

The Affective Dynamics of Far-Right Narrations on Gender and Sexual Orientation on YouTube

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Abstract

The video-sharing platform YouTube has become a central dissemination tool for many far-right actors. Existing research on far-right social media spaces prioritize a focus on mobilizing frames in order to understand the appeal of far-right actors and their growing audience. However, as YouTube allows for the sharing of the far-right worldview in a highly emotive and interactive manner, it is necessary to approach far-right video sharing with a lens that places special emphasis on the central role of emotions in processes of ideological world-building and long-term ideological learning. Far-right ideology, understood as a symbolic narration about how the social world functions, relies on the antagonistic positioning of a threatened in-group against threatening vilified out-groups; it is this affectively charged opposition that forms the central core of far-right mobilization techniques.

These insights are not new: Pioneering studies of authoritarian agitation, Theodor W. Adorno and Leo Löwenthal described rhetorical devices and themes that strategically tap into and co-produce various tumultuous affective states in their audiences. These affective states often are linked to the imagination of their adherents' social fate, but also include symbolism about social worthiness and social identity. While the original studies of far-right agitation offer a rich view on the central affective dynamics and narrative tenets of previous forms of authoritarian agitation, they do not offer much insight into some of the most effective topics of current far-right mobilization online, e. g. how issues around gender and sexual orientation are utilized.

In my contribution, I offer a consideration of how the template of authoritarian agitation can be extrapolated onto far-right narrations around gender and sexual orientation. I will make a case for a new application of this model and show how it can be helpful in order to understand both the highly ambivalent stance and strategies far-right actors exhibit with regard to these topics *and* their underlying affective dynamics. The contribution will cover central elements of far-right narrations around gender and sexual orientation, exemplified in diverse YouTube channels.

Keywords

Critical theory, far-right mobilization, mobilization around gender/ sexual orientation, far-right YouTube

Bio

Dipl. pol. Agnes Wankmüller studied political science at Freie Universität Berlin. She currently is a PhD student at the University of Passau and the University of Groningen. Her research interests include social theory, far-right ideology and mobilization, gender theory and critical theory. Her PhD project inquires into how different social symbolism are utilized in far-right narratives on YouTube.

Publications

Jasser, G./ Wankmüller, A. (2020): Alt-Right, Alt-Tech, Alt-Internet? Rechte Online Plattformen und ihre Funktion; in: *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* 33(2): DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/fjsb-2020-0042> (19.09.2020).