are just trying to keep out the lukewarm. The baby boomer grandmothers. Jesus needs real warriors, not people who are not willing to do battle for souls.

Jesus. Living as he does, in the nastier part of a youtube comments section, I think to myself as I put shame and pen to paper, trying to capture the feel of an alt-right monologue with some narration that makes its moves clear.

.PewDiePie isn’t racist he’s just joking. When they use these words they are just trying to establish a Free Speech zone. Here’s a sweet story. A guy on the board he said he would know when the CIA were spying when he wasn’t allowed to say Faggot. So then his mom got on the board, and she posted, “i love you Faggot”.

I loved you, racist. We look together at a Buzzfeed article. For a second I feel safe, until I see it is about “Sweden’s most handsome men”. She has a Swedish last name. Look at these men, they are beautiful. They look like your brother. We scroll through the blandly handsome faces, and then a black swede appears. Oh god do they have to make everything PoLITical now she declares - alighting on the second syllable with disdain. God when I just see the propaganda they give you to make white women feel like they need to love black men it just ... it just.. as the mother of a white son it just it makes me feel like the walls are closing in.

Provocation resumes your PC liberal norms and transgresses them for attention. Like fat online poker players doing their best impression of locker room talk, they see your opposition and they raise you pick up artists and a white genocide. From here two paths are possible. First, the pseudo-rational -- It’s ok to be white Cat. You can be proud of your whiteness. Hey next time you go to the city get me one of those Identity Evropa signs that say “It’s ok to be White”. I mean, it is. But isn’t there a white genocide? Putin seems like a really nice guy. Trump is here to save you. Trump is sent by god. He’s saving children. As long as they keep saving children I don’t care what happens with the rest.
The ethnographer and her subject sit next to each other on the faded blue couch, watching bleach blonde angry conservative Lauren Southern on a cheap chromebook. Her youtube podcast seems to be saying women need to have men before they turn 25, and anything else is cultural marxism or feminists deluding themselves. But with all that makeup she looks older than you, she says, Is she comforting me as though to say I could still pass for dateable? Anticipating my comments that this is an outdated social arrangement based on women being seen as primarily for reproductive value – young, submissive, fertile, empty. Just as I’m about to ask why our system of marriage doesn’t value personality, accomplishments, she heads it off with well have you ever noticed that women started working and then you needed two incomes to support a family. She’s got me there.

At times, if you squint, this is very nearly the kind of conversation “are you dating someone?” that you could have normally over an awkward thanksgiving -- if your own gender politics were right at home in the National Socialist Frauenschaft. It’s not that men value young women because of social arrangements, but that young women ARE more attractive - to deny this is to be as absurd as to say the earth is flat. “Boys will be boys” just as surely as 2+2=4. She has presumed the truth of sexual difference, and is using it to highlight the absurdity of opposition. This sort of pseudo rational line is often used to deny social meanings, insist on literalism – not quite a swastika is just a symbol, but almost. More like the kind of person who would read the Nazi’s 88 words and go, “well, what’s wrong with a future for white children?” Lucky for her my brother looks like an extra in a Leni Riefenstahl movie.

The second path of the discussion is prophetic knowledge -- the inversion of this Nazi Nature discourse, it doesn’t make her ideology a self evident truth, but fashions your beliefs the products of evil, cultural marxist conspiracies. More insular, conspiratorial, her voice will go faster, her eyes stop seeing anything in front of her as she begins to connect and combine her sources, Tiresias the blind reading the future not in tea leaves but the dregs of 4chan. Drawing in multiple sources and layering on to the words as she tells it, seeming to draw even more manic energy from the idea of your opposition. Q, [the author of right-wing message boards that pretend to decode Trump tweets and white house memos] might be the most important thing to ever happen. He’s exposing George Soros is at the center of a vast web of liberals, to sell Haitian children and drink the blood of the Christians. Especially Christians with two diferent colored eyes. Jefrey Epstein has a jet where all the children who are missing live. THEY are the people of the eye. THEY are serpent seeds, evil jews crossbred with the biblical snake are trying to destroy the Christian race. THEY invented the Zika virus to stop white women from having children. THEY faked Sandy Hook to stop white women from having children. Oh God and the Feminists. THEY are the feminists. Feminists are transgendered women. actually men sent by the CIA to disrupt the family. Merkel is part of them. Hitler was her grandfather. Hitler was a transgendered woman. Kristen Gillebrand is in a sex cult. The worst sex cult. With children. They have tattoos to mark them. THEY steal your children for blood sex orgies.

The redpilling reaches a climax, a transgender-holocaust denial-liberal-sex-cabal. And crashes back to ordinary, maternal discourse. The final move I see coming with all the grace of a fat wrestler in a onesie, poised on the ropes for a flying crash attack-. When is your generation going to have children I pray for it. Here, I know just what to say.

“I don’t know, Mom. Maybe they’ll have Black ones”
Chapter 4: Alt-Education

New Orleans native Bre Faucheux leads the right wing educational series Alt-Right 101. With a soft breathy voice, white skin and bright pink lipstick, she should be Miss Honey, Miss Frizzle, any one of a series of winsome white schoolteachers. She looks like a nice white lady, ideally feminine, as she tells the story of gender roles and the family under threat from the federal government’s communist social engineering. Bre is one of a growing number of women online who promote Alt-Education-homeschooling, blended digital schools, and online popular education as alternatives to what they perceive as the indoctrination of liberal schooling.

If the first chapter looked at femininity and mainstreaming, this chapter looks at women in the transmission and circulation of far-right beliefs and ideals. Tradwives and pagans, Neo-Confederates and Christian Nationalists, even patriotic public schoolmarms, women are both tropes and teachers in right wing alt-education. Across the right discourses celebrate homeschooling and Christian education as saving the nation, cutting down evil and cultural decadence at the root. They venerate mothers and their teaching of kitchen table commonsense, morals, tradition, and excoriate progressivism as experts telling mothers how to raise their kids. They make moral panics out of phonics, satanism out of sex ed. They also engage in creative, embodied pedagogy, a passion for literature and reading, and deeply loving and intelligent teachers committed to their students.

Often pictured as ignorant, conservative educators can be reduced to anti-science Christian fundamentalists. Lack of education is the first hypothesis tested by leading sociologist James Aho (1995) to explain right wing extremism, positing a lack of liberal arts education and a natural affection for the nation. But the right wing women I spoke to were anything but uneducated; some had Phd's in Classics, all were readers with deep knowledge of language, literature, and education. Right-wing women aren’t dumb. More importantly, right wing ideologies don’t come from natural patriotism. They are taught - and well. Alt-education has a well-developed pedagogy which can draw on practices from the left, but which immerses mother and child in right-wing ideology.
In this chapter, I explore the ideologies of alt-education. These ideologies are created in narratives of conflict between the ideal mother-educator, and institutional schooling. This narrative mobilizes many of the gendered stereotypes discussed in the first chapter, and puts them at the service of anti-government politics. First, I look at these narratives of conflict: between mothers and government, and between education and schooling. Next, I show how the ideologies of alt-education participate in broader conservative discourses of individualism and family values against the welfare state. In the conclusion I address how ideas from alt-education circulate between far-right and mainstream teacher-education. Specifically, I look at how liberal beliefs about good teachers draw on conservative ideals, while discourses of class and creative pedagogy show how leftist ideas can be taken up by the right. I draw on research with three groups of educators: white nationalists, Christian homeschooling moms, and conservative public school teachers. Tables with data can be found in Appendix X.

I began with white nationalists like Bre, looking at the videos they created on home and alternative schooling. Their videos are an alt-education in white nationalism, emphasizing their roots in what the movement defines as white culture, a mix of rigid gender roles, protestant work ethic, patriarchy and a diverse set of northern European cultural traditions. They also had videos on how to homeschool, what to teach, and crucially - why we should. They had detailed and sometimes disturbing analyses of the problems of public schools, from pedagogy to ideology.

I explore these in connection to interviews with Christian nationalist homeschooling moms. Most homeschooling families are conservative politically, and these fall to the far right end of the spectrum. These women all used a blended school program called Classical Conversations, which is a liberal arts curriculum rooted in both canonical literature and the extremist theocratic movement Christian Reconstructionism. Extremely popular in the US South, it links Calvinist belief in predestination with the southern nationalist belief in “the remnant” to argue that white southerners are the apogee of western civilization. This blended school offers once a week classes, parent groups, and a homeschool curriculum. While now much more widespread than white nationalist alt-education, it was once a fringe movement as well. They share many ideologies and practices, and the same critique of public schools. Last, I look at how these extreme Christian and white nationalist critiques of public schools and developments of alt education are reflected in conservative educators groups. I looked at a Facebook group I called Patriotic American Educators, at the ways they described themselves as teachers, their additions to the curriculum, and their criticisms of public schools.
Many of these teachers shared some populist ideologies, some going so far as to homeschool their
own children, but overall many were more conservative. Conservative, as Apple defines, blends
patriotism with protestant values and libertarian economics, emphasizing discipline and work readiness.
Yet as Laats (2015) shows, there has been long historical overlap between authoritarian populist
discourses of schooling and conservative institutional responses. Looking at these connections can help
understand how far right ideologies are normalized and affect broader educational beliefs and practices.
At the end of the chapter, I explore how the far right discourses of alt education circulate into mainstream
conservatism and are used to support broader anti-state and anti social welfare politics.

4.1 Battle Discourses and Conservative Ideology

The homeschooling families I interviewed were populist and family centered, but 80 embraced classics
and the conservative nostalgia for social darwinism. They were also part of a program that drew on white
nationalist racialized nostalgia, talking about white cultural traditions and bloodlines. Modeled on the
family and god, or competition and a glorious past, Apple’s conservatives and populists share a common
conservative ideology of education as fighting for tradition.

Laats identifies this shared belief as educational conservatism, which he defines as opposition to
progressivism and preservation of tradition. That is, conservative movements in education arise out of
opposition to movements for democratic pedagogy or desegregation, much as Robin (2017) characterizes
right wing movements generally. Second, Laats says, conservatives see the purpose of education as
maintaining tradition and social stability through traditional and authoritarian pedagogies such as phonics
or times tables. I center the oppositional nature of conservatism in my own analysis, as the key feature
shared by right wing educational discourses.

However, in contrast to Laats’ link between traditional values and traditional methods, families in
my study used creative as well as canonical methods to teach authoritarian values. Rather than tradition or
authority families framed their pedagogy in ways I will call “natural,” and was linked to both populist
beliefs about teaching as mothering and opposition to progressivism as institutional and artificial “social
engineering”.


Natural pedagogy takes an anti-institutional ethos from the left, but it also takes many progressive pedagogical practices, and similarly invests these with ideological meanings supporting white heteropatriarchy. In my research these included the language of criticality, especially class critique and a critique of standardized tests, but also pedagogical practices including project based learning, and literacy across the subject areas. All were given new ideological orientations: this is democratic education for the kingdom of christ, critical pedagogy for white authority. This idea of natural pedagogy is clearly shown here, in the advertisement for one of the Christian nationalist schools, presenting this pedagogy as aligned with a god-created nature and tradition.

The language intertwines creation and god, nature and a social order, suggesting this pedagogy is what is in accordance with reality and “man befriending” god. Underlining the metaphor of educating in this social order as cutting with the grain of reality, an image of a chopping block also suggests homespun tradition. In addition to nature, martial metaphors are central to right wing educational discourses.
Home education itself is often framed as natural freedom under threat - indeed their largest organization is called Homeschool Legal Defense. Christian and White Nationalist educators dial this up to 11, framing themselves as doing battle in discourses which vividly characterize hero and enemy, good and evil.

Conservative educational ideologies, or beliefs that define good education and link this to values and identities, are narrated as stories. First, they tell the story of the embattled educator bravely fighting the system, a la David and Goliath, the loving mom vs the government factory school. This tells the story of the ideal educator and the values she should impart; it creates the evil government and good family. Second they create the story of the good education vs the factory school, opposing individualism and indoctrination. This is the story that creates an ideal learner as the heroic free thinker, bravely challenging the status quo and liberal dogma.

Hall (1988) notes how sensationalized media discourse has been central to the right’s project of discrediting progressive education, sparking fears about failing or dangerous schools. As Anker (2005) explains in her discussion of post 9-11 media, political narratives often rely on tropes of melodrama, the “dramatic triangle” of victims, villains and heroes. These also appear in education, as in Czastkiewicz’s study of narrative in charter school policy (2012). Affective narratives are part of what Hall describes as the translation of ideology into populist idiom; they frame educational policies as morality plays.

Here, women and children are victims or heroes, and the government schools are always villains. In the following analysis, I first introduce these stories, then show how these imagined battles animate conservative ideologies or “regimes of value” (Gal & Irvine 2019), which define the essence and value of types through contrast to others. The value of the mother is made in contrast to the villainous school, and her heroic character is defined through this battle with it. Naturalistic metaphors express these values: natural mothers and healthy children are contrasted with, and attacked by, artificial institutions and social contamination. These create melodramatic narratives of purity and danger, which translate ideologies of politics and education into the idioms of motherhood.

In sections 4.2 and 4.3 I craft two ethnographic fictions (Ghodsee 2011) narratives which draw on data from my field notes, interviews, and media. They are not the story of any individual mother, but represent a synthesis of many smaller stories, crafted to reflect the tone, metaphors, and major elements I found in two years of research and analysis. In sections 4.2.1 and 4.3.1, I analyze and unpack these ideologies and the ways they were taken up by the women in this study.

4.2 Moms vs government schools
The first story is the tale of a mother who fights the government school for her boy. It stars an idealized white middle class woman: the loving, caring mother who reads her boy a bedtime story, the momma bear who defends him, the tradwife who prays unceasingly for him, become a composite figure of the endlessly motivated mom at the kitchen table who helps the child read while a pie bakes. This angelic mother fights the grim government schools, who tell her she is not smart enough to teach the children she brought into this world, fed them with her body and now she pours her soul into them to give them character, morals, values. She might begin to rant: who is this school to tell her she doesn’t know how to teach HER OWN KIDS? Who are these condescending experts and how can they do better? Schools are institutions and institutions can’t love kids. There are so many other kids her special little guy won’t get the attention he needs. Government schools mean everyone is the same, equal means nobody gets to be an individual. Instead they are all teaching that white Christian boys are bad and privileged, and girls don’t have to be mothers. They are taking away kids from their families and their identities and values; the schools are attacking the family. Mom has to be a momma bear and defend her boy from the schools who hate him. This story creates two main characters: mom and government. Mom in this story is at once the victim and the hero, the woman whose children are taken away from her and the heroic savior of the kids, the family, conservative values and the nation. In contrast, the school is evil, child stealing and indoctrinating, destroying the culture and the nation for the administrative state. These characters create very clear and affective ideologies about the mother as the ideal teacher and natural authority, which draws heavily on the gender ideologies described in the previous chapter and mobilizes them against the artificial authority of the state. 4.2.1 Mom Nationalist homeschooling videos and blogs describe the homeschooling mom first as a lover and defender of white children. White Nationalist Lacey Lynn sits on the floor of a lovingly decorated boys room and describes herself as a momma bear in her video Why I homeschool, protecting her children not just from school shootings and ADHD diagnoses but from a culture that tells her she is “giving birth to the world most hated person, a white male Christian”. White nationalist “wife with a purpose” Ayla Stewart describes herself as passing on the glories of white civilization to her children and protecting them from a system that says they are evil while bouncing a blue eyed baby on her knee. White nationalist homeschoolers frame teaching white culture and instilling white supremacy as an act of love and an extension of maternal care.
These reflect their broader gender ideologies of womanhood as motherhood, and they frame homeschool as defending their gender roles - keeping mothers at home, and keeping children away from schools telling them masculinity is toxic, motherhood isn’t a career, or genders are equal. They also reflect nationalist views of the woman as symbolic mother of the white nation, guarding traditions and cultural purity from her food. It offers an expanded maternal role, homeschooling making mothering as teaching a child European culture and protecting white pride. Most important, this discourse links traditionalist motherhood and nationalism - teaching white culture as both European traditions and 1950s gender roles (see Tebaldi 2021) for further discussion of the link between female submission and nationalism). Christian Nationalist school videos share an emphasis on teaching as a mothers love 84 and protection, but frame this in Christian language of god, love, family and prayer. Head teacher of New Orleans’ Classical Christian School Logos explains that their model of twice weekly classes is meant to be kind to the family, to preserve their authority as children’s first teacher. Christian nationalism believes god said the family has the authority to teach children, to raise them “to know god and make him known” as the motto of Classical Conversations (CC) puts it. Founder Leigh Bortins explains that her blended homeschool (now over 120,000 students) is a natural outgrowth of her own love for god and her family, and teaching a way to enjoy more time with her children.

Mothers who homeschool with CC also describe teaching as mothering. Every mother I interviewed, when I asked if women were good teachers, responded along the lines of no, but all mothers were natural teachers. One says mothers love their kids the most, and therefore are the best teachers. Others describe teaching as loving learning and as individualized, so that the best teacher is the one who knows their child the best. Equating teaching with love and relationships to children, it becomes an extension of the act of mothering. All the mothers are also concerned with passing on Christian values to their children, as values, cultural heritage, and biblical gender norms. While not all parents were explicit about whiteness, all referred to a western cultural heritage referencing their reading of Shakespeare, Chaucer, or Starship Troopers.

One mother framed this in terms of “reading for the big questions” of identity and morality, while another explained that she wanted to “pass on” to her children their “heritage“. When I asked what “heritage” meant she defined it as “European Americanness” and “their gender” blending together gender, race, as a cultural heritage to be taught. Another put this as passing on her bloodline - a term used in Christian nationalist and white identitarian discourses to refer to a racial and cultural inheritance. If mothers are nature’s teachers, the lessons they are passing on are a cultural, or a racial inheritance.

4.2.2 School
Discourses frame mothers as natural teachers, loving and protective, in contrast to unnatural, unloving, and dangerous schools. For the drama to unfold schools must be villains, making women both heroes who save families and victims of these institutions. Evil schools threatening the mother and her family borrows from longstanding discourses of white womanhood under threat from communism and blackness (Ferber 2000). White nationalists use naturalistic metaphors of attack, disease, and loss to describe schools. Lacy calls schools “parental alienation” while Red Ice radio characterizes them as “taking children away” and compares them to forced adoption. This is literal, as when physical removal of children from the home during the school day is compared to social services removing children from their families. This is figurative, as when Lacey explains parental alienation means schools take children away from the values and authority of their parents, that liberal indoctrination means they are not taught the value of motherhood, gender roles, or her idea of family.

These metaphors of loss all connect to a central idea- the conspiracy theory of White genocide. White genocide means, according to Lana Lokteff, the purposeful reduction of white birthrates and white genetic superiority and their replacement by rootless cosmopolitans, or as Blonde in the Belly of the Beast emphasizes, effeminate men and masculine women. Schools do this by promoting feminism and multiculturalism, which is termed cultural marxism. This is seen as an attack on traditionalism, with rigid gender roles and white identities; it is designed to lower white birthrates, promote dysgenic physical and cultural decline. Schools do this cultural Marxism, paradoxically, for a global capitalist elite which wants a population that is degraded and easy to control.
Christian nationalists also position schools as attacking the family and the nation. What were explicit racist conspiracies become implicit, realized in metaphors of rot, decay, and contamination.

Here in this video explaining why you should choose a classical Christian education they say school is contaminated by the tree of evil, a comparison the the Biblical tree of knowledge but also one of several naturalizing metaphors that characterize this discourse. These position education as a battle against all the evils of society, decline and decay. True classical Christian education will hack at the roots of that evil rather than its fruits, it is explicitly framed as a reconstruction and a restoration of the traditional and the natural ways of learning and of living. Secular education is framed as an evil in opposition to the loving, godly and natural education of the mother; they describe public schools as ungodly people who are “pouring their souls” into your children and contaminating them with their lack of love for god and for your kids. Christian Nationalists believe schools are illegitimate secular churches.
Homeschool Blogger Dissident Mama describes herself, like the white nationalists, as fighting for her white sons’ value and heritage, fighting for the light against the “sanctimonious sermons” and “totalitarian tirades” and “cultural coercion” of public schools “evangeleftists.” Public schools are a government created secular ideology of dull equality. They are totalitarian and unnatural, they are forced upon her instead of coming from her natural love. She compares this unnatural school to a “utopian petrie dish” suggesting that modern education is an experiment and a contamination. The parents I interviewed often used similar language to describe schools as religion or contamination. One, suggesting she wanted to teach children “in the light”, drew on the religious language of gnostic battles between light and dark. Others used language of moral contamination, describing their role in keeping children safe from peers and bad influences. Running underneath this language of light education, and dark peers was a worship of whiteness as well as god.

4.3 Education vs Schooling

The second story is about a boy, rebellious and strong, white and active. He’s stuck at a desk surrounded by 30 others like it. The teacher gives everyone the same lesson. The same work. He’s got to sit down and do it. They sit, staring at the same clock. He’s late with the assignment, in the middle of his class. Nothing exceptional. There’s a girl in front of him, in yoga pants just on the edge of inappropriate or a tank top with some belly showing. He’s fidgeting in his seat, distracted. He’s hoping a strap will slide down. She ignores him. Another, bigger boy pokes him with a pencil. He starts a fight. His mother is called to the school to discuss her son’s ADHD, his temper. She’s angry. She doesn’t want to dope up her kid. She doesn’t understand why her special little guy has to put up with these distractions, these peers, this overwhelming sameness. She begins to seek out friends from church, who talk about homeschooling. In the friends talk about homeschooling, a new version appears - it’s not her boy, it’s not his averageness, his misbehavior, it’s schooling that’s the problem. Schools don’t value boys. ESPECIALLY WHITE BOYS. They are for girls, all this sitting inside, following rules, its essentially feminine, boys need to be active, play outside, self determine. It’s not your boy who is average, its schools that are in decline - they don’t even write in cursive anymore, nevermind Latin. Schools have become multicultural and test obsessed, and just value docile mediocrity. This sameness is enforced equality, making your son just like everyone else, girls and boys the same, black and white the same, it’s unChristian and unnatural. No wonder they have to medicate him. Don’t let them dope your kid up and prepare him for the cubicle! That’s all this education is, making everyone the same and destroying individuality, medicating us and making us replaceable corporate sheep. Adderall, fluoride, the soya in the school lunches is feminizing men. They want to make us all soft, compliant, and complacent. You wouldn’t let the school cook your kid’s lunch, why would you let them feed his mind? Books are brain food, you can only let them feed them so much vegan multiculturalist globalist garbage. Homeschool!
4.3.1 Natural Education

In the second story, an ideal, natural education is created in opposition to government schooling - indeed white nationalist station RedIce offers a video on “Education vs Schooling” amongst the videos on eugenics and the destruction of white history. Schooling is institutional, impersonal, standardized and anti-individualist. It is tests, rows of desks, textbooks. It is rules, schedules, bureaucracy, and taxes. It is a site of government force on culture, family, and wallet. Without the complaints about taxes it could be a leftist critique, and in fact this opposition between education and schooling is frequently evoked by the left. Education, by contrast is meant to be home and community schooling. It is given life through embodied language and experiences, it is personal, embodied, and individual. It is exploration, creativity, living history, the expression of a mother’s love.

Far-right homeschooling shares a vision of good education as following the natural pedagogy of gender roles and biological reproduction. This ideology of natural education unites teaching cultural traditions and rigid gender roles with a belief in education as creativity, play and self-determination. These contradictory demands are couched in the naturalizing language of love, reproduction, and of course nature itself. They celebrate the seasons in a temperate European climate or the vigor of a young boy playing outside with sticks, compare Christ to the sun and progressive education to rot. These metaphors naturalize, linking boys playing in mud to biology, or English literature to a white western civilizational essence, intellectual exploration to a history of conquest. First, natural education as a pedagogy unites arts-based and creative pedagogy with white male supremacy - teaching with nature and culture mean teaching whiteness and gender. Ayla Stewart speaks of the value of Waldorf pedagogy for white homeschoolers, because it’s arts-based curriculum is rooted in “white culture” - European traditions, culture and identity. Lacey emphasizes the importance of being outside for boys, while seated in front of a bookshelf filled with stories of settlers and warriors.

Homeschooling mothers I interviewed also talked about the beauty of reading and writing, an education in “big questions” — and most of all they emphasized an education in freedom. Yet the classical curriculum, which went from Taming of the Shrew to Starship Troopers, taught whiteness, winsome womanhood and militant masculinity. White and Christian nationalists share Apple’s conservative fetishization of subjects like latin as products of more virile intellectual culture. Natural pedagogy is not just play and the outdoors, but an idea of the “state of nature” with individualism, genius, manly force and “mental fortitude” proved through intellectual combat.
Nature doesn’t mean just trees; it means alignment with a god created universe, the “natural order” of hierarchy and authority within the family, the church, and the nation. Second, natural education as an ideology frames education as reproduction, in contrast to masculine mental fortitude, invention, or leadership. Teaching is seen as an analogy to physical reproduction; for white nationalist homeschooling a woman’s role is to reproduce white culture as she reproduces the white race. Homeschooling discourses frame tradition as in harmony with children’s development. Classical Christian pedagogy argues that their invented pseudo-medieval methods correspond to the development of a child and a civilization, suggesting that they are as natural as they are traditional. Christian nationalists describe this social reproduction as “soul pouring.”

For Christian and white nationalist alike the mother, through her natural pedagogy, reproduces the values and the gender roles of the family. One Christian homeschooling mother described teaching as passing down a heritage of white Americanness and gender roles to her daughter, letting her know that freedom and children were the most important things for her. Both white and Christian nationalists emphasize the need to teach traditional culture and gender roles - as the term “white culture” suggests they are also naturalizing them as identity, embodied knowledge, biological traditions, an almost physical heritage that can be passed down. The naturalness of education is contrasted with dystopian, destructive public schools.

White Nationalist homeschooling moms argue schools teach all the cultures but theirs, by not teaching the superiority of western civilization and the value of white manhood they are refusing to teach white identity and causing its decay and decline. Integrated schools are a modern Bleak House with soy burgers and standardized tests, designed to squash the natural vigor of the active white boy and prepare the world for communist multiculturalist feminism. To characterize this cultural marxism, they use metaphors of institution, bureaucracy and standardization to characterize equality and social justice as dull sameness.

Their critiques of cultural marxist schools, paradoxically, also borrows the language of class critique. In a two hour interview with John Taylor Gatto, Red Ice radio begins by explaining that schools are institutions modeled on factories and designed to discipline the working class. The knowledge they are taught is not designed to make them understand the world, but to make them dull, confused, distracted and obedient. This critique does not lead to theories of social reproduction and hegemony (though the right is good at Gramsci) - but to eugenics. Gatto characterizes schools as “distraction factories,” which malform and constrain bodies and minds until we can no longer read the classics in Latin. The interviewer frames this as evidence of social decline, so that social institutions are making us weaker and genetically unfit. This is more the The Bell Curve than Bowles & Gintis; it reframes the problem of capital with the language of the body - and the white race.
Classical educators also framed schooling as evil; using language from god and nature they describe a good education as cutting out the root of evil, the social rot which began in the progressive era with democratic education. Classical education, like the conservatives Apple describes, honor the past as a site of more virile mental fortitude, and more natural pedagogy. The classical method is meant to both recall early church education and the natural ways in which a child develops; there is both a bodily and a historical utopia to be restored. This construction of an embodied tradition is reflected in mothers’ interviews, which describe teaching as “soul pouring” and racial and gender identity as a heritage that can be given, occasionally referred to by the far right term “a bloodline.”

Mothers’ identity as teachers links social and cultural reproduction as a woman’s natural function, but also intertwines race and culture. While less explicitly white nationalist, this language of heritage (not hate) reflects similar themes, and is vehemently traditionalist and anti-state. Founder Leigh Bortins notes, in an interview with Glen Beck, that for her homeschooling is the beginning of a traditionalist utopia with no taxes, no labor laws, no welfare state. White nationalists and Christian homeschooling families both share this narrative of schools attacking, corrupting, or contaminating the family. White nationalists position mothers as heroes in a battle for white culture and identity, and victims of the white genocide promoted by the cultural marxist schools. Christian nationalists frame the battle as for Jesus and the Christian national family, against secularism and cultural decline. Both use the metaphorical connections to family and nature that naturalize and racialize their own vision of education - the language of bloodlines and gendered heritage, white culture and soul pouring - and a language of schools as a threat to the family, an engine of cultural decline.

These discourses share the idea that there was a better education before, closer to both tradition and human nature. We are now in a period of decline, due to progressive schools, government which is oppressive, indoctrination which is feminist, liberalism which is submissive, and institutions bent on making everyone the same. These narratives dramatize, exaggerate, but they also circulate: they connect with broader discourses about education, family, and government, and they affect how a much broader spectrum of conservative teachers and mothers assign meaning to the experience of teaching.

4.4 Anti-Schooling Discourse and Conservative Ideology
Anti-Schooling is one example of a broader conservative anti-state discourse; here mothers both dramatize the conflict with the state but also naturalize their own right wing ideals as godly, biological, familial. The story of the family threatened by schools animates investment in conservative values and neoliberal opposition to the welfare state. Nickerson (2012) shows how women were mobilized as “housewife populists” to oppose public schooling after the new deal; at a time at which the welfare state was near consensus policy, visions of domesticity and family were used to gender opposition to the state. In parallels, cuts to the welfare state were used to enforce support for the family and traditional morality (Cooper 2016). We can see a similar element in right wing educational discourses.

Stuart Hall explains how the figure of the woman has a powerful ideological role within authoritarian populist discourse, as the figure of the traditional woman is used to construct populist consent and justify anti-welfare policies. Hall explains that narratives articulate ideologies to classes and shape how subjects are interpolated; here the story of the woman vs the school becomes one that articulates the relationship between the people and the power bloc, painting the state as the enemy of the family. The ideal traditional woman is used in discourse to represent the people. Hall notes “The people in their traditionalist presentation can be condensed as a set of interpellations in discourse which systematically displace political issues onto conventional moral absolutes.” (143) This is accomplished by the figure of the mother and housewife, who becomes a symbol of traditional womanhood and even tradition itself, motherhood and goodness. The woman comes to be the “keeper of traditional wisdoms and guardian of conventional popular morality,” she can therefore translate neoliberal austerity into the Populist moral idiom of caring mothers and frugal housewives (145).

Here it becomes the mother alienated from her children by the evil state which threatens her traditional wisdom, morality, and role. Educational discourses are one way traditional gender roles undergird an opposition to, and alternative to, the welfare state. These discourses bring the rights and duty of the parent to educate their child in their beliefs, link family values and retrograde gender roles to freedom, individualism, and bring all together in a vision of domestic harmony and natural education in opposition to public institutions. Discourses of education opposing mom and school unite libertarian economics with social conservatism, and set up the state as opposed to rather than supporting the family. These narratives allow women to see themselves in ideological discourses, to connect their experiences of teaching and parenting, and for these ideas to then circulate from the extreme to the mainstream.
These discourses can shape a moral panic around schools, social change and the family; social and economic change is reframed as “family breakdown” or even an “attack on the family” while schools become “social engineering,” “creeping socialism,” and of course an attack on the family. Within Christian Nationalist philosophy, in fact, socialism means government doing anything they believe is the proper province of the family, including in particular supporting and educating children (Ingersoll 2016). Schools are seen as an attack on the godly family, imposing democratic equality instead of natural hierarchy as in godly family, secular humanism instead of a Biblical worldview, and having women in public. This becomes a moral panic over creeping socialism, circulating beyond the militant fringes of Christian nationalism, between more extremist and the mainstream right. The far right’s affective language has long been borrowed by the mainstream, 13 reinvigorating and renewing support for the latter in moments of what Hall calls ideological crisis.

This discussion of creeping socialism in the schools begins in reaction to broadly popular expansion of education after the New Deal (Laats 2015). But it echoes on; while 1920’s radicals said socialism was going to make wives state property (Delegard 2012), 1970’s libertarian right uses socialist schools in connection to property taxes (McGirr 2012). Mainline Christians may red bait to advocate for school prayer, or “traditional gender roles” (Binder & Wood 2012). Today’s news is full of moral panics over education. Florida politicians call universities “socialism factories,” will require teaching “the evils of communism” and wants educators and students to be required to register their views. Republicans across the nation panic over Critical Race Theory as “Neo-marxism” in education, undermining the nation.

Moral panics have material consequences. Mainstreaming this moral panic aligns media and popular discourses are with institutional power creating a justification for political reaction. Just as moral panics over family values create support for neoliberal welfare reforms (Cooper 2016) while panics over socialist schools create justification for neoliberal school reforms: law and order in “zero tolerance” policies for weapons, dress codes; conservative curriculum in controversies over Ebonics, social studies, and now CRT. Conservative moral panics support neoliberals’ punitive defunding of public schools.

4.5 Education, Circulation and Normalization

Gal (2018) in her study of circulation explains that it is a metaphor for the multiple ways and modes a discourse can be taken up, experienced and translated into new situations. In the study of the right, circulation often also means normalization, as when far-right panics over socialism become part of the mainstream. In the final section of this chapter, I expand on this study of moral panics over schools as socialism to trace how pedagogical language and practices move from the left to the far right, from white nationalists to the mainstream conservative classroom, and back again Home Education itself is perhaps one of the most effective examples of circulation and normalization on the right.
The modern movement for home education began in the 1970’s with Holt’s unschooling. This was a left learning, anti-authoritarian and child centered educational movement. Drawing on some of the principles of Dewey’s democratic education, and taking them to the next level, it saw the child as a free learner, natural reasoner and explorer, hemmed in by bureaucratic state schools. It was kind of thing your hippie friends who make artisanal goat cheese and practice ethical non-monogamy might support.

However, the homeschooling movement was quickly taken over by those with quite opposite views-authoritarian populist pedagogues, fundamentalists, Christian Nationalists. Scholars give multiple reasons for this shift: affluent suburban conservatives were likely to have space and a stay at home mom (Kunzman 2009), schools were becoming increasingly distant from homes and bureaucratic (Murphy 2012), churches, conservative colleges, and the religious right provided homeschool support, legal advocacy, and curriculum (Detwiler 2009); Brown (2021) notes as the majority of homeschooling institutions were already on the right, new parents may become conservative as they participate in them.

Of these explanations, two are closely reflected in my research: conservative women are more likely to be stay at home moms, and to identity strongly as mothers, and homeschooling is an alternative for schools which are increasingly bureaucratic - but also increasingly integrated. The anti-institutional discourse that was always a part of homeschooling, has been invested with a pro-patriarchal, pro-white ideology linked to their vision of the family. The distant bureaucracy decried by the unschooling movement, has now become linked to social equality as artificial social engineering. Homeschooling often borrowed the language of criticality and critical pedagogy, something I note is increasingly common in digital education online (Tebaldi 2020) which presents itself as an alternative to public schools’ ideology. This often includes an explicit critique of education as a ruling class project, similar to what leftist educators would say. They criticize standardized tests, noting the ways in which this curriculum is not sufficiently student centered, the increase in ADHD diagnoses, and the emphasis on “drill and kill” education - all these would be familiar to a leftist family too. Their criticism of common core and busy work as memorization and indoctrination for obedient servants - a more dramatic version of Freire “banking curriculum” - they even describe this as created by corporate finance. However, this critical language is invested with new meanings; banker becomes a code for Jew, while criticality reinforces a discourse of white male oppression that makes white patriarchal ideology as the real, hidden truth (((they))) don’t want you to know.
Pedagogically, the far right borrow from many progressive alternatives to standardized testing; the white nationalist advocate nature and arts centered methods of teaching we commonly associate with the left, like Montessori, while the Christian nationalists borrow from project based learning and literacy across the curriculum. As mentioned earlier, nationalists like curriculums like Waldorf, Steiner, for their european and sometimes explicitly nationalist roots. However, they also embrace nature based learning, celebrating sending their little boys out for sticks and exploring bugs and leaves - this is the kind of active, discovery based, real life curriculum father of democratic education Dewey or my hippie brother would love. However for the far right it is also rooted in a deep pedagogy of inequality; for these parents nature is also celebration of the natural order, including differences of age, but also race and gender, Bederman (1998) explains the long roots of the outdoorsy pedagogy in cultivating white masculinity. Early school reformers thought young boys needed a period of “wild” education to give them a virility that could withstand the decadence and effeminacy of civilization, something echoed in my research in discussion of of public schools as dumbing down, demasculinizing, eating away at boys’ virility in ways victorians would understand.

Christian homeschooling also uses this idea of nature as meaning hierarchy, god’s order. Their pedagogy emphasizes seeing god, and white patriarchal authority, in nature, in all things and all subjects. They borrow highly sophisticated pedagogical techniques including project based learning and literacy across the curriculum - the same techniques I was taught as a New York City public schoolteacher - and use them to infuse all learning with a biblical worldview. Project based learning links all subjects together into a single theme, what my participants called a “big question”. They might read Starship Troopers along with a textbook on government and bible verses on war. Their literacy focused curriculum means that the Bible is present in all subjects, that history, religion, government, and literature are woven together, so that they read about the confederate monuments as biblical honoring of their fathers. All this creates a rich curriculum, but weaving bible and history together also produces a strong Christian nationalism — sometimes, sold together as in the “Wall Builder " David Barton’s Founder’s Bible.

From the Far Right to Christian Nationalist homeschoools

Christian nationalists recycle and reframe many ideas from the father white right in the language of Christianity or tradition; making them seem more acceptable and accessible to those who would not perhaps join and alt-right homeschool. While alt-right and explicitly white nationalist homeschools like Wife with a Purpose’s are still few and far between, Christian Nationalists have built up well developed networks with thousands of schools which often spread and normalize similarly far right views.
Classical Conversations is one of the best examples of this; now a widespread curriculum with a good academic reputation, it was once a fringe movement. Its creator, a far-right pastor, Doug Wilson, drew on the writings of minor British writer Dorothy Sayer to form the pseudo-classical pedagogy which informs Classical Conversations. Originally located in one church in Moscow Idaho, it expanded to include a school, a college, a curriculum with community based courses, and then an online teacher training program. It reaches hundreds of thousands and is well known and respected in homeschooling communities - not considered fringe or racist. Yet Doug Wilson’s beliefs are on the far-right end of the Christian nationalist spectrum; a deconstructionist who desires to rebuild a theocratic state with an emphasis on biblical laws, including the death penalty for adultery, sodomy and being an “incorrigible child.” I would be facing several counts. He is a believer in biblical patriarchy and the male headed household, preaching sermons like “sexism is a good thing” and writing books called The Federal Husband about proper male authority. Wilson is also the author of Southern Slavery as it Was, an invented history about the benign paternalism of the Southern slave owner.

This rejection of history, and the celebration of White male authority, certainly undergirds this curriculum and the push away from public schools - it also makes his curriculum incredibly popular with members of the League of the South and other Neo-Confederate groups. Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center (splc.org) notes that classical education is supported by these groups and used to sell their racist, white separatist ideas as Christian schooling. Neo-confederates are not the only ones who use Christian language to cover for far-right ideas; Stormfront will link to Christian homeschool resources or advocate reframing a white power curriculum as one about “western culture” (Tebaldi 2020c). This language makes white pride more acceptable, but it also shapes new connections between whiteness, Christian nationalism, libertarianism, and individualism. The John Birch Society also advocates using Christian homeschooling because it is the best at teaching “individualism” and a respect for white western culture.

The curriculum I explore in the next chapter, Christendom Curriculum, also uses the language of Christianity to make white nationalism acceptable - it refers to itself as a Christian nationalist curriculum, bringing together the biblical language of reconstruction with the language of white separatism and the celebration of white manhood as individualism. From Homeschool to Public Schools The language homeschooling advocates use to critique the system also makes its way into public school teachers’ discussions. During my observations of the Facebook group “Patriotic Teachers” I saw many echoes of the homeschool advocate’s melodramatic triangle, from their comparisons of teaching and motherhood, to their discussions of social decline, to an idea of patriotism and individualism that echoed much farther right discourses.
Many public school teachers borrowed a similar framing opposing the mother and the school. Much research has explored the role of maternalism and femininity in teaching (Galman 2012). These teachers, also, would often characterize themselves like moms, often with jokes around classroom management, like “Teachers are just like your mom, except you can’t get away with it here.” They would often portray themselves as having family like relationships, with language of discipline and nurture. They would contrast this idea of their classroom as a family with a cold bureaucracy, much like the homeschool mothers I spoke to. However, rather than schools it was either the Federal department of education or the teachers unions who engaged in loveless regulation and social engineering. This theme of teaching as motherhood mobilized many similar tropes, teaching as self sacrifice, as innate, as care, as reproductive labor, it helped teachers find humor and value in their work; it was also explicitly opposed to those institutions designed to make teaching a safer, better paid, and more well respected profession. The trickle-down of far right femininity could have real consequences for support of unionization and teacher protest.

A second area where far right discourses recirculated into the mainstream was that of common core and curricular change; many teachers were already opposed to this intervention in their classroom, but the conservative teachers borrowed from far right framing reflecting a more inclusive curriculum as educational decline. They were not upset about high stakes tests - but about inclusion as a lowering of standards. In the white nationalist discourse there are eugenic notions of social decline, declining birthrates, and white genocide, while public schools are understood to be cultural marxist madrassas bent on replacing white men. This conspiracy is translated into softer language within the Christian homeschooling curriculum, but the opposition remains, the Christian needs to defeat the rot at the heart of society, our secular schools, and restore tradition and light. Whiteness is reframed as Christianity, as light. Within public schools, notions of social decline are framed in the language of success and discipline, while whiteness is translated not into Christianity but into the colorblind language of academic achievement: it is individualism, achievement and intelligence.
Within the public school teacher’s group Patriotic Teachers, many of the most frequently liked, commented, and shared posts were those that decried changes to the curriculum to reflect social justice or multiculturalism. {insert example} Culturally relevant math and science curricula, and changes to canonical texts were always described as a lowering of standards. The most frequent target of attacks was the 1619 project, which centers slavery in American history. When I asked what a history curriculum should be instead, I was recommended we use a Patriot’s History of the United States and teach freedom and free market economics with Prager U, a site well known for reframing far-right talking points in avuncular style and conservative free-market idiom. They didn’t say “cultural marxism” but like the white nationalists, these teachers saw our current moment as one of cultural decline and celebrated a glorious past with stronger, smarter, more disciplined, and whiter, culture. This battle within Patriotic Teachers has circulated well beyond it; today there is a widely mediatized political battle around Critical Race Theory in education. As of July 4th, some 20 states have introduced legislation to ban teaching CRT (cite). It recirculates many of these same discourses, CRT is framed simultaneously as an attack on white children, borrowing again from the maternalist vision of teacher as carer and reproducer of white family, and as a lowering of standards and misteaching of history. High standards, good history, and emotional care, are all those that support and value white identity (iculturally responsive pedagogy for white boys who think they’re Jesus risen).

In the next, and last, findings chapter I look more closely at what the white right wants to teach instead, and why. I look at how they understand language and its use to support and create a narrative of white greatness that positions their sons at the apex of history.
Anti-biography 3: Tea Party Christmas Special

What do you wear to the tea party Christmas party? Should I go to Kellyanne Conway and dress like a colonial soldier? I try on a pair of skinny jeans and a top. It's the south, I should put on a dress? I try on a long polka dot silk dress before settling on a black pencil skirt and a white mohair sweater, apply “meeting his parents” makeup, and mascara. a rosy lip and subtle highlight, I post it to my instagram story with “what to wear to the tea party Christmas party?? 🎅😩” My friend Craig responds “backhanded compliment but you nailed it”.

I don't want to go to this. I'd been to white christmases that became white nationalist christmases after my mom had too many eggnogs, but I'd never been to an officially racist Party. Can I just do digital ethnography? I drag my heels (of course, I wore heels) and make a deal with myself that I can walk for an hour, get a nice cocktail, and then uber over to Metairie. A white suburb in a red state - how christmas. Sociologists describe scaling empathy walls but nothing about the deep awkwardness of opening up a door when you are ten minutes late to a thing you dont want to be at. Breathe. Smile. And go….

The party is in the back room of the kind of place somebody’s uncle would refer to as a “sit-down restaurant,” working class fancy. An oyster bar that might give you chlamydia. 40 or so people in a dress style that ranges from Nazi Christmas card to wal-marts celebrity range are sitting at tables of 6-8, As its mostly couples, I pop down next to two lone middle aged women, one with frizzy red hair and a mysterious accent who seems hoping to be someone’s red under the bed, and one dressed like a teacher, in a top I imagine she saw as “subtle yet festive” shimmery lace leaves and matching pants. Its so easy to make friends with these people. If you’re a white woman, that empathy wall is more like a toddler gate. Just be nice. And talk about kids. Perform white girlhood appropriately, let people see you as their daughter or little sister. Swallow your disgust at their politics, smile at older women and beam at babies. Refer to your partner often and in glowing terms, say you are “looking at schools” and let people link your research to your fertility.
It's not different than liberal life, just less inconsistent. People want to connect. You were a bilingual teacher? Oh my daughter is in special classes because she speaks Russian and English, they thought she was dumb but now she is gifted? We are catholic, what church do you go to? They tell stories about growing up together, marrying their best friends’ brother, how all the girls from her (segregated) school get together every year. You have to sort of squeeze yourself into the small talk, find the nice way to say things. They go on about phonics instruction? Make a mental field note, and say of course teaching a child to read is magical, so rewarding. Someone says Bob Jones? Don't say integration cat, don't do it. Order an “import” beer sip. smile. nod. Repeat. By the time I finish, I'm invited to her home for Christmas. She passes me the name of her church on a cocktail napkin, with a whisper that it's the real catholics, latin, with veils. I turn to talk to a woman about homeschooling. Her husband stares at my ass. An old lady shifts her fleece jacket like a fur.

Amidst underweight old republicans picking at lettuce cups and fat ones staring at the skeletons of some kind of bread bowl, their be-dockered old men scrolling through Trump’s twitter with awe like its the stone tablets my ethnographic Christmas present arrives.

A middle aged woman in red onesie and a Santa hat emerges from the crowd at the back. She takes a mic, puts a cassette in the stereo, and begins leading the group in a song. To the tune of Leonard cohen’s hallelujah, they sing:

We Americans had lost our way  
As actors in this passion play  
But the scales had finally fallen from our  
Blind eyes  
Said our founders through enlightenment  
To be free, constrain our government  
And now it's time to use what we’ve  
Been given  
The constitution,The constitution, The constitution,The constitution,  
We er gathered round and we raised our voice  
We realized that we had a choice  
To stop the degradation of our county  
When someone comes, who sings the song  
Of liberty and screams what's wrong  
We all must rise to join the revolution  
The revolution, the revolution....
After the second reprise, the group's voices grow louder and more confident. The leader begins to recite the text of the second amendment over the song. Its truly the most violently kitschy performance of Americanness I have ever seen in my life. The aural version of an old country buffet wall. It’s nauseating. I’m thrilled. Is this their song of liberty? Do they think the revolution will start with a sing-along in a strip mall in south Louisiana? The elastic waisted separatist nation, going to battle with the pantsuit nation.

They sing,

We Americans had lost our way
As actors in this passion play
Is it just their Christmas pageant? Passion of the flat tax? The crucifixion of John Adams? But the scales had finally fallen from our Blind eyes Oh god, some lady is trying to make her voice swoop and soulful. In a second people are going to be raising their hands in praise. Said our founders through enlightenment To be free, constrain our government AAANNND there it is. They all love the president. Why do we hate the government but worship Trump? Why are we worshipping The constitution… the constitution… the constitution… the constitututututututuuuuution. It's really joyously terrible. I squeeze into my little bit of ethnographic distance, so counter to their full throated patriotism. This is their jam, this loud corny music - owning the libs by wearing a Santa hat.

They’re fighting the war on christmas, saluting the flag, loud means proud. Its badness means it's populist, this isn’t arty farty lib shit. This, from the warming oysters to the elasticated separates, to the sound of the sing 99 along, this is the appropriate performance of proud Americanness. Cultural populism, for the economic elite. This is its own kind of teaching and learning, a patriotic church or a sermon in nationalism. The tea party promotes libertarianism as biblical economics; these women celebrate a Christian nation Homeschooling with the patriot's bible. This is them singing the constitution like a hymn, in order to build a world where we read the Bible like a law.
Chapter 5: Reading the Race's Story

5.1 Introduction - Conservative Curricula

In this chapter I analyze the curriculum and teaching guides for Christian and White Nationalist home and popular education programs; their beliefs about humanities education and the language ideologies which underpin them. That is, I explore what they say about teaching English, which defines literature as shaping heroes, language as a battle, and world as a story. I look at their teaching of history, which defines it as a god’s story, and positions the reader and his race as heroes and chosen people. I link these to ideologies about language; beliefs about the ways that language relates to power and the social world, and define right wing hermeneutics as I finally link these beliefs to issues of broader public concern including the attacks on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and misinformation; I argue understanding deeper ideologies is key to comprehending support for these issues.

I look closely at three groups and three sets of curricular materials in each: the White Christian Nationalist Christendom Curriculum, by WC Newsome, the Christian Nationalist Classical Conversations, based on the Classical Education model of Doug Wilson, the White Nationalist video series Alt-Right 101 by Bre Faucheux and Skipped in School, by Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, and Trump’s 1776 project along with other materials recommended by the Trumpist teachers including Patriot’s History of the United States, John Stossel and PragerU. I contextualize my observations with both interview data and online observations of discussions about appropriate curriculum, and Trump’s speeches about the 1776 Project.

Table of ideologies and curriculum resources:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1 Christian Nationalist Homeschool</th>
<th>Homeschooling with a Christian reconstructionist or “classical” style, often with a southern or white nationalist fringe</th>
<th>Classical Conversations Christendom Curriculum Dissident Mama’s blog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2 White Nationalist Online</td>
<td>Digital resources for women to educate themselves or homeschool children in WN</td>
<td>Skipped in School Traditional Parenting Alt-Right 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Patriotic Public School</td>
<td>PS Teachers who support Trump and who are anti union and federal education reform</td>
<td>PragerU John Stossel 1776 project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.1 Christian Homeschools
The first group is curriculum from Christian Nationalist homeschools, *Christendom Curriculum*, and *Classical Conversations*. These two represent the right wing of Christian homeschooling, their border line with Neo-confederates and white nationalists. Classical Education centers on a “great books” style curriculum, with an emphasis on religion, history, and literature, taught through reading, writing, and rhetoric or logic. Classical education was developed in the United States by far-right Idaho pastor Doug Wilson, TK. The curriculum uses both the medieval trivium and a fundamentalist Christian outlook reflecting Wilson’s own writing, exemplified in sermons he’s preached, such as “The Lost Virtue of Sexism”; or books he’s authored, like *The Federal Husband*, which offers advice for the male-headed household, or the revisionist, neo-Confederate *Southern Slavery as it Was*. Other supporters of Classical Education include Neo-confederates like Dissident Mama and Rebel Yell.

5.1.1.1 Classical Education

Classical Christian education began as a school in Moscow, Idaho, but it was through homeschooling that it bloomed. The most popular classical homeschool is “Classical Conversations.” Students following the curriculum learn Latin, memorize poetry and Bible verses, and write biweekly essays as part of integrated liberal-arts units that teach history, religion, and literature together, as part of a Christian worldview. “Christian worldview” is a term taken from the theocrat JR Rushoony, who believed all knowledge must come from god and all authority should be on the family. They emphasize literature written by white Anglo- Americans, mostly written before 1950. They teach history that celebrates patriotism, nationalism, and a Christian America- sometimes using the fascist allegory *Starship Troopers* where citizenship is reframed as participation in the genocide of an alien tribe. The company hosts weekly small group meet-ups, where both children and parents receive lessons in Christian education, and participate in lively online communities. This educates parents as well as students in Christian Nationalism, and make it one of the most popular alternatives to public and private education. Classical Conversations’ website states that it grew from one homeschooling family to over 120,000.

Christendom curriculum is another, newer, and farther right classical homeschool curriculum which was endorsed by the Neo-confederate and white nationalist Dissident Mama. Like CC it centers on a list of literature mainly from the victorian era and earlier, the Bible, and American history that celebrates great white heroes of the past. What distinguishes Christendom from other curricula is its open emphasis on the current culture war; it bills itself as 100 percent free of political correctness and there to help you battle feminists and SJW’s. It teaches argument and biblical apologetics, and uses these to help argue for arch conservative positions, in what the curriculum calls “battle papers.” It celebrates history as a cycle of building, maintaining, losing and restoring god’s kingdom, today we are in the era of retaking America from the left to restore god’s nation. Their literature and media courses focus on defending culture from
the left, but also, celebrating the achievements of white Christian men. The number of students is not available and WC Newsome declined my request for interviews, but the facebook group dedicated to the group has 1,400 members. Doug Wilson, the leader of Classical Christian education, also praises Newsome’s work in literary criticism on their website.

5.1.2 Alt-Right Online Education

White nationalist women create a video curriculum for an alternative education that emphasizes core nationalist and traditionalist principles and values. Many of these focus on how to homeschool your children such as the *Traditional Parenting* videos of Ayla Stewart or the *WHy Homeschool* videos of Lacy Lynn. Others, like *alt-right 101* or *Skipped in School*, serve as popular education for teens and adults. In these video series attractive vloggers teach, or re-circulate, far right talking points about gender, culture, schools, and society often with a particular emphasis on their opposition to feminists and women professors - they are the sexy, nice educators. They emphasize their vision of the failures and indoctrinations of public schools and the irrationality and ugliness of feminists, while elevating the male viewer as the pinnacle of masculine “mental fortitude” who can see beyond this or encouraging the female viewer to stop going to school and watch these to better please her man. While these videos are not yet as popular as Classical Conversations, they form the more academic-looking side of a very popular social media presence - Blonde has 124,000 subscribers and nearly 8 million video views.

5.1.2.1 Alt-Right 101

*Alt-Right 101* is a series of classes with Bre Faucheux interviewing British Neo-Fascist Mark Collett. Each video is an hour long discussion of topics central to the movement: masculinity, femininity, white guilt, white identity, immigration and others. The loss of masculinity, for example, discusses dating and video games, then moves to the feminist “war on men” and the ensuing loss of heroic masculinity and the dangers this poses for a white nation. In these videos, they both describe and enact appropriate white nationalist identities; Mark is the leader while Bre supports and encourages him with breathy voiced appreciation.

5.1.2.2 Skipped in School

*Blonde in the Belly of the Beast* offers a series called *Skipped in School* that offers a right wing perspective on history and society. Her videos include one on appreciating classical rather than postmodern art, a series on the holodomor, and videos on making good arguments and using statistics. These discussions of statistical literacy, beauty, and history teach key elements in alt right discourse while framing other education as biased. For example, the Russian famine or holodomor is used to undergird arguments about socialism hating the rural family, to relativize discussions of the holocaust, and its absence from curricula to show schools’ socialist bias. Objective descriptions of beauty undergird arguments about white cultural superiority, while statistical literacy is used to attack discussions of the
gender wage gap and prove professors’ are incorrigible feminists.

5.1.3 Trumpist Teachers

The third set of curricula and materials were gathered from the Facebook group for trump supporting teachers, which offered both educational video series, recommendations for alternative texts in English, History, and uniquely among these groups, Economics. On the Facebook group teachers comment on the failure in mainstream education, explicitly noting a failure to teach capitalism and patriotism, and recommending in particular alternative texts like *Patriot’s History of the United States* and video series from Prager U or John Stossell. Overall, these groups had a strong anti-PC and nationalist theme, similar to those of the Christian nationalist schools, and opposed their chosen curriculum to new changes such as the 1619 project, or earlier conservative panics over things like “social justice math” or teaching that individualism and merit were white supremacist.

5.1.3.1 PragerU

Prager U is the online school founded by Denis Prager, a former conservative radio host, and Allen Estrin, a writer from TV series *Touched by an angel*. They employ many “teachers” most famously Candace Owen, and produce short videos on themes like “why god is a man” and “understanding Ayn Rand,” as well as fireside chats featuring Prager himself opining on the issues of the day with a phlegmatic basset hound. These avuncular videos frame the right as the truly intelligent, and the left as wild indoctrinate crazies. They have over a billion views, and enlist teachers as part of a “pro-america” education group called Prep. Prep is a paid membership for parents and educators who wish to teach the glories of nation and capitalism (though Prager is registered as a non-profit). For 25 dollars you can get monthly emails letting you know about their children’s programming. If you are a teen you can join the “PragerFOrce” where you will become part of a network of “young patriots” who “fight for american values”

5.1.3.2 Stossel

The second video series is John Stossel; Stossel is a former Fox star and now is a libertarian educator who teaches about the failures of socialism and is frequently cited by these teachers in support of charter schools and against their own unions. Like Prager, he focuses both on the excesses of the culture wars and on libertarian economics. He takes a slightly more aggressive stance, for example anti-socialist videos called “today in stupid,” but also frames the conservative as more rational than the left. Interestingly, Stossell uses his libertarian politics in a populist way as well, celebrating citizen journalists on the right and decrying corporate welfare. These two educational programs take stars (ok, not quite that famous) of conservative media powerhouses Fox and talk radio, and use them to teach students and teachers conservative values of capitalism and patriotism

---

11 see [https://www.prageru.com/kids/prep](https://www.prageru.com/kids/prep) and also [https://www.prageru.com/pragerforce](https://www.prageru.com/pragerforce)
These themes of a “pro-america education” were taken up and emphasized by Donald Trump in the 2020 campaign, and his 1776 project. Trump’s education platform consisted of two slogans: School Choice and Teach American Exceptionalism. In his speech on Constitution Day, he celebrated a vision of America as the world’s engine of progress and freedom, a national family whose unity was under attack by the left and their socialist indoctrination and CRT. Looking more deeply into what, and why the right teaches what it does can help us better understand this policy.

5.2. Reading the Story You are Actually In: Humanities education and Language Ideologies

Across the right there is an emphasis on humanities and great books that sees the world as a story and white men as its heroes. “The history of the world is a story that God is telling, from beginning to end” one of the founders of far-right Christian nationalist education, states in his school’s website. He continues, that this makes individuals greater ”the truth that in Christ there are no little people, no little schools, no little ventures.” The world is a story, told by god, in which each of us becomes something important. This religious vision frames their teaching of humanities: history a heroic march to progress, rhetoric as a kind of battle for truth and beauty, and reading becomes a kind of hermeneutics of the world.

Heroic History

The first element in the far right curriculum is the idea of world history, as a story, that honors America. History has an author, god, a narrative arc, towards progress and Christ, morals and especially heroes, the Christians and the American nation. This vision of narrative history is reflected in the history textbooks, The Story of the World: A history for the Classical child, a four volume set by Susan Wise Bauer (2006). Amazon notes over 150,000 copies of the books are in print, and my Christian nationalist participants mentioned this title more than any other during interviews. Next most frequently referenced was A Patriot’s History which shared these themes, but focuses on the United States.

We can see similar themes in Trump’s 1776 commission for the teaching of history; in his constitution day speech Trump declared that the constitution told the story of American progress and was written in the hearts of our patriots. American history told in the constitution and the declaration of independence, and written in the hearts of Americans. Here, the ideology of language as identity becomes that of national history as a story. It has a narrative arc; it begins with the constitution and declaration and marches forward to create human progress and more perfect union. Like any good conservative story, it also has a moral; it defines America as the summit of western civilization and freedom.

---

12 [www.classicaleducation.org](http://www.classicaleducation.org)
In this view, history is a story of America's move towards ever greater freedom and perfection, much as symbolized by this 1873 painting of American progress.

These views of history as a story mirror the vision of classical Christian education. Their vision of true education, or paideia, focuses on absorbing the lessons of this story into the heart and mind. For Doug Wilson’s Classical Christian schooling, history is the story god tells about a people (classicalChristian.org). Classical Christian education seeks to teach history not as merely dates and facts, but as a story with heroes and lessons to instruct the “moral imagination” and a direction or shape, a telos or narrative arc which bends not towards freedom but towards the more perfect embodiment of god’s order on earth. They teach this vision of holy history in an “integrated curriculum” (but their schools aren’t) that elevates and links together Christian religion and hermeneutics with American history, they create a kind of Christian Nationalist curriculum. They teach that history is God's story, one that celebrates some American people.

History as the story of God's people is explored in depth in the NeoConfederate, Christian Nationalist, blogger Dissident Mama’s lessons on teaching True History. Dissident Mama is a homeschooling mother who uses Classical Christian education; but she is also connected to right wing university the Abbeville Institute and interviews key right wing thinkers like inventor of paleoconservatism Paul Gottfried. As a southerner who feels culture has been taken over by “progressive puritans” she is especially concerned with civil war and southern history; in five blog posts she offers curriculum and pedagogy for American history, while her writing overall work emphasizes a heady blend of revisionism and critical thinking, flowery writing and far right ideas.

She characterizes history as a story with multiple overlapping terms: resistance history, real history, true history, synthesis history, and logical history. Together these characterize a synthesis history that weaves multiple events and facts into a true history, a single grand narrative of a people. True history begins with biblical truths and values, and then sees these realized in human progress. True history is

13 for more on the theory behind this vision of education, see their statement on the philosophy of education at this classical education affiliated site: https://www.memoriapress.com/articles/what-is-education/
also real history and logical history, it relies on original documents, and encourages a close and critical reading of dominant narratives (yet from a reactionary perspective). True history is also resistance history, opposing the dominant norms of secular progressive schooling and academic historians’ postmodern neo-marxism alike.

In practice this True History looks like a story of the US south that begins with the bible and moves on through the history of the west, and positions the US South as the summit of white Christian culture, tradition, and values. She teaches real history with original documents from the confederacy, logical history using apologists for the confederacy and biblical apologetics for its monuments. She frames this racism as resistance history, resistance not against Nazis but against progressive ideals of equality--an education that will allow her sons to resist progressive attacks on southern identity and values.

Her aim for this education is threefold; it is education in tradition, education as secession, and education in individualism. True history weaves a story that positions the modern man within its arc, a story of godly ancient truths and human progress, a story that weaves your connection to your noble roots in western civilization and your place in US history. Second, it is education as secession, homeschooling as rejecting the “social engineering” state and its egalitarian values; it is “true skepticism” rebellious, private, free thinking and meritocratic. This view was broadly shared. Last education is individual, a “choose your own adventure” book with intentionality, inspiration, and innovation.

This linkage of inspiration, tradition, and identity was taken up by a homeschooling mom at the New Orleans Tea Party Christmas party. This party, held at a small suburban seafood joint, what my uncle would call a “sit down place.” Like many homeschool moms she was well educated, an affluent former lawyer raising two young boys in the suburbs. As we chatted about schools and had “import beer” (me) and chowder in a bread bowl (her) we talked about how she selected the Christian homeschooling Bob Jones. She told me, eyes teary and face raised with emotion that she wanted to teach her children “the light” which meant inspiration and joy in learning through teaching religion and history. She contrasted this to teaching “the darkness”, which were texts about social problems, things critical of America, as too adult, difficult and depressing. Only teaching the light, her vision of the “true history,” was an act of love. Within this metaphorical segregation was a desire to teach only what would make her children love this country—as it was clear that she did. A child of Cuban immigrants, her face shone as she spoke of free enterprise not as a way to build luxury but as a beloved, nearly religious tradition. Her hands clasped around the back of the chair, she turned to tell me the story of her father’s house, animated with the desire to teach her children a story that celebrated this American identity. Like the classical schools, she linked history and religion, tradition and capital linked together to celebrate an American identity in metaphors at once racial and religious. The light could be god, it could be white Americanness.
Clearly, the aim of this view of history is to build and celebrate a beautiful white identity - to make heroes. This is not different from many mainstream ideas of teaching a culture's literature and history, which honor the founding fathers and position the country as having an identity coming from this history. Yet this is not just about identity, but about superiority - positioning a culture and their children as the summit of western christendom. This parallels Trump's use of the constitution to position America as having a unified tradition, a story of progress, and as the summit of western civilization: the miracle of American history” (20:57). Aligned with Bauman and Briggs’ work on language as an expression of a people (2003), here history is the story of a people and one that gives identity.

As Christendom Curriculum explains, this is education in culture, custom and tradition -

**Home Education for A Rising Conservative Age**

Despite the craziness around us, the fact is that the observable trends throughout the West (and beyond) are in the direction of culture, custom, and tradition, and away from the globalist, progressive, and "Woke" approach to society.

And families like yours need a homeschool curriculum that reflects that emerging reality.

The Christendom Curriculum rejects the globalist and social justice warrior demand to despise our American and Western history, heritage, and heroes.

Instead, we teach children to honor their fathers and mothers of past generations, while looking ahead to a future re-established on the firm foundation of historic Christendom.

The Christendom Curriculum is designed for homeschooling with hope.

These curricula speak about hope, community and tradition. But each goes beyond this vision of language as identity to celebrating the religious elevation of a people - an ideology of exception. This is an ideology of patriotic language, telling the story of cultural identity and exceptionalism. History exists to make a vision of the world, hierarchy, and authority in the present. As Dissident Mama would say, education is to make children feel like the “aristocrats of the future.”

**Language as a battle for the Beautiful**

Patriotic language is in a war with the left for tradition, progress, and order. A second ideology is the view of language as a battle, or what vocal opponent of Critical Race Theory, Illana Mercer calls “verbal swordplay for civilization.” Here the ideology of language as identity becomes a language as both an identity under threat and the weapons to defend it. This is common in Trump’s characterization of CRT as the weapon of leftist villains, whose aim is to divide America, destroy history, and dishonor heroes. On the other hand, true history should be defended with eloquent rhetoric that both honors America and smites her enemies.

Dissident Mama uses martial metaphors to characterize rhetoric; homeschooling is her personal secession, her words are weapons in a cultural civil war. She fights the state, which is characterized
through a series of alliterative pairs as “sanctimonious sermons” “social justice statistics” who engage in “totalitarian tirades” full of “captive culture” and “progressive programming.” Dissident mama suggests she is locked in rhetorical battle with the left where language has the power to shape thought and to defend truth, beauty and goodness as ways man honors god and ancestors. She sees this as a key element in her teaching of writing; something also echoed in Classical Conversations framing of high school as learning rhetoric and persuasion for god.

However, it can be seen still more clearly in one of the curriculums that Dissident Mama promotes on her site, the Christian Nationalist homeschool guide *The Christendom Curriculum*. Christendom Curriculum is a (still) more nationalist and anti-progressive version of other great books based Christian homeschooling education like Classical Conversations. Its creator describes it explicitly as Christian nationalist; it consists of a series of reading lists in English and American literature from Shakespeare to CS Lewis, with an emphasis on religious and military texts, and a history curriculum that aligns American history with a battle to restore Christendom. As shown in the image below, the curriculum emphasizes a militaristic framing as part of the culture wars and how to survive “attacks” from enemy of feminist zombies, social justice snakes, and cultural marxists.

It distinguishes itself from these with its “battle papers” or study guides for the culture wars. They present their rhetoric and logic as weapons, to battle the left and defeat them in argument, while characterizing the greater project as a culture war. This war metaphor structures the purpose and story of their education. They give meaning to their project as fighting the left and rebuilding a civilization; they structure their curriculum according to four ages in the battle against secularism and equality. One battle paper focuses on the destruction of confederate states (something whistled at by trump in his speech’s mentions of BLM defiling heroes). In battle paper *Monument desecration and the fifth* commandment

[14](https://www.christendomcurriculum.com/blog/battle-paper-monument-desecration-and-the-fifth-commandment)
commandment the author WC Newsome blends Christian apologetics, or the use of scripture to defend Christianity from objections, with confederate apologies.

The use of scripture to justify positions on social and political issues is common, and here Newsome turns it up to 11, using the fifth commandment to justify confederate monuments in his war on “spiritual carpetbaggers.” With both question and answers, biblical exegesis including discussion of Hebrew etymology, and a syllogism he argues the father and the mother in fifth commandment means the head of household, church, and nation. This justification of Lee as our forefather not only sets up an argument where desecrating a statue of a leader is dishonoring our national father, it cements the idea of the nation and its history as a patriarchal family, a Christian tradition, and a (white) people whose identity must be defended.
Here we see the use of biblical exegesis and logical syllogisms, the tools of persuasion and argument, used to sell a story of the moral rectitude of preserving confederate monuments. They neatly link god, family, and country in one, comparing the southern generals to fathers who god says we must obey. These “battle papers” are there to instruct both students and their parents in the ideologies of White Christian nationalism, building on earlier Christian homeschooling’s vision of teaching children to evangelize or make god’s will known - here they are trying to train children to defend southern values and culture against northern progressivism and the spectre of wokeness.

A second battle paper, *Homeschooling in the Age of Trump*, goes deeply into the idea of language as battle. First it defines Trump as a “divine counter strike” against the enemies of America and Western Civilization. It speaks of His people (god, but perhaps Trump too) and the enemies, and describes Trump as a playboy raised up by god and a defender of the west. What Newsome cites about Trump is his elegy to the west, a 2017 speech in Warsaw where he said that the west was the greatest of nations, simultaneously honoring tradition and heroes and embracing innovation and new frontiers. He ends with a characterization of education as a battlefield, and shares Trump's discussion, on July 4 in Mt. Rushmore,
that schools are indoctrination centers that obscure virtues, twist motives and distort facts. Finally it ends
with a new hope, a conclusion that links his course and trump together in the battle for optimism and
Christian nationalism. As he puts it on the website: “homeschool or die.”

This vision of language as a battle circulated widely in the conservative communities I studied.
Homeschooling mothers referred to themselves as defending their children from the spectre of cultural
marxist bureaucratic equality that comes with being taught by strangers, from teachers who didn't love
them. They would refer to themselves as momma bears, protecting their young, and as wise keepers of
traditions and heritages they want to pass down. The mothers in my study spoke about saving their
children from “the gender” and passing down their heritage as an American, to be free and to homeschool,
and as a woman, to celebrate motherhood as your role and purpose. Schooling in the classical tradition is
referred to as attacking the root of evil and decay in our society, the secular humanist, cultural marxist,
gender egalitarian decay; you are not just teaching phonics you are leading the fight to preserve your
family, god, and the American Way.

Reading the World and the Word

Homeschooling emphasizes the role of reading; mothers reading together with their children is an
icon of the joy and naturalness of home education. Far-right and Christian education emphasizes the
importance of reading and culture, a kind of white culturally responsive pedagogy. In one video on
traditional education, the whike nationalist tradwife Ayla Stewart (see also chapter 4 for her pedagogy in
#whiteculture), speaks directly to this. A former anthropology and German student, her videos talk about
the definition and preservation of #white culture through homeschooling and social media. She explains
it as a blend of race realism and European tradition, so bell curves and bones blend with language families
and family structures. All with a strong insistence that other cultures have pride, culturally sustaining
pedagogy, and identities, and only whites are persecuted. Her video Traditional Parenting uses a
discussion of curriculum to advocate for White cultural education, and enlist mothers in learning and
sharing both traditional European texts and traditionalist values. Like many other homeschool videos she
simply holds up books, from Fascinating Womanhood to Finnish mythology and talks about why they are
important for homeschooling. This is twofold, she wants to preserve “white culture” the mythology, arts,
and traditions of North America and Northern Europe. She also wants to and to defend it from public
schools that teach us to think men and whiteness are evil, when she says they built the modern world. Her
most important point comes at the end. Breastfeeding like a Nazi Madonna, she says she homeschools
because doesn’t want her white children to think they are “the vessel through which all evil enters the
world.”

Classical Christian Education also aims at cultural reproduction, teaching the Bible, the great books
and a liberal arts education. Classical Christian schools advertise that the Bible permeates all aspects of schooling, as in their motto: “to know god, and make him known.” Biblical values and worldview shape how literature is read and interpreted; they find Christian values in main characters, when they speak about not just memorizing but looking for “big ideas” they mean god’s truth, beauty and goodness. Not just in the Bible, but in books and in the world, reading is seeing god’s creation, and learning to know him.

This idea of the worldview is shaped by JR Rushdoony’s Christian reconstruction in education, a far right form of Christianity which emphasized white men as the elect, women’s submission, and a biblical theocracy. It is therefore popular across the right. His vision is first that all true knowledge must be based on a foundation of god’s authority, and that anything else is simply another “secular religion”. All knowledge is linked in one system, or worldview. Second, the world that is read is one that is rigidly hierarchical and with defined age and gender roles. In this system the ultimate authority, after god, is that of the family. All other authority is socialism.

Blending the emphasis on family and worldview together, creates a truth which is always linked to supporting cultural identity, their values and the value of their children. Truths are the things that people like you say, that support your vision of the world and your place in it, the value of your religion, race, culture, gender - and especially, your sons. But this identity support is framed as abstract authority, literal truth. This is what Bauman and Briggs describe as the ideology of authority, where impersonal, especially written or standardized language creates a vision of correctness, abstract intellect, or truth. Often used to discuss standard language, Hodges (2020) expands authority to elucidate an ideology of literalism; one that says abstract truths are written on and define the world.

For the nationalists, these truths are, of course, self-evident. If the world is god’s story, it can be read. This vision of education emphasizes truths that can be seen, read directly off the world instead of the complex socialist intellectual machinations of the public schools. These truths are often those of sexual and racial difference. For example, Binder & wood (2012) note how the obviousness of sex difference to the right is used to make the left’s discussion of gender fluidity seem insane. PragerU offers a similar take, with stick figures like animated versions of bathroom door signs, they point to the self evident differences between big strong men and sweet little women. The same cycles of rhematization that made gender difference naturalized in Chapter 3 also make it a teachable, self evident “fact” for much of the right. A similar discussion happens with race and racism on the farther right. “Race realists” from moms like Ayla Stewart to the pseudo-scientific Intellectual Dark Web and “human biodiversity” experts on the far right, emphasize the “self evident” truth of racial difference against the “indoctrination” that race is a social construction. From there they use IQ tests and eugenics to discuss white racial superiority, but all founded on the idea that racial difference is the readable, self evident form of genetic, cultural differences.
They are not, however, divorced from academic concepts or research processes -- quite the opposite. The right continually frames itself as “doing its own research” on topics from race realism to QAnon. Instead, it is Christian Nationalist mothers reading god’s word, far-right women “doing their own research” on race, or Trumpian teachers opposing real facts to PC feelings. Instead it is often framed as going against the mainstream, a transgression of the norms of “woke culture.” In the next sections I explore the construction of “identity supporting knowledge” which the right aims to teach and the “hermeneutics of transgression” which frame how these beliefs are taught online.

3. God is a Man: Gendered and Identity supporting knowledge

Across the right from the explicit racism of alt-right 101 to the more modulated colorblind conservatism of PragerU, the libertarian inflected John Stossell or the paleolibertarian and southern nationalist Dissident Mama, all saw education as sharing particular kind of truth - what I term identity supporting knowledge.

Identity supporting knowledge means that which conforms to the nationalist worldview, and one which celebrates white male identity and authority. This may be white nationalists celebrating western civilization’s superiority, Neo-Confederates celebrating the south as the peak of White western culture, Christian Nationalist celebrating God and George Washington, or Trump declaring America is the shining light of freedom and the motor of world progress.

All of this glorious tradition is male. As this video from PragerU God is a He shows clearly, right-wing visions of truth and authority are deeply gendered. This video explains the importance of male god for peace, social cohesion, and for truth - and suggests that authority is always and essentially masculine. The
rigid gender binary that characterizes right wing worldview also extends to their ideas of knowledge.

Female cultural reproduction

While authority and tradition are male, it is women who represent and teach it. Women are celebrated as keepers of tradition and cultural wisdom in many right wing communities. Blee (2002) shows they are often seen as having a role of cultural reproduction that is analogous to their role in physical reproduction, wombs of the race and mothers of the nation. In this way women are meant to represent tradition, convention, and care; they may teach, transmit, or share messages but they are not framed as authorities or innovators. Within this their role is to perpetuate tradition and reproduce men. They raise men, literally and figuratively. Homeschool for girls often involves following and helping the mother, like Ingersoll, my participants emphasized raising girls to value others, home and family. Women’s role is to elevate and celebrate men, so that even the women on the far right who teach alt-right 101, celebrate the intelligence and strength of the viewer over their own.

Similarly, the Trumpist teachers celebrated their role in teaching standards and norms not in changing or innovating feminist curricula, and were concerned that shifting standards was a “war on boys.” On the Christian Nationalist side, the women I spoke to shared a conviction that the man was the leader of the family and the head of the church. Head of Classical Conversations Leigh Bortin spoke about watching her sons grow taller than her as a naturalizing metaphor for their growing male dominance. Indeed, she has now promoted him to president of the organization. Women teach and represent tradition, convention, purity as Inoue (2004) explains; the teachers I study used this conventionality to elevate men as Christian leaders, White nationalist innovators, or future scholars exceeding and going beyond the schoolteacher’s feminine convention.

Masculine Authority and Mental Fortitude

From Trump Teachers to the Alt-Right, education means celebrating male authority and accomplishment. These all link together physical and intellectual power, gendering intelligence as a kind of virility and authority. For the Christian Nationalists this is a celebration of the muscular founding fathers and the male authorities who wrote our constitution, our canon, and the bible. The Trump teachers couch this in terms familiar to Apple (2006) celebrating canon and tradition, and suggesting that deviations from this are “lowering the standard” equating masculinity with excellence and merit. As Apple explains, conservative visions of educational merit often see past knowledge as associated with a time when men were exposed to greater conflict, hardship and difficulty and therefore their work has more masculine vigor and intellectual rigor.

From the alt-right homeschooler Lacy Lynn teaching her boys with adventure stories, and having them play and explore outside, to the Christian nationalists I interviewed who taught their sons to work in space and military technology, men are raised to be on the front lines and the frontier. The far-right often uses
the term “mental fortitude” to characterize men’s particular genius, the parallel to women’s reproduction of tradition. Mental fortitude is mental ability modeled on physical strength, it is particularly male, and shown in the ability to compartmentalize, avoid emotion, lead, dominate yourself and others. This has long roots in what the intellectual far right calls the “faustian spirit” of white manhood. This term comes from the colonial era, as Nell Irvin Painter explains, where it blended white europeans' belief in their intellectual superiority and their physical hardiness. This vision was of a mental exploration, invention, and conquering of the world - a kind of intellectual colonialism that paralleled imperial expansion. This translates into a kind of masculinity as thinking for yourself, aggressively. Men are in space, the final frontier, they are hardy intellectual cowboys, rugged intellectuals, free-thinkers. They are the defenders of the west, progress, and innovation, and heroes who intellectually destroy the competition. Being on the far right is just this kind of masculine mental fortitude, if you hate the pc police you can be a rugged intellectual outlaw.

4. Hermeneutics of Transgression

The intellectual outlaw needs a special kind of knowledge. The simple truths of identity supporting knowledge, this post-war gender norm or nazi era race science, is made edgy, masculine and exciting through discursive moves I call the hermeneutics of transgression. They present things which are factually or morally wrong, such as explicit racism, as no longer unacceptable but as sexy transgressions of liberal norms, drawing on Greene (2019)’s analysis of the alt-right style guide, which explores how humor and irony are used to make racism play, both acceptable as a kind of joke and as fun. I extend this to argue that the far right uses transgression to frame racism as the true critical thought and create a sexy counter-cultural identity.

This masculine mental fortitude uses a transgressive style to present the belief in hierarchy and white male superiority as criticality and sexuality. They frame racism and sexism not as untrue but as unacceptable, the truth (((they))) don’t want you to know. Then to argue for it becomes not untruth but transgression of PC norms. Transgression is framed as criticality (Tebaldi 2020) to present themselves as the real free thinkers, speaking truth to power. Transgression is also framed as sexy, as a cool desirable countercultural attitude as in the phrase “conservatism is the new punk rock” but also as concerned with sexual strategy and seduction (Minna stern 2019). Alt-right sexism is framed as hidden truths about sexual difference which will lead to greater sexual success; learning that men are naturally dominant will get you girls.

This type of transgression shapes “redpilling” or the public pedagogy of right wing media. Redpilling refers to ways in which the online right tries to convince people of their ideology. As the reader goes deeper, however, as I illustrate in anti-biography two, it can take the form of an extended discourse with three steps: provocation, pseudo-rationality, and prophesy.
Provocation
A first discursive move with redpilling is provocation. This can be a red pill single fact or idea meant to provoke someone into learning more about the right, or it can be a longer discourse designed to awaken liberal ire, hand wringing and moralizing. You look transgressive and sexy, and you get to make your dull PC teacher and professor get mad.

This can make racism and sexism a game, ludic, sexy, fun. The speaker is simply playing devils advocate”. Greene (2019) explains how provocation can also function to normalize racism, if it is used in an ironic or provoking way online it also becomes less serious. Binder & Wood (2012) show how this provocative style is common in areas known for anonymity, both in large universities and online. They explain that campus conservatives in large schools would engage in more shocking protests, such as wearing diapers to make fun of leftist “babies” whose feelings were too hurt. The aim of provocation is to make fun of the left and to incite a response that can frame the left as censorious or oversensitive.

This practice also reflects norms in gamers discourse where masculinity is shown by not getting upset even at very inflammatory or insulting comments (Condis 2018). Gamers show their manhood by insulting others with homophobic and sexist language, and by not being affected by others insults. The alt-right women I studied had a similar discourse norm, often declaring that men were better able than women to compartmentalize emotions and not get upset but also showing video clips of leftists and feminists yelling or crying in order to characterise feminine authority as socially illegitimate because women lack masculine self control. For example, Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, in Feminism is for Idiots and Uglies shows a woman crying and screaming and explains that this is why feminism is incoherent.

Pseudo-Rationality
A second step after provocative language is pseudo-rationality, as when Sarah Palin describes herself as a “white common sense conservative.”15 This can simply be a style as when the Alt-Right affiliated group Identity Evropa made the slogan “its ok to be white” which softened their racism by presenting it as something rational, normal. All they were doing was saying white is ok, why would anyone be opposed to that? Of course, they then present their opponents as both anti-white and unreasonable.

Pseudo-rationality frames opposing points of view as insane or dictatorial; quite often this is related to gender. For example when NYU social psychologist Jonathan Haidt (author of The Coddling of the American Mind) coddles the center-right, suggesting that denying genetic heritability of positive traits and sex differences on the left is as insane as denying climate change. As noted earlier, Binder and Wood found that conservative activists use the presumed self-evidence of gender difference to characterize the left as insane and the right as rational. Perhaps the clearest example is the conservative insistence that

15 https://t.co/9oePT7M3UH?amp=1
there are just two genders or the TERF’s corny “couples have sex, they don’t have gender” (nobody who has said this got laid this year) and their assertion that the left believes in 8937 genders, or thinks you can self identify as an inanimate object -- as when the conservative mocks this by saying he “identifies as an attack helicopter.”

This kind of transgressive pseudo rationality characterizes a large part of the intellectual right. Ben Schapiro on PragerU states that the West is objectively the best because it is founded on the rationality of Athens and the religion of Jerusalem. His version of objectivity then, is white. It is also reflected in his pseudo-intellectual tagline, “facts don’t care about your feelings” to present conservatism as evidence and argument based, while liberalism is all about feelings. This opposition too, is gendered. But pointing this out is lefty “feelings.”

The height Intellectual Dark Web frames racism and sexism as “evolutionary psychology” or “social biology” as the true rationality. Following Jordan Peterson or Steven Pinker, these theorist reject the idea of a “blank slate” or social construction, and see hierarchy in nature. These often presume the reality of gender difference, for example arguing that if their daughter plays with dolls not trucks all feminism is hogwash. Despite the fact that the former president of Harvard agreed, these views are considered stigmatized by academia. Those on the farthest right often describe themselves as “race realists” suggesting that it is only rational to believe in the reality of racial differences which they see, and arguments about social construction or social inequality are leftist insanity. Charles Murray or Stefan Molyneux use statistics, figures, IQ and other, to present their racism as reason.

Prophesy

Rather than evolutionary psychology, or in addition, some on the right draw instead on religiously inspired language of prophecy to create alternatives to institutional knowledge. Just as one might search in the bible for hidden meanings and appropriate verses, these search the vast corners of the internet for information which affirms their identity-supporting knowledge or reveals the vast conspiracy which has deprived us of them. In this framing the simple truths must be pieced together across multiple sites, uncovered from where they remain hidden in plain sight, or rescued from the cultural elites.

These types of research often bring together multiple discourses and threads, such as those I outline in chapter 3, wellness and a mistrust of medical knowledge might come together with a celebration of tradition and food in a belief about the hidden truths of bone broth and butter as curing cancer, depression, and schizophrenia through a decalcification of the pineal gland -- which the government has caused through increased fluoride in order to prevent us from reaching the truth. Here as well truths remain simple and self evident, but they need to be gathered from multiple sources. A second element of this is alternative ways of reading a text, which can draw from biblical hermeneutics, or other forms of prophecy like tarot, astrology, bibliomancy, to find hidden patterns. In my own life this was
clearest when my mother declared that the government was into mind control, and it was all there in the name “government” as in mental. This can also involve multiple languages, as when flat earthers are known for saying that NASA means he lies in Hebrew (Mohammed 2019). Or books, as when a children’s book with a character named Baron Trump was taken as a sign he was the elect (Trangerud 2021). What is shared is the idea that inside the words are secrets.

From this linguistic uncovering, we could connect to fluoride, oil pulling and ayurvedic medicine as forgotten forms of oral health. Together this information gathering and reinterpretation can create new, productive and ever shifting theories as science, religion, occult, wellness, education, tradition, or lifestyle discourses. Often this is connected to conspiracies and conspiratorial thinking. Traditional foods, vaccines, or even high fat diets have been framed as stigmatized by institutions as in my mom’s cookbook “the nutrition truth the diet dictocrats don't want you to know,” sometimes tipping over into more elaborate conspiracies as when fluoride is framed as a conspiracy to control the population and make them docile (Benowitz 2015).

Both the anti-institutional science and these new hermeneutics are best seen on the Q Message boards, which as explained in chapter 3 is a conspiracy theory whose focus on saving children from a pedophile elite is popular with right wing women. Q would leave “drops” on a message board with vague and poetic texts, fragments of sentences, dates, predictions and odd patterns that his followers would have to decode in order to unveil and help stop the pedophile conspiracy. This type of interpretation process was known as collecting crumbs, while assembling them in a theory was baking. This might include finding all the wrong capitalized letters and deciding they were an anagram for Kill Hillary, listening to Trump’s speeches for the repetition of words in the Q drop like tippie top, or counting the letters of each drop and deciding they corresponded to the ancient hebrew term for King Cyrus the hero the Evangelicals compare Trump to. It didn’t matter how you uncovered the truth, which was still, identity supporting and self-evident, like the glory of family and children, the process was finding creative ways to prove it, to rescue it from the mainstream “educrats.”

Across the right from biblical gender to race science, there is an emphasis on identity supporting knowledge as readable truth. Readable truths can mean something immediately perceptible, like the difference in sex. They may mean arcane conspiracies and internet rabbit holes. They may mean time honored texts, for the Christian the Bible but also the Constitution and the Canon But they all connect to identity, culture, and community. These readable truths are always also stigmatized truths; they are opposed to the complex socialist indoctrinations, the cultural marxists, the PC police. They are obvious, but have to be recovered because of the fallen and broken state of our world. Put another way, the fight for real timeless truth against the evils of cultural marxist social construction. This is something evident their fight against “CRT” and the “dictatorship of the woke”, which I explore in the conclusion.
Anti-Biography4 : Goodbyes

I did this research during the Black Lives Matter Protests of summer 2020. At a week of protests by New Orleans Workers group and Take em down Nola, we marched past the empty column at lee circle, watching the sun set on the absence of this slaveowner. We marched down the street to counterprotesters waving the American flag (so close to getting it) and shouting at us to go home. We shut down a trump supporting restaurant, walked past columns of live oak lined sidewalks yelling for people to come out of their plantation houses to join us. We walked to the overpass where suburban police attacked black people fleeing Katrina, hopping over cement walls my friends said Ccat this is the Bastille you can do it. You could feel the tear gas in the air, slightly spicy, even across the city in the 7th ward. The last night we sat in Jackson square, the site of the last monument to be taken down, to this authoritarian populist racist who “saved” New Orleans by doing little to nothing the original schlubby but magical white boy. Music played as the sun went down and we walked to the Mississippi and screamed, asked by the organizers organizers to let go of the anger and the futility and the sadness of these protests to leave them in the wide dark waters of the Mississippi and the little lights dancing on it.

I screamed.
I felt a bit silly.

This isn’t my moment, BLM isn’t here to teach white girls self actualization. But later - there’s time for that. Throwing in the river these ideas of white femininity, these endless failures to live up to a tradition out of a tv-dinner advertisement. What would it be to find a mode of being that wasn’t based on submission to men, that wasn’t rooted in oppression of Black people? Was that a kind of femininity?

I walk home him with my Pandemic Protest Partner, Joseph. We met when he had hoop earrings and a the shirt celebrating Tio Bernie. There is a sense of unresolved tension in all this watery wellness, this individual level resolution. Kill the cops in our head, ok, but what about the ones that had tear gassed us? The mississippi isn’t a bathtub to cry in, it can overflow these banks and wipe the city away… filing past Jackson square littered with discarded placards, the city was still founded on slavery and living on the exploitation of black labor and culture. Biden was winning primaries, Bernie was done. Karens run rampant. Nothing has changed, nothing is better. Anger is like static electricity, any conversation an uncomfortable shock. We walk silently. The river demands better.

We meet later, drink on the banks of the Mississippi to say goodbye. He drinks a mango Prosecco, the Orishas are disappointed by the offering but not the company.
My last night in New Orleans I go to say goodbye to Tara but also to the river, the memories of drinking and talking shit out there. The protests. Sunrise runs. Midnight parties at the secret beach in the abandoned military base called the end of the world. The sun is glinting on the Mississippi, blue and silver grey. We pose ourselves on the wide, shallow slate steps of Jackson steps Jackson square in the background. It looks like a Disney castle.

I drink a local specialty, a large strawberry beer. It tastes like moldy jam, the musty taste of nostalgia to come. Trying to resolve a fight with a college friend, because I told her that sexual submission, with its stereotyped gender roles, is tradwife shit. It is — but it doesn’t do to say that - and definitely not at brunch. She just feels fat on top why am I making it political. My future in consciousness raising is anything but assured. What do I do with this angry brain, these observations. I can feel the links between us fraying.

I have to pee, badly. This sense memory puts me back in the role of a kindergarten teacher in Harlem. Where people would say “god bless you” about my work, read my wide hips and big eyes as being good with kids, my whiteness as smart. Back to my family, to my mom’s explicit sexism, and my father whose face lights up when I’m cooking in a way tenure will never match. Disney castle in the background, all these miscast prince charmings. Arty, academic guys really wanted tradwives; little brothers who cried if you outshone them. Drowning conflicts this femininity I internalized, fear of becoming and of not becoming this kind of woman, with emotionally unavailable leftists. All these things that weigh on me, can I throw them in the Mississippi. Illegal to throw your exes in rivers probs.

When I was a child, before my mother went trad, she would end every fairy tale with and she got a scholarship to college and lived happily ever after. She regrets that now. As a kid, I liked the real little mermaid, was never sure how floating around the world was a sad ending.

Saying good bye to the city, to the voodoo hipsters, the Bywater gentrifiers, the Marigny anti-vaxx mommas, coming unstuck from yet another place and floating away. Maybe some old me, tied up to all these ideas of white womanhood is floating down the river like a waterlogged protest placard. This dissertation is just yelling in the river, watching these thoughts float away. Maybe it's my fairy tale.
Conclusion

This dissertation calls for a broader understanding of the educational practices on the right - popular education in media and communities and the way these build alternative institutions and discourses, from neo-confederate museums to #milfs for trump. In particular it focused on how these practices develop and circulate narratives and forms of personhood. It traced threads of far-right femininity, along with its ideologies of submission and hierarchy, across different types of media from YouTube videos to homeschooling curriculums.

Through teacher education we can see one of these threads of far-right femininity, as desirable forms of white “republican motherhood” long shaped both who is a teacher --even today it remains 80 percent white and female-- and what is considered a good teacher - a well educated, attractive single “nice white lady” who will reproduce the norms of a middle class culture. This still animates much of what we see in contemporary teacher education, from Teach for America’s classed vision of “high achieving” women in classrooms (Traore 2004) to the vision of teacher as a “good girl” that Galman (2012) studies. The ideal teacher, like the ideal woman for the right, must be sweet, positive, and child oriented.

These traits retain traces of victorian ideals of the “angel of the classroom” or the “mother of the nation” who would teach immigrants to be americans echoed earlier KKK calls for mothers to teach children “patriotism at their knees” with a flag and a bible as part of an education in 100 percent americanism (Baker 2011). Nice white ladies are still called on to teach a patriotic history from “Confederate History month” across the south, to the christian nationalist homeschoolers i studied in Louisiana , but also my own teachers in Massachusetts asking me to sing how proud I was to be an American because at least I know I'm free (the ‘at least’ is doing a lot of work there)

Much of the right shares mainstream ideals but simply says things louder, with more certainty. If mainstream media celebrates mothers for the right then women are naturally mothers. If more teachers are women, for the christian right mothers are god or nature’s teachers. These traces and connections allow far-right ideology to connect, be normalized, be taken up. The shared experience and struggles around femininity, motherhood, vocation can be invested anew with meaning, the contradictions of trying to have it all in late capitalism can be smoothed out by far-right ideologies. Femininity becomes submission, nature becomes hierarchy. Far right discourses pull on these threads of connection, family and femininity, motherhood and nature, reorganizing them until femininity becomes submission and nature hierarchy.

This dissertation has traced these threads though gender, media and language; .Gendered visions of what truth and education are important to understanding the right, and in particular to the work they do

16 “Confederate history month”
http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/confederate-heritage-month-memory-american-civil-war/
creating and naturalizing hierarchy and male power.

I used a blended ethnographic method, online and offline, to explore media, formal, and home education as an intersecting set of ideologies and practices of Alt-education. I hope this makes two contributions to an understanding of education and ideology. First, alt-education broadens the understanding of what education is on the right, understanding schooling as part of and connected to social and popular media and to beliefs about education. Secondly, in exploring these practices I highlight the importance of gender to alt-education, to far right ideology and its reproduction.

In the first part, I focused on how there are threads of arch femininity everywhere, connecting schooling to bibles, or cooking videos to white genocide. I show how these are a kind of schooling; they are deeply implicated in the processes of normalizing and recruiting for far right politics, and how these threads also implicate my, and our, experiences of gender. Far right politics can be taken up, transmitted, taught, because it connects to the mainstream.

I then theorized the idea of iconization and naturalization of this kind of femininity, looking at rhematization cycles and their role in naturalization of hierarchy. That is, bodily expressions of femininity like a womb, become part of women’s character, like our natural role as teachers and creators of life, which is then expressed in another physical quality. The threads of femininity are bound together in a naturalized, essentialized vision of gender and power.

In the second part, I looked closely at how these ideologies of education are taught. First, I explored how this vision of mother as nature’s teacher was used as pedagogy and as politics in right wing discourses about education, creating an opposition between mother as a loving natural teacher and the evils of the public schools. I looked at how this difference was part of pedagogy, emphasizing the creative, nature based, cultural pedagogy of the right wing school as opposed to bureaucratic and egalitarian public schools. I then showed how this difference was politicized in discourses about education, and used to win consent for anti-state politics by framing state as anti-family.

In the last chapter, I looked at the curriculums and the ways knowledge is understood on the right. I explore how this too, is infected in gendered ways - the natural mother teacher should raise a rugged intellectual cowboy. I try to sketch the contours of what an alt-education means to those who practice it, a culture and identity and social hierarchy preserving education.

In this conclusion, I first elaborate my understanding of alt-education using Stuart Hall’s work on ideology in crisis, highlighting the central themes of motherhood, schools, and narratives. I also explore the ethical implications of this perspective, which places the extreme in connection to the mainstream. In the second section, I apply this understanding to current debates about right wing educational politics: parental rights, the opposition to critical race theory, Covid misinformation and conspiracy theories. In the final section, I trace the implications for researching, responding to, and teaching far right media.
Deep State Stories

In *Strangers in their Own Land* sociologist of the right Arlie Hochschild (2016) characterized the Tea Party and other far-right groups as having an “deep story” of being superseded, a strongly held and affective narrative of their place in line taken by minorities and women. Hochschild seems to naturalize this story, as though it comes from deep within lived experience or collective memory. A closer focus on media instead how these deep stories are made, and taught. We might ask how media communicate right wing ideology and connect it to affect and experience, explore how these narratives are taken up, changed, and transmitted, and ask how they shape social critiques and solutions?

Stuart Hall’s work on ideology in crisis suggests that hegemony, or ruling class ideology as commonsense, is never total but must always be fought over in response to both external crisis and internal conflict. This fight takes the shape of building hegemony through education, media, and cultural politics, this metapolitical battle is what Steven Bannon referred to when he spoke of “politics being downstream from culture,” and it must be constantly renewed through ever more affective narratives of social crisis and conspiracy. As ideology is where “politics cuts into language” we can also see this as a fight over meaning, the ruling ideology fights for the meanings assigned to words, feelings, experiences - a fight over the deep story, and then the characters and social roles it narrates.

To look at how this deep story is made, I analyzed how the right wing media assigned meaning to everyday experiences such as teaching, childcare, cooking and eating. My analysis of right-wing media and gender model it as a kind of web or set of vines or threads, tendrils connecting extreme to mainstream, weaving through everyday life with widely accepted tropes like cupcakes are feminine and grilling is masculine, knitting these together with deeply felt ideals of love and family. These threads can come from multiple and potentially contradictory directions, as when Dissident Mama complains of corporate communism, and draw together affect, identity, meaning, with what Hall terms the experience of the social crisis.

The far right takes these threads and combs them out, assigning them meanings. While individual experience and belief are shifting, as narratives move rightward their meaning becomes fixed in a rigid natural order. Far right ideology works as a center of gravity, shaping how problems become interpreted, how identities are valued, organizing the world into gendered, raced, natural hierarchies that pull people in. It organizes the world according to a rigid axis of difference (Gal & Irvine 2019) of dominant/submissive or good/evil. This difference is naturalized and given affective power through the gender binary, and fractally reiterated at all levels from clothing and food - sweet, soft things expressing feminine love and submission -- to political orders - the welfare “nanny” state and a set of scales which organize the nation as a kind of family.
In discourses of motherhood that I studied, how right wing ideology becomes attached to highly affective experiences, and can give the everyday slog of diapers and dishes deep, weighty and important meaning - part of a deep story of your own identity but also your race and your nation. Phrases like “the womb of the race” reduce women to reproductive function, but also make her a symbol of a whole people. Similarly, motherhood comes to stand for tradition, the “traditional gender role”, to christian values or the naturalness of motherhood. This ideal gives meaning to the daily work of motherhood, the value many of my participants felt denied by mainstream feminism. above all it connects far-right ideas to the experience of love. In my research, motherhood embodying the greatest love was central to both their stories of themselves and narratives of homeschooling and opposition to the state.

Right wing meanings also attached to critiques, especially evident in my research in discussions of education. Many moms would complain about high stakes testing, a concern held across the political spectrum from the white nationalist Lacey Lynn to my committee chair. The right wing discourses however, picked up on this critique and assign it very different meanings. Here, high stakes tests became a symbol of indoctrination and multiculturalism. Testing became part of social justice, painting equality as a kind of dull bureaucracy, and less an issue of high stakes as of a levelling down. Similarly, ADHD medication instead of having a more active, natural pedagogy was a criticism of neoliberal public schools -- but this was an opening up of an argument about masculine vitality and energy and a critique of gender equality in schools. Yes, the right was also talking about banking pedagogy, but it became an anti-semitic slur. When the far right says schools are “corporate cultural marxist HR speak” it may be a critique of neoliberalism, but it’s turning that criticism away from capital and towards culture and gender roles.

Perhaps the best illustration of this comes from a discussion I had with Cammie, a Christian Nationalist homeschooling mother and Louisiana native who had been homeschooled herself. We had a hour long phone interview where she was warm and kind, describing homeschooling as an expression of love for her children and Freedom, blending details of her teaching practices with mentions of bloodlines and white American heritage. Afterwards, we maintained a correspondence. She sent me her daughters drawings, asked me questions about French, and discussed Strangers in Their Own Land with me over facebook chat. She was intelligent, well read, clearly loved teaching her children and had an excellent critique of Hochschild - that for all her discussion of empathy she had missed the real “deep story” of the right, their love of freedom.

Freedom was, for Cammie, a deeply held ideology and an affective one - freedom was her american heritage, it was freedom to homeschool, to be the kind of mother she wanted. But this was not just her deep story, it was also the freedom to decide who her children spent time with, the freedom to exclude Black people from her social world - freedom was also authority and white supremacy. This framing as freedom was clearly a deep feeling, but it was also the product of right wing discourses from patriotic
songs about American Freedom to right wing homeschooling media. Brown (2021) explains that freedom was one of the most frequently invoked concepts by homeschooling advocates and major institutions, encouraging the uptake of this framing of opposition to schools as parental freedom, similar to how anti-gay practices are framed as religious freedom. Freedom was her feelings, herself, but these were no innate deep story, instead shaped by circulating discourses. Deep stories are learned.

**Alt-Education, Pseudo-Critique and Cultural Politics**

Much of this deep story happens as a “defense” of home, family, or white nation against an imagined enemy. This is a kind of pseudo-critique of the existing order, one which can frame racism as the true transgressive thought, or sexism as reconstructing an ideal tradition or natural order. This framework of red pilled provocative transgression or far right reconstruction is especially important in understanding the cultural politics of intersecting far-right educational discourses that frame themselves as anti-institutional:ant-CRT, and anti-vaxx.

**Anti-CRT and Biblical Learning**

Opposition to CRT clearly draws on the language ideologies I illustrate in the previous chapter; an heroic national history threatened by the other. The right’s obvious, timeless, truths to need to be discovered and redeemed, there must be an enemy - the evil pc woke brigade who hides them. This is clear in the right’s demonization of public schools as socialist indoctrination centers, their endless critiques of the new history curriculum, the 1619 project which centers the Black experience or multicultural curricula as lowering standards and federal communist interference. The demonization of public schooling and universities is key to the right’s self presentation as the true critical thinkers, seeing past this political correctness, and as the truly rational - those who see the obvious truths of sex and race differences, genetics, biology, or those who see the self-evident truth of God, America and Capitalism’s greatness.

This framing underpins contemporary battles against CRT as well. In his final Constitution Day speech, Trump called CRT a woke indoctrination, a divisive attack, and metaphorically compared it to both the toppling of Confederate Monuments and to Black Lives Matter uprisings - for Trump CRT was a violent mob that wanted to destroy American history and character. In contrast Trump proposed a vision of history education that celebrated the constitution and the declaration of independence as songs written on the hearts of all Americans (perhaps he had been at that tea party party) Trump began to support the 1776 project, which took aim at the criticality of the 1619 project and proposed an explicitly patriotic alternative.

While Trump lost, the fight against CRT raged on. 22 states (as of Sept 1, 2021) proposed bills banning teaching critical race theory in education. Senate candidates like JD “hillbilly elegy” Vance
tweeted about CRT as a very expensive attack on white people, something echoed by conservative media from Fox to Breitbart. Protests erupted at school board meetings, sometime funded by Koch brothers, as parents demand an end to CRT or a call for body cameras to monitor teachers and make sure they were not teaching “anti-white” curriculum. The content of these bills banned CRT or even teaching about the history of racist organizations like the KKK; CRT was seen as a kind of “racism against white people” making white students feel bad, guilty about their identities instead of loving their country.

The far right got angrier and angrier about CRT, calling it not only anti-white but a kind of white genocide, an attack on their culture and existence. CRT became the opposite of the kind of identity supporting knowledge that the right wanted to teach - and opposing CRT became a way to advocate for teaching this kind of knowledge. The far right argued we need to go beyond opposing CRT to teaching a pro-white curriculum in order to fight the cultural marxist attacks on whites. They said CRT showed public schools were inherently anti-white, and new ways of teaching and learning should be found that supported the race.

JD Vance called for a bible based curriculum. Laws began which banned any teaching which makes students feel uncomfortable about their race or their history. The Christian Right, similarly, said that to stop CRT we must begin teaching a bible based, patriotic curriculum that celebrates America and its values. This would teach the reality of American exceptionalism, freedom and family values (read anti-trans) and stop socialist indoctrination.

While many on the left argued the right had no idea what CRT was, that It was a legal studies framework with no place in the public schools. Yet this misses the point, and continues to caricature the right as uneducated rubes who just need the real facts. The right knows CRT is a fiction, an umbrella term for all teaching about race, as its creator Chris Rufo admits publicly. CRT was an image of identity-critical education, used to advocate for identity supporting knowledge. Calling out CRT helped the right further demonize and defund schools, but it also provided a way to talk about the biblical, culturally reproducing education that they want - the kind I explore in chapter 5.

This framing of the right as ignorant, much like anti-evolution education was framed as opposition to science rather than support for christian schooling, ignores what the right actually want to teach - white christian supremacy. It also elides much of the similarities between the far right and mainstream liberal education. As Merry (2020) and other scholars of social studies education have pointed out, mainstream education which focuses on liberal democracy and citizenship, also often relies on nationalist history and shared mythmaking. Many of us learn about America as a family with founding

fathers, as having a national story of expansion and increasing perfection, or as a land of liberty and beacon of progress - much as Trump celebrates. We must deal with what the right wants to teach, not merely label the right as ignorant or in opposition.

Anti-Vaxx and Covid “infodemic”

Covid misinformation is perhaps one of the best examples of these intertwining threads of far-right meanings, gender, and everyday practices. Vaccine opposition easily links to conspiracies, anti-state politics, gendered ideas of motherhood, support for organic food. Opposition to vaccines is often anchored at once in everyday practices and commonsense beliefs around health - taking care of your body, personal responsibility for health, valuing natural or organic food - which are natural responses to health care in a capitalist country. These can also however, be linked to farther right meanings around eugenics or eco-fascism, as when we talk about some people being naturally immune and therefore more worth saving, or to deeply gendered views about women’s natural instincts for their children.

Research on the right should look at the spread of misinfo, but also at gender roles and worldview anchoring this opposition - what the movement is for, not simply what it's against. Many of the conspiracy theories around vaccination are gendered. They are linked to other far right conspiracies around birthrates - suggesting the vaccine makes you infertile - or to those around fluoride -suggesting the government wants to make you docile.

Conspiracy thinking itself can be gendered. Harsin (2020) for example, shows how the opposition to masks and vaccine mandates is based in a masculine “aggroTruth” which has elements of the far right’s masculine “mental fortitude”. We may laugh as the right calls masks “face diapers” but it is clear that identity, masculinity, get bound up in reactions to public health information and misinformation. Similarly, gendered beliefs about thinking for yourself may underpin opposition to institutional knowledge, while interest in tradition, gender can also support the acceptance of pseudo-science. For example, belief in traditional wisdom and gender roles can lead some to interest in traditional forms of wellness, herbal medicine, or folk remedies such as fermented fish oil as a cure-all. This embrace of natural health, traditional foods and medicines is also bound up with a vision of nature as a hierarchy and of gender roles and difference as the clearest evidence of this. How might we look at wellness and health communities differently if we understood them as being linked to these kinds of right wing ontologies?

Gender roles and motherhood, a call to tradition, can also be part of a call for an investment in nature and tradition as also motivate much of the belief in QAnon, the conspiracy theory that says pedophilie elites are murdering children to make adrenochrome, which also has strong links to both far right politics and health and wellness communities. Rather than mocking or marveling at these beliefs, we might look closer at how identity and especially gender, makes these desirable worldviews and how mistrust and opposition to institutions shapes processes of research and argument.
Finally this gendered worldview and the takeup of these threads is presented by the right as doing your own research, as critical thinking. Anti-vaccine and other conspiratorial beliefs often also offer a takeup of leftist language, and even to some extent their social critiques. The right become the rebels, the transgressive fighters, the opponents of state power and official thought. This is why Christian conservative Charlie Kirk can call his belief in gender roles “thoughtcrime” or where “dissident mama” gets her name. There is also a presentation of the left as totalitarian, as against free speech or free thought, or with lockdowns even freedom itself. This is the language of oppression, but it is used to preserve hierarchy. It presents the white male as the embattled hero, a rebel fighting the leftist PC brigades, whose identity and power what underpins true reason and value.

Far-right alt-education blends affect and identity with the right’s ideology of hierarchy and power. It co-opts the real social movements but does so with real legitimate criticism of neoliberalism. Some people might just want to make racism sexy again, some people might see the crisis and contradictions of late capitalism, reject girlboss feminism or high stakes testing and find homemaking or homeschooling the most compelling alternative. These right wing narratives co-opts resistance, in part by reframing right wing politics as rebellion, resistance, “the new punk rock”.

![Image](image-url)

Leftists are joyless social justice warriors, or brainless “NPC” (non player characters) in thrall to “woke corporations”, while tradwives as resisting feminist totalitarianism, white nationalists as resisting political
correctness, patriotic education as resisting indoctrination.

This means we might take far-right critiques of the neoliberal consensus with a grain of salt, but it does not mean we abandon a critique of neoliberalism. This far right pseudo-rebellion made possible by the neoliberal hollowing out of left meanings; as a socialist, progressive left is replaced by rainbow capitalism and neoliberal multiculturalism the far-right’s critique of social justice as the reign of “woke capital” starts to make sense.

I hate liberals, too.

Trying to meet one of the first teachers’ groups, I was asked if I was a conservative. I said, with a flippant tone that didn’t work well with these Facebook mommas, “well, no, but I hate liberals too.” This dumb joke offended these women’s self regard, who tended to frame themselves more as the victims of liberals than their aggressors - but it points to the need to analyze the far right alongside the (neo) liberal, late capitalist mainstream. Scholars like Mondon and Winter (2020) note how a focus on the far right can erase mainstream racism and normalize some of its forms of personhood, like the “white working class” or “family values”. In this final section I trace out a few ways forward for an engaged, critical study of right wing media, and a critique of liberalism as well.

Research

The first an most central contribution of this dissertation is to take gender and the far right seriously; not assuming women were merely wombs of the race or winsome spokeswomen. Instead, gender plays a central role in how narratives and ideas are presented and it shapes the way they are taken up. As Minna-Stern (2019) shows the women of the far right are a valuable resource in recruiting and getting attention to the movement, and the fact that the often are using anti-feminist discourses also may push the movement more in this direction. Gender is also central to the threatened tradition, intimacy and conspiracy that construct these affective narratives. It is key as well as to the connections between far-right metapolitics and metapragmatics, that is, between metapolitics which see the world as gendered and politics as male, and the metapragmatics which govern acceptable performances of feminine speech and beauty. This gendered link between metapragmatics and metapolitics is also central to understanding the spread and use of influencer culture for these movements. It can be productively applied as well to an analysis of far-right “deep stories” and how they are taught, shaped and interpreted.

Miller-Idriss (2018) has pointed to the need to explore the mainstreaming of the far-right, and the importance of both ethnographic approaches and ongoing media literacy research to studying the right. Miller idriss, crucially, takes an ethnographic approach to studying media - looking not only at right wing symbols but how they become part of material culture, social practices and processes of interpretation. This dissertation has similarly looked at online media with an ethnographic sensibility, focusing closely
on the circulation and the uptake of media. It looks at what is produced, but also how it has been consumed, taught, read and used to shape identities. Uptake is a crucial aspect for all research on right wing media, or else one could merely argue that photos of women serving men dinner are wholesome, or swastikas are merely aryen symbols. More research is needed on the uptake of right wing discourses, both how individual women understand and encounter far right media, and how mainstream liberal or even left critiques can be taken up and given far-right meanings.

Secondly, drawing on critical feminist perspectives this research has emphasized reflexivity and affect often showing these through creative linguistic expression. Rich, affective, and narrative writing is a growing area of emphasis in other ethnographic studies (ie Ghodsee 2016) and as Ahmed (2004) shows in her work on affective economies, affect is a key part of far-right discourses, sticking on some bodies as ideal national subjects or using hate of others to form attachments to the nation. This has been seen as an important intervention in right wing studies, countering tendencies to frame the far right as isolated backwoods extremists.

Some recent research on the right deals with affect and empathy, like Hochschild whose work focuses on anger and loss, but then uses ethnography to create empathy and closeness. Here affect and narrative are used to paint sympathetic and human portraits of difficult people, and their analysis links ethnographic closeness and experience with a need for empathy and closeness to these people. Similarly, Titlebaum (2018) calls for ethnographic complicity, boundary crossing and even friendship with participants in the far right music scene. In these works the richness of feeling is used to counter a perceived demonization or othering of the right (unsuccessfully in Hochschild’s portrait of racists in Louisiana chemical swamps).

Yet I felt this kind of empathic, close engagement along with the rich ethnographic narratives of home and family life could also provide an unwilling complicity (and unlike Titlebaum I find complicity with Nazis to still be a bad thing) with both far right participants and far right narratives. Much of the media I reviewed in this piece was focused on domesticity and femininity, it used the language of love, family and care. Far right media emphasized white women’s beauty, the wholesome farm girl preparing healthy organic food, the wife serving her husband dinner, the mother reading to her child at night -- a close vivid ethnographic portrait of these aspects of a life would perhaps also be cloaking the values of white supremacy in the language of family. The practices of mothering, the clear love these women have for their children, was used by the right to sell a politics of hate.

So to avoid these twin perils of othering the right as backwoods losers with no connection to us, or as sweet mothers and winsome ambassadors for tradition, I suggest future research employs critical feminist approaches to ethnographic research which emphasize reflexivity and affect, politics and positionality. First, we might move beyond this kind of affective objectivity, where we merely have empathy for the right, to recognize both the right and ourselves as having a full range of emotions. Sometimes we feel
comfortable talking about babies to the Tea Party organizer, sometimes they talk about patriotism in ways that feels icky, or smugly superior who eats chowder in a bowl of bread. These affects are also social, political and provide insight into the right and crucially to its relationship to the mainstream. Where I as a white woman felt comfortable or most threatened, these were sites of important overlap between mainstream femininity and far-right visions. Above all, this kind of affective entanglement is central to right wing women’s media and discourses and focusing on reflexivity and affect help develop frameworks which understand this.

This critical and reflexive approach also must emphasize political engagement; we can’t look at neo-nazis and simply count how much german they speak or look at the GPAs of members in far-right campus groups. Similarly, we don’t want to avoid making the far right seem like backwards isolated cleftuses simply because this isn’t nice, but because this highlights their difference to the mainstream and erases liberal democratic racism as Mondon and Winter show comprehensively. Reflexivity could also operate on a larger scale, looking at the far right’s economic, political, and social connections to the mainstream - and doing something about racism and sexism in both.

Media

One key area of intervention and political engagement is critical media literacy, teaching how to analyze media as cultural politics or public pedagogy, reflecting and creating dominant narratives of our society. A critical engaged study of the right then asks what media is teaching us - what stories are the right telling us? I argue we also need to ask - what stories do we tell about the right? How can we use media informed scholarship to tell better ones?

A first implication is to move away from liberal media takes which often frame the right as stupid or as not understanding. Multiple news sources framed the opposition to Critical Race Theory as a story of right wing ignorance. It is not that the right doesn’t know what critical race theory is (and does MSNBC?) or mistakenly believes that a law school curriculum is taught in elementary schools. Instead this was a deliberate and canny media strategy led by Chris Rufo to create a moral panic around anti-racist education, now spearheaded by James Lindsay who performs as though he is in some kind of evil debating society citing a laundry list of titles around CRT in education without stopping to breathe. Framing them is ignorant permits Lindsay to perform this competence like a podcast on 1.5 speed. It ignores both the work done to create this panic, and more importantly, the work this panic is doing (in this instance, making a case to cut school budgets).

A second implication is to see when the mainstream media repeats or amplifies far right narratives. Even in an era of Brietbart and Qanon, scholars should continue the critique of mainstream and legacy media when they mainstream the far-right and call out these ideas when they get normalized. Wodak and
others show how media is a normalizing and mainstreaming force; we might look closely at the different ways in which this is accomplished in the current moment. Sometimes it is through restricting a vision of the far right to skinheads, others by overly sympathetic interviews, as in the recent portrayal of Lauren Southern in the *Atlantic*.\(^{18}\). Much coverage of the tradwives plays into the right own narrative of representing atavistic tradition through postwar gender roles, as in the article “What is a tradwife, a wholesome 1950’s housewife or a white supremacist?”\(^{19}\). The answer of course is a white supremacist in an apron. This coverage erases the racism of the anti-feminism of the movement, calling it “wholesome” which is, in fact, the exact word these white supremacist women use to describe a pure white wife. Opposing this housewife to the white supremacist erases the racism of these postwar gender roles, and plays into the far right’s traditionalist fantasies.

Media should become more informed by scholarship of the right; there are some excellent examples of this such as the New Yorker’s work on Rufo or reporting on Unicorn Riot’s expose of Nazi hipsters in New York City. This might involve making space for scholars of the far-right to publish on the topic in public facing areas; the Center for Analysis of the Radical Right for example asks scholars to publish short articles on right wing movements or media. Universities, also, might make space for researchers to publish engaged and engaging work, share their work on social media, or work collaboratively with artists, reporters, and teachers.

**Teaching**

In addition to media, we need to pay more attention to far right ideas in schools. A recent study done by University College London\(^ {20}\) shows conspiracy theories growing in schools, something confirmed by my own experiences teaching and seeing an increasing use of far right media by students. The report shows that teachers lack the knowledge to teach or discuss extremist ideas, and that this is compounded existing difficulties in discussing race and other sensitive topics. This challenge is further exacerbated by both increasing pressures from neoliberal education and patriotism in the curriculum. Students are asked to learn to reject extremists when at the same time the mainstream remains nationalist and capitalist.

Approaches to teaching about the far-right often focus on fact checking or on countering violent extremism/radicalization approaches, which may work with conspiracies or skinheads but are much less effective with pastel-Q or sexy instagram influencers. Discourses on this often focus on metaphors of protection and cure (Tebaldi & Nygreen 2021), the idea of keeping children safe from dangerous ideas.

\(^{18}\) [https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/10/alt-right-star-racist-propagandist-has-no-regrets/616725/](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/10/alt-right-star-racist-propagandist-has-no-regrets/616725/)

\(^{19}\) [https://screenshot-media.com/visual-cultures/toxic-masculinity/what-is-a-tradwife/](https://screenshot-media.com/visual-cultures/toxic-masculinity/what-is-a-tradwife/)

These medical metaphors have only increased with the pandemic with where professor Karen Douglas speaks about the idea of inoculation against misinformation in the “infodemic” (Harnsin 2020). While it is important to understand and prevent racist ideas or bad science from becoming fact, these erase the social facts which make these beliefs stick.

Instead, as Nygreen and I argue we need to use the same critical reflexive methods we use in research in our teaching. We show how right wing discourses have borrowed the language of criticality and speaking truth to power, and argue that the response is not to return to liberal fact checks and endorsing the New York Times, but is instead to double down on critical pedagogy and cultural politics. We have new challenges for teaching, but at the same time have renewed interest in questions from cultural politics of education: what is true, who decides, what is legitimate knowledge and what are real values? This is an opportunity to do really deep learning and critical pedagogy, countering its shallow uptake by the right. We argue that this begins by being honest and building with students, more like the way right wing influencers can build metapolitical intimacy.

We may also look at right wing media to ask how the left can offer a compelling alternative within and beyond schooling. We can’t just have fact checking games and high stakes tests, neoliberal multiculturalism and college loans. We might build on existing media alternatives, from hot communist cam girls and twitter anarchists, to socialist jello shot giveaways and reading groups, building on and offline networks of multiple forms of leftist alt-education. We must also network, connect, and build on these threads, coming up with our own new meaning, countering this nostalgic nationalism as fake rebellion and imagining and new forms of personhood. Lesson one: Liberals are annoying, but that doesn't make conservatives punk rock. Nazis aren’t sexy, bring on the hot anarchists and the socialist himbos.
Endnotes: Videos Referenced in Text

Ayla WWAP

- Feminism - My History With It and My Rejection of It
- All People Want To Preserve Their Cultures, Interview with Susanna

Blonde in the Belly

- My Red Pill Journey
- Living in Libtard USA
- Skipped in School #1 | The Holodomor (pt 1)
- Skipped in School #2 | The Holodomor (pt 2)
- Skipped in School #3 | Identifying a Good Source & Testing for Causation

Lacey Lynn

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmNeG8EnRfw

Prager U

- Why God Is a He

RED ICE

- Excerpt from Red Ice Radio  John Taylor Gatto  The School System
Appendix 1: tables of observations and data collected

Digital Interactive Data Collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey 1 - Conservative Public School Teachers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Questions about discrimination against conservative teachers, conservative teaching, gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2 - Louisiana Homeschool Teachers</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Questions about the reasons for homeschooling, gender and teaching, curriculum, and issues with public schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delphine</td>
<td>Public and Homeschool</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Blended Classical Conversations</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Blended Classical Conversations</td>
<td>California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Blended CC</td>
<td>California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Blended CC</td>
<td>California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bob Jones</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Tea party member)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Online High School</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor Johnson</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnolia</td>
<td>Blended Logos Academy</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belle</td>
<td>Blended Logos academy</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Digital Data Collected.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instagram Posts</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>Hashtags: #trad, #traditionally feminine, #surrendered wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook group posts and replies</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>All facebook posts plus videos connected to groups and comments on those</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Other media types:          |       | Blog posts: 25
|                             |       | Videos: 50 + first 200 comments
|                             |       | Tweets: #white genocide, #tradwife, #tradlife up to 3,000                    |

Total Videos, posts, tweets, websites and replies: 8,760

Observations of Conservative Spaces in New Orleans and Suburbs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Highlighted Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metairie Downtown</td>
<td>Observe highly conservative suburb</td>
<td>Anti-abortion billboards chain restaurants, long texts to friends describing what hell it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metairie Border</td>
<td>Observe how conservative suburb is divided off from city</td>
<td>near-Impossible to walk, access blocked by country club and private drives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deutsches Haus</td>
<td>Visit German heritage center that had hosted a far right group</td>
<td>Interviewed the head of the organization. Interviewed an aging southern belle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea Party Christmas Party</td>
<td>Discover conservative group ideals and practices.</td>
<td>Extended talk with parents about education, homeschooling. Video of people singing the constitution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea Party Political Meeting</td>
<td>Discover conservative group ideals and practices.</td>
<td>Conservative reactions to me in a Bernie shirt. Limits of my Ethnographic Calm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Mass</td>
<td>Familiarize myself with a church service.</td>
<td>Emphasis on womanhood/Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin, Conservative Catholic Mass</td>
<td>Discover conservative catholic services, as these are a growing segment of the far right.</td>
<td>Women in veils, emphasis on womanhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist Church</td>
<td>Familiarize myself with protestant service.</td>
<td>Discourse patterns, indie rock band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Observation Details</td>
<td>Discussion Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist Church 2 - new member orientation</td>
<td>Discover conservative church recruitment techniques.</td>
<td>Interview with pastor. Also they prayed for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protests against Southern Decadence</td>
<td>Observe anti-LGBT protesters</td>
<td>Signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confederacy Museum</td>
<td>Observe pro-confederate educational space.</td>
<td>Museum gift shop data. Visitor observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War Two Museum</td>
<td>Observe nationalist educational space.</td>
<td>Discourse on signs. Discussion with guides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantation Tour</td>
<td>Observe pro-confederate educational space.</td>
<td>Discourse on tours. Discussion with guide and other tour participants. VALENTINES DAY DINNER AT THE PLANTATION.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken Down Monument Tour</td>
<td>Watch empty confederate monuments at sunset</td>
<td>Confederate monuments at central, dominating locations in city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross City Walk</td>
<td>Observe racial and class boundaries in New Orleans</td>
<td>The “golden triangle” of wealthy white conservatives in uptown vs the 9th ward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Schools Walk</td>
<td>Observe private school density, building quality relative to neighborhoods</td>
<td>White areas have very large concentrations of private schools, often with big banners proclaiming their excellence in academic or extracurriculars, including student photos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Observation/Activity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSU game w. Trump Visit</td>
<td>Observe reactions to Trump</td>
<td>Trump is very popular with LSU fans. LSU fans visiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenner visit</td>
<td>Observe highly conservative suburb</td>
<td>Visited a bar talked to multiple people about conservative politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metairie Bar visit</td>
<td>Visit bar frequented by right wing folks</td>
<td>Talked to a guy about history of segregation in NOLA and his own experience going to private school after desegregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Day</td>
<td>Visit white cultural event</td>
<td>Did not make friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Interview and survey questions

1. Sample Interview Questions

1. Tell me about a homeschooling day for you
2. What books do you use to teach (English, Politics, History, Reading)
3. What do you think of the BLM protests?
4. Why did you choose to homeschool?
5. Do you think boys and girls learn differently?
6. Do you think women are better teachers than men?
7. What is the same between being a mother and a teacher?
8. What do you see are the problems with public schools?
9. Could you tell me if, and why, you supported Donald Trump?
10. Would you mind telling me about your politics, do you identify as conservative?

2. Sample Survey
Teacher Interview First

Conservative voices are underrepresented in public education, and I am very interested in hearing more about you and your perspective on teaching.

All of this information is totally confidential, all responses are anonymous. No schools will be contacted, and the data is only used for academic research.

* Required

1. Email *

2. First, how do you define yourself politically?

3. Mark only one oval.
   - Public
   - Private Catholic
   - Private Christian (non Catholic)
   - Homeschool
   - Charter
   - Other

4. In what region do you teach
   Mark only one oval.
   - Not the South
   - South
5. What are the differences between Conservative and Liberal teachers? How does being conservative support your teaching?

6. What would you like to have as the ideal conservative curriculum? Do you use any conservative books, videos, news, or digital media in your classes?

7. Have you ever felt stigmatized in a school because of your conservative beliefs? Do you think that schools are biased against conservative, Christian, or white students and culture?

8. How have schools changed since you were a student? Since you began teaching?

9. Do you think women are natural teachers? What about being a woman makes you a good teacher?

10. Please share anything else you think I have missed about being a conservative teacher!

11. If you are willing to talk further, please let me know the best way to contact you for more information about my research.

---

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.
References


Cole, M. (2018). *Trump, the Alt-right and Public Pedagogies of Hate and for Fascism: What is to be Done?*. Routledge.


Hunter, J. D. (1992). *Culture wars: The struggle to control the family, art, education, law, and politics in America*. Avalon


