

Down the Rabbit Hole: Radicalisation and the Online Right

Wed, 9/2 10:47AM • 1:47:12

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

caleb, cindy, alt, anon, figures, gamergate, people, algorithm, community, called, radicalization, ideas, ian, mainstream, ideology, discourse, videos, radicalized, started, move

SPEAKERS

Caleb Cain, Cindy Ma, Ian Danskin, Ruairidh

Ruairidh 17:43

All right, that seems like an appropriate time to get started right as the as the song finishes, so, hello everybody and welcome to what I would be calling the first official event of TWT the opening launch yesterday, did not count. This is the actual first, or at least it's very close. It's the first panel discussion of the event. So, welcome to down the rabbit hole radicalization and the real opening set exactly thanks Sam radicalization and the online right My name is Rory and I'm very excited to be chairing this event tonight. I have a couple quick announcements to make, before we get properly started. The first one is just general rules of engagement we want everyone to feel welcome in these spaces and for everyone's voice to be heard. Please bear that in mind when engaging in the chat or comment boxes during the session, try not to use inappropriate rude or unkind language, and please do not spam. We have a wonderful tech volunteer, called Robin who's helping us out tonight. If you do any of those things. He may put you back in the waiting room, or worse. The second thing is, in this session we're going to be using a live transcription service called otter. So, if you would rather follow along the discussions tonight, using the transcription service. Hopefully Robin will be posting a link to that in the chat, there it is right there. And we'll keep posting that throughout the night as people kind of keep joining us but yeah if you'd rather follow through the transcription, then just click on that link there. And finally, TWT is free for all we aren't forcing people to pay for tickets, but it is only made possible by the contributions of our supporters if you are able please please please consider supporting us by heading to the world transformed.org, forward slash support, and that way you'll be helping us sustain our work all year round and I will do a couple more plugs and hopefully there'll be a link for that in the chat as well so keep an eye out for that. So tonight, I had a couple of things just to quickly say, so we're going to be using possibly a lot of terms and names, either of individuals who may be associated with the alt right or the far right, or perhaps like kind of internet culture-y words that you might not be familiar with. So what I would really recommend everybody does is just, if someone says something if one of our speakers or if I say something or someone in the chat mentioned something that you don't quite understand, make sure you ask in the chat, I'm sure there will be loads of people involved in this call tonight who will be able to tell you what exactly GamerGate was or who Pewdiepie is or whatever it is

and Exactly, yes, Caleb will also be in the chat there'll be a cut hopefully the speakers can kind of help out with that as well. And then finally, so I wanted to just include a bit of a content warning, we are definitely going to be talking about some potentially uncomfortable or upsetting things tonight. That might include things like mass mass shootings abuse, harassment, racism, sexism, transphobia, fascism and violence. If at any point, as we're doing that something is said that maybe makes you feel a bit upset, or you're finding a bit overwhelming I would definitely encourage you to maybe take a step back from your laptop maybe pull out your headphones and stop listening for a little bit. It's all going to be transcribed anyway so you'll be able to come back on it later on. And without further ado, let's, let's get started. So, on March 15, 2019 a 28 year old Australian man screams subscribe to pewdiepie, pewdiepie before murdering 50 people in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Before leaving his house that morning he published a 74 page manifesto entitled, 'The Great replacement' referencing a whole string of far right and alt right ideas, largely found online in kind of edge lord discord channels message boards and within the videos of alt right personalities. Over the years we've seen a number of alt right related or far right related terror attacks perpetrated by mostly young, almost always white men in places like El Paso, or Pittsburgh, or tragically most recently in Kenosha, where a 15 year old blue Lives Matter activists traveled across state lines, ended up murdering two BLM protesters. So clearly, something is happening online, that is increasingly having dramatic and often violent consequences in the real world. Over the past 10 years we've witnessed the emergence of far right and so called alt right personalities like Paul Joseph Watson, Lauren Southern or Stephen Molyneux. Popularizing repackaged white nationalist white supremacist, or outright Nazi ideas. Simultaneously, communities in online spaces that were once places to create and share memes about cats, celebrate the fandom for movies, video games have turned into breeding grounds for the far right, where they aim to basically radicalize. Again, most of the young largely white fan bases. Well there's nothing new about these ideas, its success in reaching a wider audience and sustaining itself in light of repeated acts of white supremacist terrorism and its influence on real world events, most notably with the election of Donald Trump is a break from the normal life cycles of far right groups and presents a unique challenge to those of us on the left. In recent years, most of the mainstream media has pointed the finger of blame at platforms like YouTube or social media, accusing them of designing the perfect pipeline for far right radicalization through a mixture of their business models that reward provocative content creators and an algorithm designed to keep users glued to their screens. But tonight we're going to be discussing whether or not that is really all that is going on. What changes have actually happened in online communities and spaces in the last few years, how have far right ideas and talking points permeated so much of the Internet, and how exactly have tech savvy right wing extremists, and a powerful algorithm created the world's greatest tool for radicalization, and most importantly, what can we do about it. To answer those questions, I'm very excited to be joined by Cindy Ma, a doctoral candidate at the Oxford Institute and Trudeau scholar, doing research on right wing discourse, irony and race on YouTube hopefully you can all see her, maybe give a wave Cindy. Ian Danskin, a video essayist, media artist and creator of the YouTube channel innuendo studios, his flagship series is the alt right playbook and ongoing dissection and deconstruction of the rhetorical and political tactics, the far right uses to legitimize itself and gain power. He also makes videos about games, film, art and web culture from a pinko social justice warrior perspective. And finally, Caleb Cain, a former sympathizer to the alt right, who was radicalized through hours of YouTube content. Upset and ashamed after the Christchurch shooting, Caleb began a project to help us escape the far right outside of his YouTube channel Caleb works as a researcher at the American University under a social science lab called P.E.R.I.L, which

stands for polarization extremism research and innovation lab there Caleb helps to understand and produce strategies to combat and disrupt anti democratic and disinformation campaigns and movements. Thank you all so much for joining us tonight. We're going to just go straight into it so I was hoping that we could begin by hearing from Cindy, and specifically kind of having you walk us through, maybe some of the key events and players that we're talking about when we're discussing radicalization and the online right, as well as trying to help us understand some of the maybe key conceptual frameworks that are prominent within these spaces. So what are some of the key moments for you to understand how much of this is new. And how has the internet perhaps changed, what's been going on so hopefully we can hear you Cindy. Can you hear.

Cindy Ma 25:35

Hi, can you hear me.

Ruairidh 25:36

Yes, that's perfect.

Cindy Ma 25:39

Great. Firstly, thank you very much to Rory, and TWT for inviting me to speak on this panel, and my research as Rory summarized isn't on the alt right per se but rather a network of YouTube personalities that have sometimes been called alt light. So, these are channels that complicate the mainstream extreme dichotomy and highlights for us how porous the boundary between those two, those two poles can be. And I have a particular interest in discourses of white victimhood and the role of irony and humor in disseminating white supremacist ideology online. And, as a caveat my own research looks predominantly at American and Canadian politics so my apologies for the North American focus of my portion. So, in the briefing that Rory gave me he asked me to look back historically over the last 10 years. But I will take the liberty of going back a little bit further because I think it pays to have a longer view of history, and when we talk about these movements and to make sure that we're grounding it in events, not just the last 10 years, the last 50, 60, 70 years so one book that I found really helpful recently is called the 'Politics of Losing' by McVeigh and Estep. And in that book they essentially argue that white supremacist ideologies. Although, always present in societies like America and Canada, which are settler colonial nations from their founding. These societies have received moments of resurgence and revival of white supremacist ideologies when racialized and oppressed groups win rights or see their power grow within that society. So for example, there was a significant surge of the KKK following the Civil War and the dismantling of the slavery economy. There was another surge in the 1920s as black folks left to the American South for Northern industrial cities and women enter the labor force. And then another surge in the 1960s in the midst of the civil rights movement and the legal kind of dismantling of Jim Crow segregation. So, these historical patterns help us to better understand our current moment say the last 10 to 15 years where we've seen major economic disruption and upheaval, but also moments of representational progress like the election of the first black president. And I see the alt right as a continuation of a decade's long pro white movement that's reacting to the black freedom struggle of the 1960s in the 1970s in the United States and Canada and in the UK. So, during this time, there was a loss of respectability around overt white supremacy, which meant that one wing of the white supremacist movement went underground became more violent and more militant, while another wing sought to reframe white supremacist ideology within the bounds of mainstream post

1960s civil rights discourse. So, this re articulation of white identity politics meant a shifting towards pro white discourse and away from anti black or anti Hispanic political ideology, so focusing on kind of positive cultural values. Another element of this new white supremacist discourse, was an emphasis on victimhood so appropriating the language of civil rights to advance the opposite goals of the civil rights movement itself. So one important example of this strategy was David Duke who was the Grand Wizard of the KKK in the 1970s. And he went on to serve in the Louisiana House of Representatives in the late 1980s so he was an extreme white supremacist figure who then entered the kind of political mainstream, at least in electoral politics. So he made arguments, like white people don't get to show pride in their culture, white people don't have organizations and politicians that advocate for them, the very future of the white race is under threat. And these sorts of claims were being made as early as the 1960s but they continue to be made by alt-right groups, and alt-right figures today. So, turning now more to today's far right movements, the alt right was born out of the so called paleo conservative movement and founded by right wing figures like Paul Gottfried who rejected mainstream kind of Republican neoconservative policies in favor of an identity based pro white vision of American conservatism. And a lot of right wing figures, embrace that that impulse as well. So in the late 2000s we saw Andrew Breitbart launch Breitbart News with the mission of tying conservative politics to cultural issues, and identitarian, politics, Richard Spencer launched alternative right .com in 2010. The rebel media in Canada launched in 2015. And they're perhaps best known for raising the profiles of far right figures like Faith Goldie, Lauren Southern, Gavin McInnes, all of whom got their starts in the public eye as commentators for the Rebel. And all of these groups represent just the most recent iteration of white racial resentment, and they usually also espouse misogynist ideology, as well. So, I've highlighted some of the continuities but I know we're here to discuss digital politics. And so, there are also disruptions tied to technology and our current cultural moment, which are, which are significant. So, one professor who I admire her name is Jesse Daniel she works out of CUNY in New York she's observed that white nationalists are what she calls innovation opportunists, which means, because of their need to be covert, they're often early adopters of technologies, we saw this with podcasts, with web blogs and now with social media platforms and image sharing boards like 4chan and messaging apps. So, while these groups have been online for a long time, I think, one moment that Rory has already mentioned 'GamerGate' kind of stands out in that it provided a model for a coordinated networked harassment campaign of in that case women in the video games industry so GamerGate was happening around 2014. And this moment also represented a key instance of backlash to political correctness and what was then called social justice warriors, and we might hear terms like call out culture or cancel culture today. But many far right personalities like Milo Yiannopoulos, who is British rode the wave of GamerGate to prominence and then made a career out of warring against you know social justice warriors and progressive movements. And that's a mode of discourse we continue to see a lot in right wing and far right spaces these sort of ritualistic roasting of progressive figures often accompanied by networked harassment campaigns. So that's, that's one one disruption that I think is worth noting. Secondly, we've also seen that social media has created platforms that support cultures of micro celebrity. So, for instance, a YouTube personality is able to cultivate a sense of authenticity. By sowing distrust in mainstream media outlets, claiming to show their viewers, an unfiltered version of the truth that is being denied to them by the mainstream media. And that kind of positioning can be very destabilizing to people's worldviews. And these micro celebrities also exist within networked communities. So a more mainstream figure might bring on to their YouTube show or their talk show a white nationalist, thereby introducing more extreme ideas to their kind of more mainstream viewers.

And that network structure can be a dimension of radicalization. And in addition, because these channels cultivate this intimacy and authenticity, they can be very persuasive and very addictive, meaning a lot of people spend lots of time on these channels, and then that causes these videos to be algorithmically amplified because the platform see that they are very engaging for users. So, those kinds of affordances of tech platforms, allow new ways for people to be radicalized. And then the final thing I'll note is something I'm interested in my own work which is the simultaneous kind of invocation and then immediate disavowal of white supremacist ideas through the logic of trolling so for instance, a figure like PewDiePie might hint at white supremacist ideas. They might say white supremacist slogans but then immediately disavow the ideologies. Using the logic of, I was only joking, I'm only doing this to troll mainstream users who don't understand my sense of humor. And that is a tone that can be really challenging for those of us who are aiming to understand and combat the persuasiveness of right wing figures of far right figures. So just to end. I want to emphasize that, right now we live in a moment where mainstream political figures are designating Black Lives Matter, as a terrorist organization. So the mainstream, extreme dichotomy is becoming increasingly untenable. And we need to take seriously the fact that white supremacy doesn't only exist on, you know I hear terms like the fringes of the internet or the, the dark corners of the internet but it's rather diffused and embedded in mainstream politics, and I think that's a helpful perspective to take moving forward.

Ruairidh 36:35

Thank you very much, Cindy. And yes, absolutely. I think you're right it doesn't really work, we only look at 10 years and I think I'm just on the David Duke as well there's a. It's not a great podcast actually so I don't know why I'm plugging it, but Slow Burn have done a good podcast on David and it is quite good listening, if only because all the stuff that David did you're kind of listening to it you just think, oh shit this is exactly the same like he says all the same stuff and it's interviews with him from, you know, 20, 30 years ago. So absolutely, so I want to kind of move on to Ian now. I think you'd actually, what Cindy was saying there I think picks up quite nicely with a lot of the content that you do obviously with the, with the alt right playbook. I think particularly these kind of different forms of disruption that Cindy was outlining, but I was hoping that you could maybe go into a bit more detail about kind of the ins and outs of what is actually happening online and maybe just starting with, where is actually happening I think Cindy kind of spoke about it, but giving us a sense of where it's happening. And then what are the actual kind of things that are going on.

Ian Danskin 37:35

Yeah, I mean, I'm also Hi, I had to make a note during that last talk to read everything Cindy has ever written because it seems so relevant to my work. But like honestly, if we're talking about a nexus of like far right radicalization and then acknowledging that that diffuses out into the rest of the internet, where it begins is kind of anywhere. Common entry points are like social media, YouTube fan communities and fan forums. But we often see that like any place that they can get a foothold there's often going to be a slow funneling to some of the more extreme locations. Some more extreme places, can be kind of a moving target, like for a long time it was 4chan, and then certain boards on 4chan got shut down so people move to 8 Chan, then 8 chan so many literally like three different mass shootings got orchestrated by 8 chan-ers and like they posted their manifestos on 8 chan and you mentioned the Christchurch shooter there's like two others as well. And so then 8 chan hosters shut it down. So then they move to. They make like a private like dark web hub that you have to manually log into so that it

can't be shut down from outside. What we see is that with each one of these things they get more obscure but they also tend to get more distilled. So like 4 chan was like kind of this big like nebulous there's all these different parts of it and for a long time it was like yeah there was edginess but the, the actual radical politics were like a slow evolution. Whereas, when a lot of those people moved to 8 chan. The parts they take with them are just the most extreme parts. So there's suddenly this big deposit on 8 chan of like all the most extreme people the people who were too extreme for 4chan which was already the place for like people too extreme for Twitter. Right. And so then when they get booted off 8 chan it's only the most extreme of them that go to these dark web places. So you see this steady gradient of like the more mainstream it is the more diffuse it is, but also the more broad and more public it is. And so like a lot of those places will be like, some of them just set up discord servers, some of them set up IRC channels. Some of them are like they end up on the daily Stormer or Stormfront, various chan boards, like the right stuff like it goes on and on and on, but it's pretty much any community that has a large primarily sis white men population. People can often be off by like one maybe two, but the more privilege you have, the more likely they are to target you and infiltration is a common way like they will find the community where they say this has the kind of people we want to reach, we're going to try to get footholds in that community, or they will create a community like they'll say oh here's a public figure that the kinds of people we're trying to reach are into. Let's see if we can reach his audience. It's usually a him. Or maybe that person is in fact a fellow traveler and we can just join that community and that community itself will become what it is we're trying to create. And this distributed nature makes it very hard to police, it makes it very hard to know who actually is doing it on purpose and who is just kind of like a useful tool. And one of the things you can have to get your head around with this stuff is that distinction matters but not as much as we think like who's doing it sincerely who's doing it unwittingly who's doing it, ironically, they're all still doing it and they're all still contributing to this larger structure, and sometimes you have to look at the structure and not really look at the intentions behind it.

Ruairidh 41:17

Thank you and just maybe just kind of following on from that as well like can we talk, could you maybe go into a bit more, just about your because obviously your videos if anyone hasn't seen them you should definitely check them out innuendo studios, the alt right playbook. I mean you talk about a lot of different kind of, I guess factors or things that the alt right are doing, specifically I guess on YouTube so you kind of mentioned there like the infiltration of various different communities and I think you know there's some really great stuff out there that's been done, particularly on like what's called the PewDiePie pipeline, and how his community has kind of over time, created a bit of a backwards and forwards and I think Cindy you might have been touched on some of that as well. But is there other stuff that I guess we should maybe be aware of when when we're thinking about like what the far right is actually doing online like if you had to pick like I don't know the top three things that you think people should know about or, because I know there's a lot of stuff I mean you've done like 16 videos on it.

Ian Danskin 42:11

Um, I mean I guess like the core thing, I, I figure like when I was making notes for this was like I guess this is sort of the core thing I want people to take away is that they're kind of reaching people the same way that like we as leftists are trying to reach people like they find a person who is in some way suffering under the modern world. And they first give them an explanation for why they are suffering. They give them some narratives for where that suffering comes from and who and what causes it, and

then they give them sometimes very gentle and occasionally more expressly direct nudges in the direction of doing something about it. And in a lot of ways like they actually do copy a lot of tactics from the left like for one, at the very least liberal discourse is more socially acceptable than like radical conservative discourse so they tend like Cindy was saying they tend to cloak in our rhetoric. You know, you get things like white power movements are very directly modeled as like an appropriation of black power. But with this, like, grosser tinge to it. And that feeling of like, hey, a lot of people in the modern world they're, they're suffering under economic distress they're suffering under social unrest they're suffering under like weak job markets, a changing landscape like a term that I came up. I came across recently as anomie, which is the sense of like your future kind of not existing the way you thought it would anymore. A lot of us, especially those of us who grew up in the 90s like during a period of relative economic stability especially here in the States. We had this idea like the whole Gen X like ennui was about, oh there's this map that we have for what the future is supposed to be you're gonna grow up in the suburbs, you're gonna go to college, you're going to get a job, and a lot of the anxiety Gen X had was oh do I even want that. But now we're having this generation of like millennials and Generation Z who were like, We don't even have that map anymore We don't really know what the future is supposed to be for us we don't know what our place is in it anymore, and especially with like a lot of social justice language coming out with like white people don't know what the place is of whiteness in the world anymore because whiteness is getting deconstructed, and a lot of other races are getting valorized in the process but whiteness isn't and part of that is because whiteness was constructed in such a way that that valorization kind of can't happen. And similar with like gender like we're deconstructing gender well, so much of the male identity is around there is this map of what a man is supposed to be. And as we deconstruct that like there's healthy ways to go about living in that you know oh I get to draw my own map, but for a lot of people they just want someone to give them a map again. And that sense of like, I don't know who I'm supposed to be in a rapidly changing world. Yes we can reach those people and give them a better story and direct them in a good way, but they're also incredibly vulnerable to people who are going to say, you know, like the Harry Potter explanation for any plot hole is a wizard did it like the fire rights explanation is the Jews did it, and they can give that narrative to almost any anxiety you have, and usually whatever pipeline you're in. That's going to be the terminal direction.

Ruairidh 45:25

So just just very quickly then before we move on to Caleb that was that was gonna be the last thing I was gonna ask is, what is the pipeline like what you know I'm falling down the rabbit hole, what are the kind of shelves that I see on the way down like where are the bus stops so I don't know this metaphor has gotten beyond me but what are the sort of things that are going to be because you said at the start the entry points are very different. But obviously some of your videos you do talk about you know that there are some things that sort of say the same and there's kind of a logic to it. Could you tell us a little bit about that and then that will take us quite nicely into Caleb.

Ian Danskin 45:56

Yeah. One of my more, I guess it's not that recent anymore because the pandemic sucked up so much time. But, um, one of my more recent outright playbook episodes is called How to radicalize an army where I broke it down into about five stages, which was actually somewhat modeled on there these studies into how ISIS recruits online and other like radical like actual terrorist groups. And I found that like the structure is fairly similar so it tends to begin with, finding an audience that they think is going to

be susceptible to their rhetoric, and then either infiltrating that audience's community or creating a community that audience is likely to stumble into, and that community is going to be the most. To use the terminology they would use their power level is most hidden. So, they're going to be cloaking the radical rhetoric in the most acceptable language, they're going to use the most irony on that level. They're going to make it seem like they're only saying these radical things to provoke a response or to upset liberals, but it's always curiously the liberals they want to upset they never want to upset the conservatives. And then, once they've sort of established this community. It's about slowly isolating them from their other communities alienating them from the left ridiculing the left insulting people who express any even remotely left of center view, and it becomes this very like self-policing community but in this very unofficial an ad hoc kind of way. And it's important to recognize that like really what these people are looking for is community, like what they want is oh here's people who share my anxieties they share my pain and this community feeds a sort of emotional need that I have. And these politics are slowly adopted kind of as the price of admission. Like, they're just there for the people and that's why the people put like community first and politics are sort of undergirded underneath that. But as they get deeper and deeper into it and that community overtakes more and more of their life you enter into this fourth stage of more explicit radicalization, where a lot of the irony slowly starts to shear off a lot of the very sincere anger gets more explicit they start to move further past to the outer layers of like, you know, they're gonna move past the alt light figureheads into more expressly alt right figureheads. So you're gonna move past Milo Yiannopoulos and maybe start heading to actual like Richard Spencer, Stephen Molyneux, and then you're more likely to get on the more out there boards, the more secretive boards, the ones that are harder for the public to scrutinize. And then yeah, the fifth stage. In theory is giving them something actionable to do, and that's the one that's kind of like nebulous right now like there's been a few instances of an act like attempting to organize something the unite the right rally in Charlottesville was kind of like this attempt to say okay we've got all these different groups, you've got all these different forms all these different people, can we bring them together into an actual proper public mainstream movement and everything that happened in Charlottesville was so egregious that the public was like no they resoundingly, well not resoundingly but they at least softly rejected it. And they realize like okay we can't form this public movement like we want to. So they kind of go back to being underground and getting stuck in that stage four of like we keep radicalizing people we don't have anything to push them towards. So you see a lot more vigilante action you see a lot more people saying well I'm going to take things into my own hands then they'll see a lot more factionalism like groups are sort of turning on each other a bit more. So it's harder to unite them into one solid movement. I mean before Charlottesville there was just get Trump elected like that was the big thing, but they have an all united under necessarily getting him reelected now there's disagreement between them on whether or not Trump has sold them out, and who they want to support and who they want to mess with so everything's in kind of disarray right now, which, in a way, can be comforting and in other ways can be really terrifying it's like, oh, the last thing you want with this huge group of incredibly radicalized and often militant people is for there to be a big power vacuum. So it's, it's scary to think like what stage five is going to be when someone learns how to unite them again.

Ruairidh 50:17

Thank you very much. That's, that's really helpful that definitely kind of situates it quite nicely. So that takes us over to Caleb and I'm actually just over the moon that Caleb was able to join us tonight. Because, Caleb, I think, really brings in like quite a unique element to this in that Caleb has actually

experienced some of what both Cindy and Ian have been talking about. So maybe just beginning almost kind of where you left off there in terms of that, that sort of experience that journey Caleb. Would you be able to kind of tell us a bit about like how you actually experienced that I guess kind of where did it begin for you. What sorts of things were you watching over time as well what brought you back out all that stuff, and then kind of maybe looking at some of the other questions that we've discussed afterwards. Oh,

Ian Danskin 51:09

yeah, I'm still on mic and Caleb was muted.

Ruairidh 51:11

There we go. All right, thank you.

Caleb 51:13

Um, first of all, I just want to say. Great job here, you know your shit, also Cindy, first of all, I love your jacket and also I want to bring you next time I do talks like this because you perfectly articulated some things, particularly like the watering down of the ideology, a couple other things which I should have written down but thank you for that. So, okay, I procrastinated so I didn't exactly prepare, so I'm just going to go through my story a little bit, and then I'll I got some other points I want to bring up to you guys, sort of like, what's going on what currently is going on in the far right. And then what I worry about for the future. So first of all, just my quick personal experience, I'm not going to tell the whole story but basically I grew up in West Virginia. Bad family relationships, not a lot of opportunity, had a lot of potential didn't do anything in high school, tried to go to college, dropped out, ended up back at home, depressed, broken down I felt like I didn't meet my potential, and a whole bunch of stuff. And so, yeah, I mean I spent went to YouTube and spent all my time online, watching YouTube but it was to try to fix myself, and eventually I found Stefan Molyneux, who is a Canadian alt light youtuber although the man is a white nationalist he's not all light, he's a fascist he's a NEO not well not, maybe not a neo nazi but he is a fascist. And I started watching his content, it was the self help content at first that I was first finding and then eventually he started injecting his red pilling or his you know social commentary on feminism, Islam, all sorts of things. I got into all that because I wanted to fix my depression and I saw someone who told me that they could do it, who they told me that they'd went to therapy. They told me that they had this wonderful life they had a kid, they had a wife, they had a home, and they had this career where they were running this podcast and to me like their life was perfect. It was like the best life that someone could imagine, and I thought well if I just do everything that Steph does if I do what he's telling me, just like Ian said if I follow the map that he's giving me. Then I'll be good. And what was wonderful about Steph, and all that stuff on the far right because it was the first time in my life that I got a map. I was like oh my god like and I grew up without, you know, not a lot of guidance for my family so I was like oh my god finally like I know what to do, like, I'll just follow these steps and then everything will work out. And I did that for a really long time and I repressed a lot of myself a lot of my identity. Nothing like, you know, nothing like as major as like a religion or sexuality or anything like that but like I was not a traditional conservative. I was not a person that enjoyed the super constricted lifestyle. And I was just doing it cuz I thought you had to do it. I thought you had to live that way I thought you had to believe all those things and I thought that that was the objective truth of the world, and I thought you know and there was a lot of times, whenever I would hear ideas like whenever I would think about

Muslims coming, you know, the mass immigration 2015 for example I would think about like, oh my god we have to we can't let these people in like there's too many of them and they'll just, you know, they'll, they'll flood in and they'll shift the culture and then bad actors will take advantage, and then we'll be screwed. And I don't want anything bad to happen to these people but we have to protect our country. And you know I had the same feeling about the southern border. The race realism stuff, it would bother me, I'd be like, you know, this is unfair This is awful like these other races they're, they're just inferior. But I thought, but it's true. Like I cannot believe it, it's true it's science and this is what Steff's told me this is what everybody else has told me. Um. Eventually, I found a destiny, Steven banal who is a twitch streamer who did a lot of debates, I watched his channel. He debated with Lauren Southern, and a whole bunch of other far right figures. That was the first crack and what he did was not only did he debate them and show them that they didn't know what they were talking about once they got into a room, but also he would kind of give you a crash course like a sort of a crash course in media literacy, where he would explain to you tactics that people use for persuasion, he would show you like you know for example, show you like how to read an article or how like, you know, when these guys like you know are citing an article they'll read like halfway down the page, or they'll take the whole thing out of context. And I started watching that. Then he did an interview with Natalie when and if you're noticing anything here you're noticing that the algorithm, you know it works, whichever way, there's no particular direction to it, and also make a quick comment on the algorithm is that everyone if you're interested in that if you want to finally read that lay that topic the rest of yourself just go read Becca Lewis's study from data and society, I think it was called alternative influence. And she talks about the algorithmic effect in there, but she also talks about the parasocial effect, and the marketing strategies that these guys used, and you know, the way that Ian describes it like that process. That is how it works and a lot of these guys did that intentionally. And you know as for as much as they I know a lot of you are in the UK for as much as they go on and on about Rotterdam, and Pakistanis they've set up the biggest grooming gang I've ever seen on the internet, and it's just simply radicalizing people so that they can either make money, or push them into an ideology where they can use them. And the thing about white nationalism is in Richard Spencer's kind of learned this, I think, is that you don't win it through electoral-ism, you can't win white nationalism through electoralism because the demographics don't allow it. And so that's why, as Ian said the, the stage of violence occurs because you come to a conclusion that to have the world that you want. You would literally have to murder, like millions of people, maybe billions, like you have to, there's no other way to get that world. And so, you know, I found Natalie through the algorithm, and then I started watching her content, and then I you know found other people's content I found Ian's content, and I started to get put words to the experience that I went through. And so, you know, Time went by, I also was hanging out in Destiny's Discord server talking to a lot of people. And one thing I think helps with deradicalization is exposure. Now that person has to be kind of willing to go through that exposure, but exposure to, you know, I got when I went to Destiny's Discord server, there were trans people in there, there were black people in there, there were Muslims, there are Muslims from Saudi Arabia and Turkey in there, you know like I got to meet people from like all over. And I started talking to them, and there was leftists in there and communists and progressives and liberals and I started to realize that like I had been sold us a bill of false goods that, like, what I was being told, was not correct. And that these people were not what I was being told that they were. And so, I you know I, I was also upset with destiny server though because you know they would do things like right wingers would come into the chat, and they'd all tap him and shit on him and and mock them and and really go after them, and sometimes I would get it like I get it like that fascist came in trolling and then other times

I was like, why didn't you guys just let them hang out and just talk to them, and over time it can change. And I've learned, now that like a whole community shouldn't be asked to do that that should be something that a whole community comes together and decides to do, but I was frustrated nonetheless, and also they would say things like Jordan Peterson's alt right ben shapiro is alt right and so I wanted to make this video I want to make this channel, I wasn't gonna put myself on screen, I was just gonna make a channel to talk about this stuff. And then Christchurch happened. And I read the manifesto I watched the video. And it fucked me up, because everything that guy believed in that manifesto I believed he was just laying it out explicitly I had believed in all these watered down versions of things, and he had just laid it out explicitly just like Ian described in his you know process. And that freaked me out, and I felt horrible and I thought about all the new friends I've made, and I thought about like just everything, and so I sat down for the camera and made a video. And, you know, I went to Twitter and talk to a couple people on Twitter about it. And I guess someone saw it and they shared it, and it blew up overnight and then I got on the front cover the New York Times. So, what I do, then, then I set up a Discord server to try to direct people, and that is nearly impossible. And the thing that I'll give you on that because you guys probably want to know how to reach people. We've had successes in our Discord server, but it's not through some sort of like giving someone factual information and then reprogramming them, that's a myth that doesn't work. I don't believe that works. The people that we've had successes with they've been in there for a really long time and they formed relationships with people. And I noticed things like they've started to shift the way that they talk, they don't use such harsh language anymore because they're always spending time in moderated spaces, they don't feel so eager to insult people anymore because they now they know those people most people will inform them how it upsets them. I'm not gonna say this person's changes person is still a fascist self devout fascist. But we're starting to see. We're starting to see some changes. So I would say that long term relationships and this is why it's better for you to be in this, I think the whole society needs to try to come together and do this and I think we did a really bad job of this for a while. We demonize each other for a really long time. And now it seems kind of silly to demonize you know 1980s conservatives when we're dealing with 2020 fascists. I want to see more of that dialogue with people in their communities. And I know that that's not easy, but that's the first thing that I would say, you got to have energy and patience. You have to understand the issue so you got to be educated on stuff a little bit. You got to be prepared to fail. Don't attack. Don't when you're dealing with someone personally not if you're making some like video or you're making some ad campaign or whatever but if you're dealing with someone personally, then do not mock them and do not attack them. It doesn't mean you can't be harsh on them sometimes but don't mock them attack them, give them love, and always leave the door open to that person. And, and again, be prepared to fail. So, what am I worried about Was I muted the whole time.

Ruairidh 1:01:56

No, you were totally fine until just a couple seconds ago. Yeah, okay.

Ian Danskin 1:01:59

All right, cool. I just trying to get through all this. So, next I'll kind of go a little bit deeper into why I think that people are choosing this stuff. So, you know, Ian talked about identity that's a big part of it you know where he talked he also talked about community, and that's a big part of it. But there's. I, you know, one thing that helped me understand a lot of this stuff was honestly reading like philosophy and

history a little bit, and learning about specifically post modernism, and the effects, the post not post modernism like the Jordan Peterson Neo Marxist blah blah blah but like literally the postmodern condition the things that the postmodern philosophers, were describing were happening because of the, the changing of social conditions, the changing of society, moving and moving from feudalism to capitalism, and the shifting of technology, the growth and expansion of technology and how is this going to affect human beings. And a lot of times we're like frogs in the pot and just boiling, your slow boil and we don't recognize how our society is changing around us rapidly. But I think that the reason, a big, big part of the postmodern condition is that when we moved from feudal societies to capitalism in through the enlightenment. We killed God, we just murdered him, we laid him out on the slammys. And we did it because we were tired of those things but also we were pursuing reason and logic and science. And so that was a natural process that happened. It was not some intention thing that people tried to do, but it happened. And, you know, now kings can't have you know there's no divine right of Kings anymore and there's none of this stuff. And, but also people's meta narrative has broken down, and a meta narrative is a narrative that guides your entire life. It's a, it's like a framework that you live inside of so Christianity would be a meta narrative orthodox Marxism would be a meta narrative fascism would be a meta narrative. People those bases been deconstructed. And then nothing's replaced them, and instead what's replaced them is, I mean just consumerism. I mean look at all your friends, whether they spend their time doing what do they spend their time coping with, if they're not artists and they're creating something they probably just mindlessly consuming things. And so I think that that's had a lot of impact on people. And then, of course, the, the impact of technology. It has networked everyone into a giant hive mind and we do not appreciate the effect that that's had. We are all influencing each other now in this giant network space. And I have a theory personally that this causes a distortion of reality. And I believe in the future one day that there will be social scientists that will quantify this somehow, but there is when people come together, because we work through imagination and story, and that's how we interpret the world, also a big reason why that meta narrative was so important. When people talk and communicates narrative and imagination. And so, information is not going to go one to one, there's gonna be a breakdown y'all know about the telephone game, or you know about drama Mills you know like remember when you were in high school, and someone started a rumor it just spiraled and then people got into this little like false reality where they thought like this whole story. And it almost seemed like a conspiracy against you or against your friend or whoever maybe you were involved in it. I think when people network together and they just, they stop, keeping track of the pure reality, they can go off into alternate realities. And I think that what the internet does is it provides that on a mass scale. It provides that globally. And so now you can see ideology spread out horizontally and just spread out everywhere. My big concern about this is I think about things like Q and R. And I get really worried. Q anon is not like white nationalism, q anon can pull anybody in. And in the background of Q anon is a death call, there's all this occult bullshit in the background of it, but they are literally preparing for a day of the rapture, you know, and I won't go into more detail on it but they're preparing for the day of the Rapture. And they, they minorities join them Jews, Christians most everybody joins into them. There's no, you know, and even the Trump thing it doesn't really even need Trump. So my worry is is sort of like fascist movements that open themselves up, but another concern I had was something like Q anon is Qanon and I think Ian's talked about this a little bit with GamerGate, but q anon has gamified political activism or political engagement, and because q anon is a conspiracy that people believe in, it's a whole false reality, it's, you don't know that you're playing the game. And so you're doing all these things like in Q anon specifically you're collecting clues building puzzle, you know, solving puzzles,

making connections or spreading the content, but you know in the alt right or in GamerGate it was, you know, if we say the wing, if we say that these games that people play have wind conditions the wind condition GamerGate might have been get or media Sarkeesian kicked off of the internet or, depending on who you are, depending on what game you're playing exactly get her to kill herself. And that was gamified, and it was gamified to the social medias and then everybody was networking hive mind, and they all get to spin in their little conspiracy theories because we're all in echo chambers together. This is my big concern for the future, is that ideologies, like right now we have memes, right we have mimetic warfare. My concern is that this is going to get more entrenched, and more sophisticated and the Russians, know how to do this, our own country knows is developing ways to do this. And I know damn well that Steve Bannon has read enough new communication that he knows a bit about this stuff. I'm specifically talking about a thing called an ARG an alternate reality game you can just type an ARG q anon on Twitter, there'll be a thread that you can find I'll try to post it in the chat, but just essentially like I'm concerned. Outside of like a thing like q-anon causing mass destabilization and political violence. I'm worried that it can cause that it can be adapted and used, and then it can be used to basically just completely brainwash people, and just send them into false realities and corporations will use that everybody will use that and that's another big reason I think that it's very important. And I think a big part of this why people feel desperate they don't feel power. I mean when you look at the things that q anon rambles about. It's a lot, a lot of it is true. There are elite people that are very corrupt, that are child molesters that are ruining the world. Now their conspiracy about all these people's connections and, and they focus too much on people and not enough on systems, but they're their fears and concerns and anger is justified to a large degree, a lot more than the white nationalists, but they don't have the correct measures to fix those things. They think that some figure some fascist figurehead like Trump's gonna fix it, or that rooting around on Google is gonna fix it. People are desperate people on the left are desperate people on the right are desperate people in the center and desperate. And I've come to the conclusion. People keep asked me Have you been radicalized. I've come to the conclusion that like we literally need class solidarity, we need community organizing, we need mutual aid, and we need highly targeted general strikes, you know, strike on Christmas and then strike again on tax day, and don't pay your taxes. And that's the peaceful way that we get out of this and if we can get everybody on board with that and then we can turn things around. But if not, like, the people are. They're getting accelerated. And this is the last thing that I want to touch on is this idea of accelerationism and this stuff is being pumped through the system. It's being pumped into left wing circles, it's being pumped into right wing circles, it's being pumped into religious circles, it's being pumped in everywhere this idea that the world is going to end this idea that there needs to be a war that there needs to be a collapse in, you know, for the left it's this idea of the revolution or to the right, it's the day of the rope. But this idea that there's just this coming event. And that we might as well just get ready, for buckle up, and you know, why not even accelerate it. That type of acceleration if you are organizing, or you are politically active and you are on the left, you need to be having conversations with those people. Because what we do not need is full system collapse if we get full system collapse, we're fucked. That's my belief. But anyway, that was a bit rambling I apologize but it's people feel lost and confused, I felt lost and confused. And when people step into your life and especially when these people take the form of like father figures, and mentors, very compelling, very compelling, and it's powerful, and we have to, we don't have something that's just like that. We need to make something better than that. That's it.

Ruairidh 1:11:20

Brilliant. Thanks Caleb. Yeah I know I'm not so had I had a series of questions but now I'm just a bit depressed. So maybe we'll just end the call there now I'm just kidding, I do want to come back and ask all three of you just a couple questions I think actually. You've all sort of answered some of this stuff anyways so I guess this is maybe just your chance to like double down on what you've already said, I think we'll definitely start with Cindy. So Caleb, kind of touched on it there and actually Cindy you spoke about it. At the start when you were kind of talking about how the right is kind of because they're more, I guess underground that they're just better kind of tech adopters they're just in a better position to kind of adopt technology, but the big question I always get asked whenever I talk to my whenever I force my friends told me about this is often kind of around like why, why does the far right, do better at this than the far left, and you know obviously in Caleb's story like you have the beginnings of people like Steven Molyneux in the beginnings of the far right or the alt right or however you want to label them, then eventually he kind of comes into contact with people like contra points and the rest of red too. And I feel like it almost everyone's story that is sort of what tends to happen at some point or another. But if you compare you know contra points, she has I think a million subscribers on YouTube, which like on the left is huge. It's absolutely massive. But you compare that to like yeah Milo Yiannopoulos or Lauren Southern and it's kind of, you know, it kind of pales in comparison so I wondered if you wanted to maybe expand a little bit more on on what you were kind of saying about why the far right may be better at this and if you have any insights into why the left, maybe isn't so good.

Cindy Ma 1:13:07

Yes, sure. Thank you. Ian and Caleb, for your, your remarks that was really interesting. Um, this isn't really my area of research expertise, so I can only kind of hypothesize. And I think, you know, discourses around white victimhood and the suppression of white culture, because they are so taboo within the political mainstream. When people hear those views articulated, and I think there's something really gratifying about hearing someone say it. Um, and there's been a lot of talk around algorithmic amplification. So, a, an abundance of radical content on the supply side but I think we can't underestimate that there's also demand for these views, and there was a study that came out by Kevin Monger, I think his name is, um, who, who is sort of challenging, this idea that it is solely the algorithm that is contributing to patterns of radicalization he argues that if this was the case we would just see less extreme channels over time getting fewer views more extreme channels, over time, and getting more views and that's not always the case and in fact in more recent months and years we've seen alt light figures like Steven Crowder and those who are adjacent in their politics, increase their share of views, as opposed to those further on the right, who are also increasingly becoming deplatformed. And so I think there, there's something to be said about a demand for a viewpoint. That is very rarely articulated within mainstream media a growing sense of resentment around not hearing that view articulated and then then finding someone to validate those views online.

Ruairidh 1:15:18

And would you like to maybe come in on the same question as well.

Ian Danskin 1:15:23

Yes. Thank you, Cindy also that was, that was enlightening. Um, so I mean there's there's the two things that come to my mind about why the right keeps being successful in ways that the left is not is

like for starters, there's the de toqueville quote about it's easier to get people to believe a simple lie than a complex truth. Like, it's really interesting to watch the parallels between how the right explains things versus how the left explains things right, like the far right, like if socialists, anarchists, communists or other flavors of leftists you look at a lot of problems in the world today and you want to explain it in terms of capitalism right like, oh, the reason all these people are suffering is capitalism. Well, the, they get to say, oh, the reason you're suffering is the Jews. And in a lot of ways that kind of ticks a lot of the same boxes, it's like, oh, it's a small elite group that has amassed most of the wealth for themselves. And so like it sort of fits the narrative in a way that makes sense to people, but it's simpler. It's so much simpler than like, there's this huge complex, interconnected web and it's not necessarily masterminded it's just kind of the product of this big system and that's what the system optimizes towards, and so like yeah there are bad actors, but it's not really any individual person's fault and it's not really designed and they can just say, No, the Jews designed it. And it is very very hard for us to compete in terms of simplicity of narrative, because their narrative does not have to be bounded by the truth, and the truth, like the world is complicated and the truth is going to be complicated as a result of that, and we can do our best to like simplify our message, but at the end of the day, we can never be as simple as they can be. We can never be as like reductive as they can be. And especially the nature of the internet is the more compressed information is the farther, it can travel and the easier other people can pick up on it and repeat it even people who don't know what all the baggage behind it is they just repeat the meme. And that spreads the narrative in ways they don't even realize, I think the other reason why the right is ultimately like getting more traction than us, is because however much they want to posit themselves as like revolutionaries who are bucking the system, they are ultimately stumping for the status quo, like they are saying the people in power should continue to be in power and the great upheaval they are talking about is basically just, oh, there are changes that have happened sometime in the last 30 years we want to stamp it down like there is a like Cindy was saying about the cycles of resurgence whenever we see, oh there's been some civil rights movement well now time for like there to be a big resurgence in white power movements. Susan Flutie has a really good book called backlash, which is about like anti feminist backlash throughout history. And one of the things she points out is, um, a lot of times the backlash is don't even happen after gains have been made for the minority party. It's just the moment, even the notion of gains for them is floated out right like GamerGate happened well GamerGate didn't happen but the pre GamerGate harassment of Anita Sarkeesian didn't happen when she released a bunch of feminist videos it happened when she said I'm going to release these feminist videos. And it's like, it's always something very very recent like oh here's this very recent way that the status quo has changed, and ultimately what they're stumping for is, let's put it back the way it was. Conservatism is very backwards focused it's always like, we're going to reclaim the glory that has been taken from us. And everybody has already lived through the past like we all have memories of what the past was like we don't necessarily have the same memories but all they have to say is things were better in the past. They don't have to be specific about what it was about the past that was better they don't have to describe it, but we all can feel nostalgia. But it's very hard to get everybody unified onto a vision of what is the future, a phrase that I like the alt right playbook was almost named after this phrase I use a lot which is a, there are 100 ways forward and only one way back, because there are so many ways society can go, but there's only one way that society has already been. And so it's easier to sell nostalgia than it is to sell like enthusiasm for the future because you have to build that future you have to make it up and design it and argue with people about what it should be. And in a way like the only way I know to combat that is to say yes but that's

thrilling, like it's really exciting that you get to invent your own future that you have the ability to design whatever you want, and accentuate the ways that what you've been through, even if things were better in the past. That's not as good as they have to be, they can be even better aim higher, basically.

Ruairidh 1:20:00

Thank you. So I'm going to move on to another question because we actually do have quite a few questions that have come in from the chat so I don't want to take up too much time with basically my own kind of fan questions and 3d view. So I wanted to maybe bring in Caleb first then we can go to Cindy and then Ian if there is anything you want to add maybe just shake your hands in the camera if not we can move on to my final question. So obviously, you know, this session we kind of came out of I listened to rabbit hole which is a New York Times podcast Caleb's in it it's part of the reason why I kind of initially found. Caleb in the first place, and it was a great podcast. But the one thing that frustrated me the most about it was it often felt like the direction they were taking it was, it's the algorithm, and that that that was really what they tended to talk about. And I feel like all three of you have touched on this a little bit and I kind of feel like the answer to the question. You know how important is the algorithm in this process and how responsible, are you know companies like YouTube or Google for this, and are they actually doing anything about it. I feel like the app store that is sort of the algorithms there but it's actually not really that important. I just wanted to give everybody a chance to maybe elaborate that on that a little bit, because that is often what the main stream media will do you can kind of read the various articles in the Washington Post or whatever, they'll just say it's the algorithm, and they'll kind of leave it at that. So Caleb, do you want to kind of jump in first.

Caleb 1:21:18

Yeah, I mean, I have that same frustration. That's why I cited Becker lewis's study at the beginning of this, because it's look the algorithm is just the Xbox. It's just the Xbox, if you take the Xbox away from your kid did your kid change is he suddenly different. Does he like does. Did he want to start wanting to like play the type of game on his Xbox that he did because he had an A. Like, you're just taking the game platform away from them, and you're taking the network away from them. But like it, that's not, it's the ecosystem like Cindy said there's a demand for it. First of all, even if it's not an explicit racist demand. It's a demand for something that these people are offering and then there's these people out there to offer it. And if these people can't network online the button do it IRL, it will be harder, but the algorithm is not like this deterministic thing that just brainwashes people, you know it's it's the relationships between the content creators and the fans. It's the relationship between the fans and the culture, you know it's it's a whole ecosystem to try to boil it down to just the algorithm that seems silly to me.

Ruairidh 1:22:28

Cindy Do you want to come in on this question of the algorithm and

Cindy Ma 1:22:34

Yeah sure I think I've touched on it a little bit in in my response to your last question but like Caleb said I think it's one dimension of a, an ecosystem where the incentive structures are broken, and not necessarily directing people towards constructive forms of engagement. And so, I think, a more holistic approach that looks not only at the problem as a question about funneling people towards like extremist

or violent content, , where people are getting, you know, this model where people are always getting more and more extreme which I don't think is necessarily the case. So so moving away from that idea around radicalization and focusing on supposedly lesser forms of hate speech and hate cultures that proliferate on these platforms and destabilize people's worldviews. And I think is an important shift to make

Ruairidh 1:23:47

That kind of take I'm sorry, just like focusing on Ian for a second, to see if his hands are crazy but they didn't. And that kind of takes us to the last question I was gonna ask all three of you to answer maybe we can stick with you, Cindy for a second, which is what, what can we do about all of this, and you sort of did answer there but I don't know if you want to, if there's anything else you'd like to add to that, what good examples do you maybe know of already that exist that we can kind of hold up and say this is a great way of of maybe combating online far right radicalization. Or maybe you just want to tell us a list of things that isn't working. So that we don't have to start from zero. And is there anybody that we should be supporting.

Cindy Ma 1:24:28

I like the work of someone called Baraka Nash and and yeah he writes about about this issue. And he's also an academic based in the Netherlands. But he advocates for taking a wide view around what extremism is, which is what I do also and moving away from a logic of free speech, which looks at outliers, and deplatforming only the most extreme only the most violent instances of far right, racism, and, and that logic ends up privileging the freedom of expression of far right figures over the rights of minoritized groups to exist as equal members in society right to exist without fear within society so I think that's another reframing that needs to happen, thinking about how we can, through regulatory means and also through cultural transformation undermine those, those, those cultures of hate that breed, the sense of racial resentment, and in order for that cultural transformation to happen like again I don't have a roadmap for it but a lot of radicalization narratives are rooted in misunderstandings of history. And so, I think we need to insist on a politics and on discourse that looks at systems that looks at historical legacies and connect those legacies to the present day.

Ruairidh 1:26:10

Amazing. Could you just repeat again there was a couple people that chat just asking what was the name of that academic.

Cindy Ma 1:26:16

I'll put it in the chat,

Ruairidh 1:26:18

You'll put it in the chat. Thank you so much. All right, brilliant. Well Ian do you want to you want to come in on that because I know there are other YouTubers, I guess that question around like the, I guess the role of regulation within this is maybe something that kind of differs between people. I don't know if I've ever seen anything that you've covered on that obviously don't just stick to that but I don't know if you want to comment on that particularly as a YouTuber yourself as somebody who could I guess fall under like some kind of weird liberal category of extremist content.

Ian Danskin 1:26:46

Yeah, I mean, two of my last videos got randomly age restricted. Which means, now you have to verify your 18 before you can watch them. So yeah like I do want to say that. I think Cindy's comment about early adopters is really important that I think what happens with the algorithms is it's not so much algorithms are fundamentally like radicalizing but that these far right people figure out how to use them to their advantage faster than everybody else. I do think that dealing with the algorithms is one of those things where it no it's not the solution in and of, in and of itself it's not a silver bullet but at the same time, it's one of the places where a small amount of effort can have a very large amount of effect. And so as much as we're saying like don't entirely blame the algorithm, it's also, don't let these companies off the hook, like there is no such thing as a neutral algorithm, an algorithm is ultimately programmed by human beings who have their own ideologies and their own unconscious, or conscious biases that are pushing them in certain directions. There was another part to your question, what was it.

Ruairidh 1:27:54

Just against like you know what can we do about it more generally like us, I guess, activists as content creators, that sort of thing.

Ian Danskin 1:28:02

Yeah, I mean, it's one of these things where like, if I had, I probably would make far fewer videos if I knew already what to do, like in a lot of ways the alt right playbook is me trying to find an answer to that question and so researching as much as I can. I have leads, I don't exactly have answers. One of the core things is we often. I think it's kind of a liberal thinking that we often sort of reflexively fall into is this idea of like, well you know there's the right and there's the left and then there's these people in the middle, or there's people on the right that we can pull to our side and ultimately the way we beat them is by deradicalizing them converting them to our side and that's how we win, which sort of ignores, you know, like, if we're using the voting metaphor the two thirds of the country that aren't voting at all, here in the States anyway I don't know your percentages in the UK. But there's also like there are so many people whose voices aren't being heard so many people who are already on our side are already our allies who aren't being platformed at all who aren't being given the ability to use the power that they have and that we would be so much stronger if we worked with them. The reality is that like the right is as represented as it is because they've learned how to cheat the systems, right, like we all know here in the states that if it weren't for gerrymandering and gaming the Electoral College and the fact that like they deny rights to prisoners and then throw disproportionately like non white people who disproportionately don't vote conservatives into jail, and we deny voting rights to a lot of our territories which coincidentally have majority non white populations right. Like, that's the only reason why the right and the left look roughly equal in my country and in a lot of other countries as well. And I do want to stress that like de radicalization is a very important part but it is only one part of the struggle, and that there's a lot of work that people on the left are already doing. And I just wish like a fraction of the energy spent arguing with people online was spent like on statehood for DC, you know, and on prisoner re enfranchisement and issues like that, as for ways to actually like deal with the, the radicalization pipeline. I do think that figuring out ways to like, like contact communities that are likely to get infiltrated and talking to their moderators about here are the things that they are likely to do and here's how to stop them. I think it's really worth looking at communities that have managed to fight off attempted

infiltration. I'm, I'm really delighted to say that like the community that the alt right tried to infiltrate recently that it was having none of it, was like the furry community. And I really want to like talk to some of the people that like, Hey, you did a really good job with this like it wasn't perfect there's still pockets of like, it's not a perfect community but for the most part, compared to even just like, hey, you've done a better job than just Star Wars fans and Star Wars is an expressly anti fascist property. So I really want to like look into what are people who've had success in this doing, how did they pull it off. I do want to know like what are the best ways to frame an argument, such that people who need to hear it actually see it without platforming the person you're rebutting. So there's a lot of like extra questions here but I do think we've got some like directions that are worth looking at.

Ruairidh 1:31:19

Amazing Thank you then, Caleb, if you want to comment on this quickly so I would, I'm just mindful that we definitely will have to finish at half past.

Caleb 1:31:26

Yeah just real quick first I just want to say that Star Wars is only anti fascist depending on who you root for in the film. So, I also want to say, arguing online is pointless. Now I understand that there's like the debate rows and the youtubers that do this, but those people have a different dynamic they're building relationship with the audience and bla bla bla bla bla. But just when you guys are in your comment section on your Facebook arguing with people. You're wasting your time and you're making things worse, in my opinion, you're adding to the game you're playing the game, and you're contributing to their little false reality that they get to live in and you're not helping them you're not helping you're not, you don't have an audience on a comment thread. You're wasting your time. If you want to help people, meet them in your real life, people they have relationships with or make a friend with one of those people online and focus on one person. Because the only thing you're doing in those kind of threads is making yourself feel good. The other thing I would say is inoculation. So, I'm kind of touched on this and I'll just say it explicitly, the way that we combat a lot of this isn't by deradicalization because deradicalization is very, does not have a proven efficacy or track record. In fact, there's been a lot of failures. So, yeah, derad is high risk or high reward, high risk, low yield. What we need to do is inoculation which is basically pre emptying this propaganda before people encounter it, and we can do that through messaging campaigns I mean that's what we've done for a long time. It's just I feel like, you know we haven't done a good job of this wave of it, but we do messaging campaigns and basically you know like the far right does it. So Stefan Molyneux will say, when you go to college, you're gonna hear about intersectionality and it's going to mean blah blah blah blah blah. But what it actually means is bla bla bla bla bla bla bla. He's inoculated you there so by the time he's poisoned the well, to put it in a different way and by the time you get to college in here that you know the college campus SJW talking about intersectionality you immediately think that they're a crazy person. So that's, we kind of have to do that and I think that you know that's what we're doing at American University. My job PERIL. That's what we're currently working on inoculation projects and study designs for that.

Ruairidh 1:33:38

Amazing. Sounds really really cool, if there's anything you can share with us I'm sure there would be lots of people in the chat.

Caleb 1:33:43

I can't share specifics of projects but it's basically I just explained the idea of inoculate that's basically yeah we do that through media, all sorts of resource we use that in school or out of school or whatever.

Ruairidh 1:33:53

Okay, so we have time just for a couple questions from the chat and I've been trying to write them down, as I've seen them. So sorry if we don't get to yours. I think the first one here might be best to throw this to Cindy actually, was from Michael who's asking about the internationalization of the far right, I guess specifically with figures like Bannon, so we've obviously seen Banon like in the, in the background of you know pixel Bolsonaro, he came over here to the UK. I think a couple months before our election he's been doing like a whistle, whistle stop tour of a, you know, a real who's who of all the horrible people in Europe. Is there anything that you would kind of like, I guess point out, or want us to know about when it comes to maybe the internationalization of the far right and is it new. Is it different.

Cindy Ma 1:34:43

Yeah, that's something I've noticed, mostly anecdotally as well I made a trip to India, last year for work. And I was pretty surprised at how, how concerned, people were about, about Trump and about the influence that Trump was having or trumpism was having on Hindu nationalism in India. So it's definitely a phenomena that is occurring and I think something that might be interesting to investigate is how the US and the tech platforms that are based in the US and the infrastructures that are based in the US kind of export American political discourse, and how people outside of the US or also through those platforms become bought into certain kinds of politics, I think that's something really interesting that I can't, I can't say definitively is new or isn't new but would be ripe for further study.

Ruairidh 1:35:53

Thank you. Ian or Caleb, do you want to just come in on that or shall I move on to the next one. Just trying to see. Yeah. No. Did you use that point.

Ian Danskin 1:36:04

I'm saying you can move on.

Ruairidh 1:36:05

Move on. Okay. All right, so then I guess this one was actually from from Julie was a private message but I think it was meant to be in public, which is where did they learn to do all this, all this stuff that we're talking about so Cindy's obviously talked about how maybe that the far right was more I guess like tech prone because of the situation they're in but but I guess like, you know, does anyone have any insights into like how they learned to do all this so maybe he in this this might be one for you or maybe Caleb, but Ian do you want to have a shot at that.

Ian Danskin 1:36:36

Well, so when I was talking earlier about, about how like whenever they move to, they get kicked off one form they move to another form and they take stuff with them. Some of the researchers I've talked to, I've talked about like basically every time. They're on one of these sites, and they're just sort of throwing techniques at the wall and seeing what sticks right. Whatever works gets put into these forums

and then when they move to the new forum that's what's they take with them. So it becomes sort of the seed of like everything we've tried that has worked is coming with us to the new form and that is what we're building our new forum around. So like the speed of the internet and the sheer volume of people on the internet just means they get to try a whole lot of things in volume. And so it sort of this like naturally evolved system that just comes from like being able to do a lot very quickly. And then the things that succeed and keep succeeding the things that fail fall out of fashion very quickly.

Ruairidh 1:37:40

Cindy is that a hand? Can we bring Cindy back in. Yeah.

Cindy Ma 1:37:44

Another thing I would add is that a lot of far right and right wing figures are re articulating or appropriating familiar strategies that have been used on the left so I mentioned, the way that they appropriate civil rights discourse so that the discourse of human rights really to to further their own their own aims but I've also been thinking about how the format of the takedown video, where in mostly right wing commentators will like roast a Vox video or BuzzFeed video about white privilege or whatever, and how, you know, that echoes leftwing late night political commentators like Trevor Noah, or John Oliver, John Stuart, before him. So these are these are strategies that aren't necessarily new and in fact, many of them have been adopted from liberal or progressive movements, but it feels new and it feels surprising when it comes from, from different parties.

Ruairidh 1:38:57

Okay, do you want to just add anything I could actually see all three of you now so maybe for the final couple of questions if you just raise your hand I can, I can see and then we don't have to do this awkward me being like, do you want to say something and you're like, No, not really. Thank you. Okay, perfect. So I think we can maybe fit two more in so we'll try and be as quick as possible so Linda asked, Why are these ideas, getting so much traction now, and maybe I should we start with, with Cindy again because I feel like maybe your answer to that is, they're not just you know they've always had traction but maybe I'm wrong so maybe we can start with Cindy and then if anyone else wants to come in.

Cindy Ma 1:39:33

Yeah, I think, I think that's broadly what I would respond is that these ideas have circulated within settler colonial societies like Canada and America and Western societies like Britain since, you know, since day one, you know, so I don't think that they're necessarily new I mentioned at the start of the session about how perceived advancements by racialized groups, by women are often met with extreme backlash, and something that I've also been thinking about in my research is how how the internet has amplified, a lot of progressive voices, and how those ideas have been then taken up by for example BuzzFeed by by Vox by kind of mainstream news outfits. And when those news outfits are talking about white privilege or toxic masculinity, that causes a sort of just disorienting effect for someone who's never thought of there, has never had to consider their whiteness or has never had to consider their, their maleness. So there's a kind of interplay between progressive ideas emerging, a kind of disorienting effect that that has on on those who are invested in the status quo and then backlash.

Ruairidh 1:41:05

Amazing. Thank you. Okay, so then one last question there's been quite a few questions about q anon in the chat and I kind of, I did have a kind of like conspiracy theory question I was gonna throw at three of you, but though that actually what we were all talking about was much more interesting anyway. But obviously it's been in the news more recently, because I can't remember the name of the person in the States, you've got a or a Republican candidate who is just explicitly like I you know I'm from Q anon, and I think recently here in the UK we've had a number of protests, kind of anti mask protests that have had a lot of like Q anon, you know where we go one we go all paraphernalia I don't know I don't know how to describe it. So I guess the question that Nancy asked was, Do any of the speakers think q anon comes out of a loss of democracy or maybe just can you shed a bit more light on, or maybe where Q anon comes from and I feel like Caleb's been messaging the most about it in the chat. So I might put you on the spot Caleb if you've got. Well, I mean,

Caleb 1:42:10

I've kind of said already, everything I really want to say about Q anon it. One thing I'll add someone was talking about this in the chat, fascist and alt-righters, people that have a, people that have a real ideology, they seem less susceptible to q anon, the people that I see falling into q anon, are typically your conspiracy theory normies, you know your Joe Rogan gamer bros and you're a really, you know, a lot of holistic healing circles, and then the thing that concerned me the most the demographic that concerned me the most was the normie house mom in the Midwest whose identity is as a mom, first and foremost her life as a mom, first and foremost, maybe she works. Maybe she doesn't. Maybe she's involved in the community. Maybe she isn't, but she spends a lot of time on Facebook. And those women, and that demographic has now taken on q anon, that concerns me deeply. So it seems like people that are unideologically focused, but have fears and concerns bla bla bla q-anon does a really good job of grabbing them up. Again, I've already said everything I want to say about it it's a death cult, it has gamified behavior. And as far as democracy goes, I'm not one to answer that, I was talking to a friend, a philosophy, graduate who does counter-terrorism, and they were telling me that essentially democracies are going to become a lot more hard to handle and manage because of a lot of different factors, the tech being a huge one. Yeah, that's all I have to say on that.

Ruairidh 1:43:47

Amazing. Thank you. Okay, well I think we, we will end it there, because it is now half past 8 our time. So I just wanted to say before we go, a big big thank you to Cindy, Ian and Caleb for joining us tonight. We really appreciate it. And I think it's been an absolutely amazing conversation, I've been trying to have this event for nearly two years now, Cindy and I first met like nearly two years ago and I called her and was like, I really want to do this thing. And I'm glad that it's finally happened. So, before we go, I just a couple final things so the first one is hopefully you might have seen it in the chat. We do have a forum thread specifically for this session. If you are registered for the festival this year, then you should have received an email, inviting you to set up an account on discourse. If you registered in the last 24 hours you won't have that yet so you will get that pretty soon. And then you can head over there. It looks like Robin is posting in the chat now you can head over there and continue our conversations. From tonight. And like keep asking questions, I'll come on there later on and yeah we can just keep going basically make it as lively as possible. The second is, I imagine most people on here have already registered for the festival so I'm not sure how you would have gotten on this call otherwise but if

you haven't. There are loads of events at TWT 20 and they are all filling up extremely quickly make sure you've registered for the festival by heading to the world transformed.org forward slash register. And finally, as always, TWT is free for all of us, but it's only made possible by the contributions of our supporters, and our opening rally last night we had 29 people sign up to our supporters network which is amazing. And it really does make a huge difference with our work, it means that we can keep going, all year round. It means that we can hire more people. It just means a lot of really great stuff so if you're enjoying what we're doing, and you can afford it. Please do head to the world transformed.org forward slash support there'll be a link in the chat, head over there either become a supporter or send us a one off donation whatever you can. And yeah just again thanks to all our brilliant speakers for coming along, and we'll see you all for the next, the next event the next session tomorrow night. Yeah. Goodbye.