

BOOK REVIEW

The Women of the Far Right

Leidig, E. (2023). *The Women of the Far Right: Social Media Influencers and Online Radicalization*. Columbia University Press. 276 pp. ISBN: 978-0-23121-0-171

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The *Women of the Far Right: Social Media Influencers and Online Radicalization* by Eviane Leidig is a thorough and incisive account of the crucial role that women play in shaping and directing the online and social media discourse of the Far Right. Drawing on Leidig's extensive research following a large swathe of right-wing women influencers across multiple social media platforms, the work presents a cohesive and compelling argument for the centrality of women influencers in the modern discourse of the Far Right. Leidig argues convincingly that even when they are not overtly advancing the Far Right, women influencers play a crucial role in advancing its goals. By serving as aspirational role models, objects of desire, and propagandists for regressive social and cultural ideologies, they broaden the appeal of the movement, softening its presentation, and facilitating radicalization among less-susceptible populations. Leidig's work is an excellent and long-overdue examination.

Leidig's years of personal research and broad understanding of the variety of perspectives within the online Far Right milieu shine throughout the book. She distinguishes the myriad trends and complementary - and sometimes competing - ideologies that characterize the online discourse of Far Right women influencers. Leidig is at her finest when highlighting the development, perspectives, and personal contributions of the influencers she's studied. She details how the discourse on the Far Right - ranging

from overt white nationalism to more conventionally conservative appeals to traditionalism in gender roles - contributes to its ecosystem. She peppers her incisive analysis with voluminous quotations and examples derived from her research, lending both context and authority to her narrative.

The highlight of the book is Leidig's incisive analysis of the particular role of women influencers *as women* within the broader online environment of the Far Right. She deftly examines how these women promote a worldview of female subordination, while simultaneously positioning themselves as metapolitical actors. Her subjects build rapport with their followers, present themselves as both aspirational and relatable, and utilize those parasocial bonds to advance more radical rhetoric and positions. In Leidig's presentation, this balancing act is difficult and takes a substantial toll on these influencers. Several of the women she studied took lengthy sabbaticals from political activism in order to focus on their private lives and raise families, which Leidig presents in context as a symptom of the peculiar tension around family structure and patriarchal expectations placed on women in Far Right circles. Many of these women framed these retreats in explicitly political or cultural terms, referring back to traditionalist expectations of women as homemakers and mothers, roles which are perennially central to their worldview. At the same time, many of her subjects repeatedly returned to the social media limelight - often changing the focus of their content to center on domestic duties, food preparation, personal grooming, relationship dynamics, and similar material that promoted the values and assumptions of the Far Right, without engaging directly in political discourse as such.

Additional highlights include exploration of how the women influencers of the Far Right obtain funding from their activities, and how they resist and counter efforts to curtail radical rhetoric on social media. Leidig's research shines here, and she is able to bring detailed and substantive evidence to bear to show how the Far Right online ecosystem operates behind-the-scenes.

The book struggles slightly to draw a clear line between the ideologies of the traditional Far Right and its alt-Right counterparts - a struggle due entirely to the fuzziness of these ideological lines to begin with rather than any failure of Leidig's research or presentation. Another minor criticism revolves around Leidig's tendency to

pause her narrative to debunk various talking points presented by her subjects. While readers will appreciate her willingness to engage directly with the arguments of her subjects, it can sometimes slow the development of her analysis and direct attention away from the broader points her work presents.

Within the larger literature, *Women of the Far Right* is unique in focusing specifically on the role of women influencers. While much scholarship highlights the central role that social media and online discourse play in advancing the political and cultural agenda of the Far Right, Leidig's deep research and lucid explanations of the role that women influencers play within that ecosystem is unmatched. This book is appropriate for general audiences due to Leidig's clean and considered prose, but is best suited for readers who are interested in a detailed and comprehensive deep dive into the subject matter, either as an academic or a layperson.