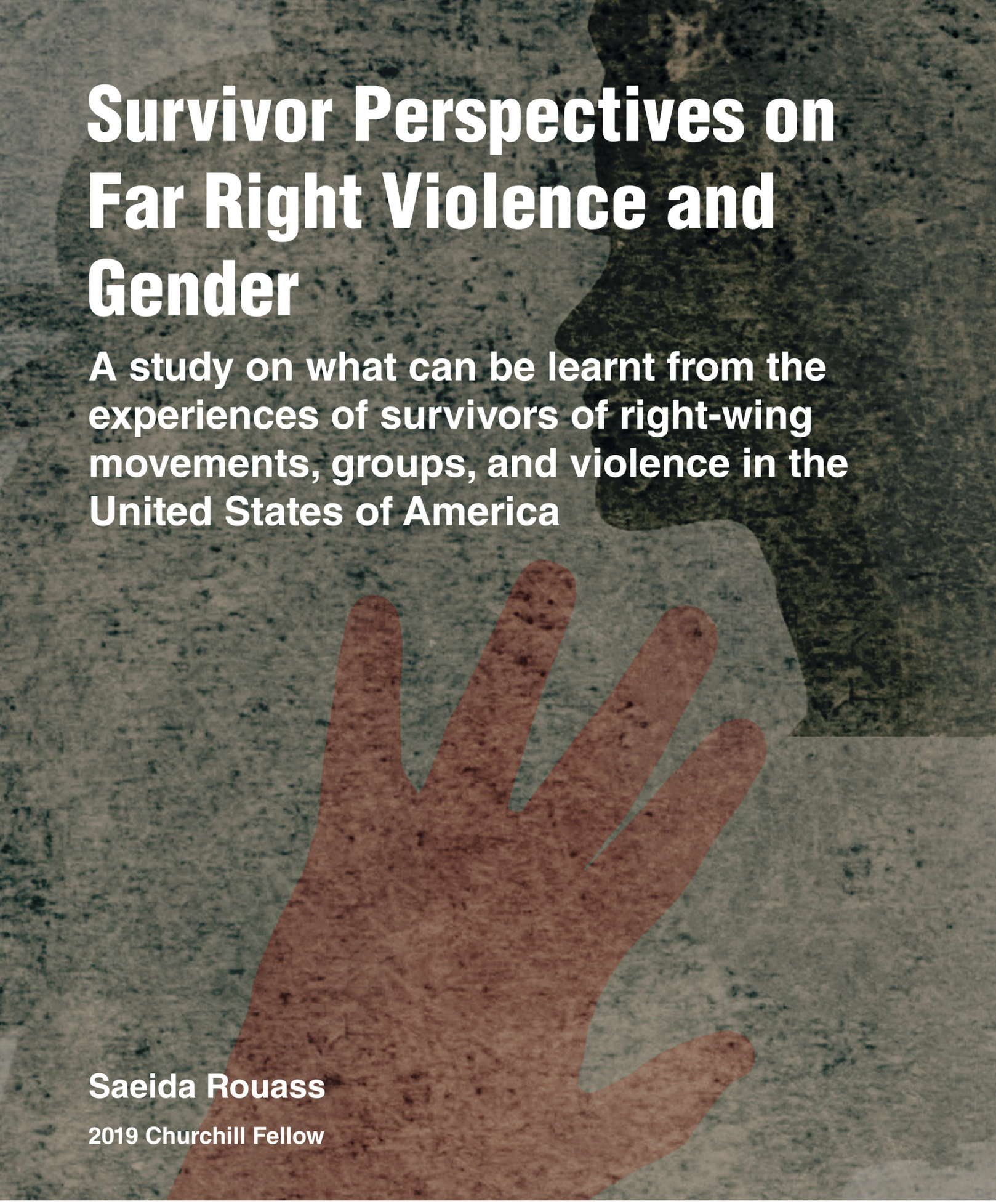

Survivor Perspectives on Far Right Violence and Gender

A study on what can be learnt from the experiences of survivors of right-wing movements, groups, and violence in the United States of America

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2019 Churchill Fellow

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CONTENT WARNING: This report contains references to and descriptions of sexual assault, child abuse, self-harm, suicide, death and dying, miscarriages and abortion, mental illness, white supremacy, racism, violence, misogyny, and homophobia which some readers may find distressing.

About the Author

Saeida Rouass is an independent researcher, writer, and consultant with an interest in extremist violence prevention, human rights, rule of law, and gender. She has worked on programs internationally since 2015 with her research published in various journals and news outlets. She is a Senior Fellow with the Global Center on Cooperative Security with a focus extremist violence prevention in prisons and women-led community initiatives in Morocco that strengthen human rights and reintegration. She has also contributed to extremist violence prevention and capacity building programs in Indonesia, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Sudan. She is a UKCP Trainee Psychotherapist.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the individuals I met during my travels and the communities who welcomed me. The topic of my Fellowship is no easy one to explore and I will forever appreciate the people who welcomed me into their homes, faith buildings, and community centres and took the time to share their stories and experiences. Asking individuals to share their traumas and experiences of violence inevitably involves asking them to relive them in some form. I feel forever grateful for their generosity and willingness to share those stories. Tracking the impacts of far-right hate and violence across the United States can leave one with a skewed perception of the country. The people I met on my journey remind me of our unbreakable shared humanity even when tested at its most extreme. While I have not mentioned anyone by name in the report, I am dedicating it to Thomas Engleman. Thomas welcomed me into his home in Florida during my Fellowships like a long lost friend and shared his story as a former member of the Aryan Brotherhood with openness, integrity, and even some humour. Thomas took his life in 2020 and when I think of the time I sat with him on his porch as the sun set, I am forever reminded of the toll hate and violence can take. I will cherish the afternoon I spent with Thomas.

I would also like to thank the Churchill Fellowship for awarding me a Fellowship. It has truly been a life changing experience whose impacts find me in all parts of my life. Writing this report has taken an incredibly long time and I am especially thankful for the support, patience, and encouragement as I have received from the Churchill Fellowship staff.

Table of Contents

Background

In September 2019, the then Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations, Neil Basu, announced that right-wing violence is the fastest growing terrorist threat in the United Kingdom, with the most likely attempts to come from 'lone actors'.

Police investigations at the time revealed that:

- A quarter of all terrorism arrests in the past year were linked to right-wing violence.
- The right-wing caseload of counter-terrorism police jumped from 6% to 10% in the last two years.
- A third of all terror plots to kill in Britain since 2017 were by those driven by extreme-right causes.[1]

While right-wing violence, white supremacy movements and organised groups have long posed threats to public safety in the United Kingdom, the globalisation of right-wing networks through advancements in technology has contributed to a resurgence, reorganisation, and fluidity of those movements. Revelations in 2019 showed most of the plotting to commit acts of right-wing violence in the United Kingdom took place online with links to extreme-right networks elsewhere in Europe, the United States and South America, including plotters sharing information, receiving encouragement, and acquiring manuals on killing.[2] Right-wing transnational networks, influences, and capacity to organise have widened, strengthened, and deepened in recent years.

Since 2019, the threat of right-wing violence has persisted in the United Kingdom and acknowledging that those engaged in groups, networks, and/or activities do not necessarily represent a cohesive body. Recent insights include the recognition that individuals in the United Kingdom can be radicalised to right-wing violence by overseas actors, with some of the most influential right-wing propaganda emerging from the United States. Much of that more recent propaganda is rooted in fascism and national socialism and poses the threat of inspiring 'self-initiated terrorism' in the United Kingdom.[3] Right-wing networks, organising, and ideologies have always transcended national borders. However, in more recent years the transnational character of these movements has resulted in United States actors increasingly influencing the nature of United Kingdom movements.

Much has been written about modern variations and expressions of right-wing groups and violence and the enabling influence of technology. There is also an extensive body of literature that aims to identify drivers of engagement and involvement in right-wing movements and/or violence. A significant purpose of this literature is to develop a comprehensive and evidenced-based understanding of how and why individuals might become willing to commit acts of right-wing violence in order to advance intervention approaches that might offer alternatives to those individuals.

In the United Kingdom efforts have been made to prevent radicalisation to violence or terrorism. Those efforts largely aim to identify people at risk of committing terrorist acts in order to initiate interventions under the Prevent Strategy[4]. Prevent falls under the United Kingdom's wider Strategy for Countering Terrorism, known as CONTEST. The CONTEST four-pronged framework of Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare outlines roles and statutory duties for the various agencies and actors involved in reducing the risks of terrorism to the UK. Prevent works to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism and to support the rehabilitation and disengagement of those already involved. It does this through tackling the ideological causes of terrorism, intervening early to support individuals susceptible to radicalisation, and enabling people who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate.

Historically, Prevent has come under substantial criticism by human rights agencies, community organisations and leaders primarily for its disproportionate targeting of Muslims, heavy-handed interventions, and the stigmatising of entire Muslim communities as suspect.[5]

The theories and research underpinning Prevent into how and why individuals become radicalised to violence have historically been patchy, problematic, or lacking in evidence. Disproportionate significance has been attached to the role of ideology in motivating that violence, with little attention given to wider structural drivers. Efforts to prevent violence have also largely focused on preventing individuals from radicalising into violence, resulting in a pathologizing approach, where such behaviour is treated in exceptional ways and in some cases as a condition to be diagnosed and treated. The fixation on understanding and then preventing individuals

from radicalising into violence, often present in the Prevent approach, has at times also obscured wider socio-economic, environmental, and political drivers or the role of the state and state agencies in creating conditions conducive to the spread of ideologies, networks, groups, and narratives promoting violence. This research adds further evidence to this body of criticism, particularly demonstrated by the fact that many former perpetrators of right-wing violence interviewed described the intersectional nature of their involvement, including wider gender, economic, and race norms and inequalities acting as significant drivers with ideological motivations being of less significance.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the intersection of misogyny and right-wing violence. Within public discourse a symbiotic relationship between misogyny and white supremacy is often presented, with misogyny acting as a catch-all term to include ideas such as toxic masculinity,[6] aggressive masculinity, a crisis in masculinity and aggrieved entitlement,[7] patriarchy, gender norms, violent misogyny,[8] domestic violence,[9] and global masculinism[10]. A cursory glance at these discussions indicates misogyny is used to characterise the attitudes and behaviour of men who hold extremist beliefs, are associated with extremist movements or/ and have committed acts of ideologically influenced violence.

The increasing recognition of right-wing movements posing threats to public safety and the trend towards classification of sub-groups within those movements such as Incel (involuntarily celibate) and Proud Boys, as well as the growth of the Manosphere, has resulted in heightened interest in links between misogyny and white supremacy.[11] For example, in the United States, the Southern Poverty Law Center started to track 'male supremacy' on its hate map in 2018 following an increase in terrorist acts committed by members of these groups that targeted women or women's spaces.[12] However, blind spots persist. This has included the persistent prioritisation of the perspectives of men, resulting in the universalisation of male experiences. This has influenced how radicalisation to violence is understood, how preventative interventions are conceptualised and implemented, and national policies on prevention approaches. Internationally, it is widely recognised that women are disproportionately harmed by terroristic violence and counter-terrorism responses, wedging them between a rock and a hard place.[13]

Often the first-hand experiences of women impacted by involvement in right-wing movements or violence have been overlooked, resulting in the gendered nature of that violence and impacts being ignored or even reinforced. Yet, their voices may offer significant insights into the realities of right-wing violence and the role gender and misogyny play in these movements. Furthermore, the mainstreaming of gender into understandings of and responses to the risks and threats right-wing violence pose to individuals, communities, and society is critical to ensuring comprehensive approaches that do not reinforce the wider norms and structures that create conditions conducive to the growth of right-wing narratives. Another significant group impacted by right-wing violence who are often overlooked in our conceptualisation and response are survivors of such violence. In this context, the term 'survivors' refers to individuals or communities who have been targets of and subjected to right-wing violence, although, as this report will show, individuals once involved in right-wing groups, networks, and violence may often also identify as survivors.

The perspectives and insights of individuals with lived experience of right-wing violence are important in understanding its drivers, impacts, how individuals recover, the support and resources needed to aid that recovery, community resilience, and importantly how preventative approaches can be designed without causing further harm. Inclusion of those perspectives and insights increases the potential of preventative measures and responses not reinforcing conditions, such as gender bias, that may drive violence and the narratives that underpin it. Far right violence and biased violence prevention responses combined risk trapping those most impacted by both in a cycle of harm and disadvantage.

Introduction to the Research

Research Objectives

The research project's primary objectives were to:

1. Identify how gender and far right violence intersect in the lived experiences of individuals directly impacted by that violence.
2. Identify how constructs of gender influence how far right violence happens, is organised, and experienced by different groups.
3. Identify and highlight unique experiences, lessons learnt, and insights from the perspectives of women directly impacted by far right violence.
4. Identify lessons learnt from survivors of far right violence in the USA that can be used and adapted in the United Kingdom context.

Research Methodology

The research for this paper is rooted in feminist research epistemology and used qualitative semi-structured interviews and participatory observation methods. This approach takes the epistemological position that: "conventional standards for 'good research' discriminate against or empower specific social groups."[14]

Feminist methodology does not prescribe a single research method. It aims to improve the way we know society, while acknowledging that value-free research is an unachievable goal. In Talking Back to Sociology: Distinctive Contributions of Feminist Methodology, DeVault argues conventional research practice has resulted in "the omission and distortion of women's experiences in mainstream social science, the tendency to universalise the experience of men (and relatively privileged women), and the use of science to control women, whether through medicine and psychiatry, or through social scientific theories of family, work, sexuality, and deviance." (DeVault, 1996)[15]

While feminist research is not a unified or singular epistemological position and methodology and is continuously engaged in a critical and reflective process of change, the research for this paper is rooted in three of its core points of focus:

1. Shifting the focus of standard practice from men's concerns in order to reveal the locations and perspectives of (all) women ... to 'bring women in', that is, to find what has been ignored, censored, and supressed, and to reveal both the diversity of actual women's lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many of those lives invisible.
2. Seeking a science that minimalizes harm and control in the research process.
3. Seeking a methodology that will support research of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women.[16]

Fundamentally the research and this paper seek to disrupt the marginalisation of women's voices, experiences, and perspectives within the peace and security space and inject those voices, experiences and perspectives into the growing interest in the intersection of misogyny, gender, and far right violence. Through doing so it aims to contribute knowledge to this current trend that makes women visible and benefits them and others who may have been historically disadvantaged or marginalised.

Primary Research

The findings of this report are based on primary research conducted through the Churchill Fellowship. A total of thirty-six in-person qualitative interviews with individuals directly impacted by far right violence or living in communities targeted by far right violence in the United States of America were conducted across five weeks in 2019.

The interviews took a narrative approach through the use of open questions, allowing interviewees to tell their stories and experiences with as little interference from the interviewer as possible. This approach was adopted because it was deemed best suited to revealing the lived experiences and stories of individuals impacted by far right violence, the parts of the experience significant to them, and how they have come to make sense of those experiences. The approach essentially began with the open-ended question 'can you tell me your story?' and allowed the interviewee to speak freely, with the interviewer asking follow-up questions where needed.

Interviewees fitted into three broad categories, though overlap existed. These categories were:

Individuals with past involvement in far right groups, networks or movements in some capacity, including perpetrators of physical violence.

Survivors or family members of victims of far right violence, attacks, or acts of terrorism.

Community leaders and activists from communities targeted by far right violence, attacks, or acts of terrorism and professionals working with survivors.

Interviewees were identified using a snowball approach as there can be challenges to gaining access to people with such experiences. Issues around trust, a willingness to share their experiences with others, shame and trauma may influence a person's willingness to participate in research of this nature. The snowball approach allowed consenting participants to recommend the research project to others, creating a body of interviews that was diverse and reflective of a range of experiences and insights. The research project specifically targeted people who identify as women, but men were also interviewed in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how gender and far right violence interact in people's lives. Just over fifty percent of interviewees identified as female.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded with consent of interviewees. They were then transcribed and analysed to identify emerging themes and patterns. Once those emerging themes and patterns were identified they were coded into categories and the interview transcripts were analysed again to explore, uncover, and reveal insights specific to how gender intersected with far right violence to influence the lived experiences of participants as reported by them. Data was also analysed to identify where gender intersected with other characteristics that may underpin lived experiences of far right violence, such as race, class, sexuality, disability etc. as reflected in the findings section of this report.

Research Limitations and Cautions

It is important to note the research limitations and cautions to be taken into consideration with the findings of the research.

Key limitations and cautions include:

1. The findings of the research are drawn from the perspectives of those interviewed. It is important to note those perspectives are a result of a variety of influencing factors that may or may not be visible in the primary data. Therefore, the findings of the report should not be taken as an account of how gender and far right violence intersect, but how they are experienced by individuals with lived experience at that intersection as reported by them.
2. While the findings of the research offer useful insights from the perspectives of individuals with lived experience of direct far right violence, it is important to note the limitations of exploring such violence through this lens exclusively. Far right violence, including white supremacy and racism, has a long history in the United States and presents in many forms, including non-physical violence. The experience of individuals directly impacted by that violence is not the sum of the structures that exist and drive individuals to commit such violence. It is important the findings of the report are not understood to speak to or construct far right violence as solely an individualised experience or used to mask or overlook the wider socio-economic, historic, and cultural drivers that underpin it. The report aims to add to the rich multi-dimensional body of literature and anti-racism activism on far right violence

by contributing accounts of individual lived experiences.

3. It is important to note gender is understood as a construct and the use of the terms male/female, woman/man is not intended to create gender binaries or exclude. Furthermore, the research acknowledges that gender can and does intersect with other characteristics such as race, class, sexuality, disability, etc. creating interlocking oppressions and multi-layered and complex experiences for individuals. What this means in practice for this research project is that it may not always be possible or wise to separate the experiences of individuals as a result of gender influences from experiences of race, class, or sexuality etc.

4. There is a plethora of terminology to describe far right ideology and violence ranging from racism, alt-right, far right to white supremacy etc., each with multiple meanings and nuances. Furthermore, the diversity of hate based movements in recent years creates additional challenges when selecting appropriate terminology and definitions. Some movements may appear to prioritise nationalism and prevention of immigration for example, while others may focus on traditional gender roles while masking white supremacist ideologies. In the technological age, hate based movements appear to function as eco-systems or networks that interconnect, overlap, and borrow concepts and ideological positions from each other rather than being organised around distinct ideological positions. This exacerbates the challenges of terminology, what it means, and how it is used. The phrase 'far right violence' is used in this report as an umbrella term to broadly mean violence influenced, motivated by and/or working towards extreme nationalist, xenophobic, racist, religious fundamentalist, or other reactionary views.

Findings

The below findings provide an overview of some of the themes and trends that emerged from the research significant to better understanding the intersection of far right violence and gender in the United States and deemed potentially relevant to the United Kingdom. The themes below provide broad observations and insights that aim to contribute to our understanding of far right violence and gender based on analysis of the data set and are therefore not an exhaustive list of the ways in which the two may intersect or what learning presented in the research.

Listening to Former Members of Far Right Groups

An important first observation of the project relates to how personal stories of far right violence are told and the various factors influencing how they may be constructed. An unexpected outcome of conducting the thirty-six interviews and participant observation was in recognising the patterns that underpin how survivors talk about personal experiences of far right violence. This is particularly true for former perpetrators who have abandoned their once held views and have made sense of those experiences.

Those experiences were often told with narrative arcs by interviewees so that sense could be made of them. The narratives were often constructed not just so the interviewee could make sense of the experience, but also the listener (in this case the researcher). This meant the experiences were curated with conscious or unconscious choices made around where significant events were placed and in what order, what experiences were selected for inclusion and exclusion in the story, how underlying themes such a shame, trauma, avoidance, and a desire to repair harm were integrated, and how current identity shapes understandings of past experiences and choices. This is pertinent when considering these personal stories might be shared with different audiences (researchers, community groups, media etc.) and may alter to accommodate those audiences.

The curated nature of how people talk about their experiences of perpetrating far right violence brings into question the truth of those accounts. Truth in those stories is important in order to identifying the lessons that can be learnt from them. When events or insights are overlooked or not included, the integrity of the story itself can be challenged. For example, individuals who were once members of far right groups or movements and committed violence often constructed cautionary tales that sought to address underlying questions such as:

1. Why did I become involved in a far right group or movement?
2. What sustained my participation in the far right group or movement?
3. What enabled me to commit violence on the groups behalf?
4. What instigated my movement away from the far right group?
5. Who am I now as I look back at that experience, the harm I may have caused, and the impact it had on me and others?
6. How can I make positive use of those negative experiences or choices?

It was apparent that this underlying structure to how the stories were told was influenced not only by the interviewee's need to make sense of the experience but also a desire for the interviewer to identify the value of their past behaviour. For the listener, this can be challenging because the areas deemed important for them may not be important to the storyteller and when they appear not to be addressed, the integrity of those accounts comes into question. When it comes to far right violence this can relate to important themes such as taking accountability for committing violence towards others because of their race or acknowledging the gender based violence committed along with the violence driven by racial superiority.

A number of interviewees, since abandoning far right movements and violence, have professionalised those experiences through public speaking. This may involve telling their stories on public platforms in schools, universities, faith institutions, and conferences. The stakes become higher when those stories are given a public platform.

Recognising that the story of past involvement in far right violence is received by others with their own histories, experiences of that violence, and wider racism means acknowledging sense making is emotionally charged and difficult for everyone. Individuals who have been victimised by far-right violence can receive the stories of former

perpetrators as justification of the harm caused, a centring of perpetrators, hypocrisy, and a co-opting of their traumas. For victims it can feel as though former perpetrators are now seeking their empathy and emotional labour so that they can heal from who they once were.

An example of this is how individuals explained their abandonment of far right violence. Some of the reasons given in interviews included becoming a parent and deciding not to raise their child in a far right movement because it may harm them, having a cancer scare, being imprisoned for a hate crime, and the far right group turning against the individual and them becoming a target for the violence. While these reasons were identified by those interviewed as important catalysts for their abandonment of far right violence, for the listener it can be a bitter pill to swallow, especially if the 'truth' of that experience is not acknowledged. In this instance, the 'truth' being referred to relates to an acknowledgement that the catalyst in each of these experiences is that the potential to now become a victim rather than a perpetrator of far right violence drove the individual to exit the movement. For listeners (particularly those from marginalised groups who have experienced racism) this can be difficult to hear because it speaks to self-preservation being a motive for leaving rather than a realisation of the harm they may have inflicted on others. If this part of the story is not acknowledged, as was often the case in interviews, it can make the listener question the integrity of other parts of the story, such as expressions to repair the harm inflicted on others or the desire to prevent others from joining those movements. A lack of acknowledgement of how being a perpetrator of far right violence afforded them power and exit happened when that power was turned on them has direct emotional and psychological impact on listeners from marginalised communities who have long histories of being targeted by that violence.

Talking about race, racism, and far right violence is difficult for everyone. The experiences of individuals who once committed that violence and have since 'reformed' are important contributions to the conversation. However, when those individuals are given platforms to share those experiences, it is important to acknowledge and adapt to the presence, background, and history of the listener and the emotional and psychological impacts of hearing those accounts. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that the sharing of those lived experiences can often be an exercise of making sense of them rather than arriving at an objective truth about why individuals commit far right violence. That sense making process is collective, mutually created between speaker and listener(s), and difficult for everyone involved. Creating spaces for collective and shared sense making of far right violence means considering the backgrounds and needs of everyone involved rather than the exclusive centring of former perpetrators. Developing safeguarding plans for all involved is important, especially when the stories of former perpetrators can often be glamourised, curated in ways that elicit specific or strong emotional or psychological effects, for example graphic descriptions of violence, and in doing so centre the experiences of [former] perpetrators over victims or survivors.

Gendered Narratives

Continuing with the theme of how past experiences of far right violence are told, another prominent characteristic is how gender norms and identity may shape or influence how females and males tell the stories of their lives. In this context gender identity refers to the extent to which gender-stereotyped characteristics or norms were part of how individuals narrate their past experiences in gender typical ways. Analysis of the interviews indicated past or present gender identity influenced (conscious or unconscious) accounts of far right movements and violence for individuals once involved.

Male interviewees often invoked masculinity norms to describe the appeal of far right groups, movements and violence, and how membership made them feel. Female interviewees often described experiences of victimisation as precursors to involvement in far right movements and violence and victimisation from within the movements as causes for their sustained participation or exit. While some male members recognised childhood adverse experiences and victimisation as influencing factors in their involvement in far right violence, this was often caveated with talk of having 'worked on themselves,' or only coming to realise their own past victimhood and its effects in adulthood. It is worth illustrating this point with two descriptions of involvement in far right movements and violence from one male interviewee and one female interviewee.

In the male example, the interviewee described the sense of power membership in a far right group gave him as a man and how the traditional gender role of men as protectors influenced and informed his involvement. The influence of the masculinised

characteristic of 'protector' is important because that characteristic also shaped how he understood his relationship with women, and to society more broadly. Overall, the role of male protector extended to women, nationalism, and the sense of power being part of a far right group gave him and underpinned actions that can be perceived as rooted in other discriminations or contradictory.

It is worth taking a moment to explore where the masculinised characteristic of 'protector' presents in the interviewee's story as a way of better understanding its influence as a core driver to his involvement in far right movements.

While a senior member of an organised far right group (in this case the American Nazi Party), the interviewee describes a secret he kept from other group leaders and members. During his time in the group, which involved responsibilities such as advising on the strategic direction of the group, maintaining order and discipline amongst the rank and file membership, resolving disputes, organising rallies, and representing the group publicly at events and in the media, he secretly lived with a Black American woman. This might appear to be a contradiction for others in a group that believes in the superiority of white people and the inferiority of black people and may not allow an individual to associate with a black person, let alone live with them. However, for the interviewee his responsibilities as a male protector overrode those racial positions and he even suggests that being a Nazi SS Officer (Schutzstaffel) was beneficial to the Black American woman.

He states

> *"So, what happened was I was her protector. That and nothing more...The only feelings I had at the start was that this woman is my charge, and I had to see that she is safe, and I dealt with it as a professional...You make a commitment, you keep that commitment or else and it was the same there, I made a commitment to protect her...You see in addition, being an SS Officer was only an enhancement as far as her protection because what it is that we are not going to say one thing and then do another. If you make a commitment you keep that commitment because your manhood hinges on your word and your dedication."*

For the interviewee his role as a man, understood as one of keeping commitments, dependability, and protecting others (women) appears to be a strong motivator, strong enough to behave in ways that may appear contradictory.

The hyper-masculine construct of manhood presents in other descriptions of his involvement in the far right.

For example, he describes his initiation into the American Nazi Party as initially motivated to protect the nation when he says

> *"...if I stay with these characters I might get a beat on domestic terrorism and things like the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City and things like that, if I find out about it in advance, I can put a stop to it so I decided to stay...[but] it was an outright excuse on my part and I'll tell you why, why it was an excuse. See the only thing as a child, as an adolescent, even as a young adult that I would identify with being something, being strong and victorious, had to do not so much with Nazism but with the SS, seeing how they handled things, how they dealt with things, how people feared them, people cleared the street for them and I identified that with a form of victory; whereas, I always felt myself to be a failure."*

When he describes his rise to a leadership position within the American Nazi Party, masculine characteristics present again:

> *"if the sense of discipline was not there I most certainly would never have been promoted because they could say this is a man you could count on, not somebody that might tell you one thing and then do another. He's untrustworthy, he tells lies. When they find that your basic history is spotless and that there was never room for a rebuttal then they know that this is a man that we can depend on regardless, no matter what the situation calls for."*

Describing what sustained his membership, masculinised notions of power, authority, respect, and fear are prevalent.

> *"You develop a feeling, you develop a superiority complex where at this stage in the game I was at the top of the world looking down on creation basically and I was the master of all I survey and it was the power I had, more and more membership, more and more power, I was becoming more and more of a leader and after a period of time, I didn't even feel as I used to because I've always been more of a modest type person, low profile type person and now here I am making public speeches and I took on a completely different personality... At the very height what I was getting out of it was almost like a feeling of euphoria. I'd walk into a meeting hall or a room where I was not meant to step through that door, everyone is jumping to attention and I'm looking back at what once was that frightened abused child as compared to this man that held a sceptre now and to go full circle like that I said to myself 'I finally did it, I'm in a position of power' and it was growing because they had also connected with the KKK, they were attending a number of our rallies, a number of them; several of them wanted to recruit me but I told them that I don't look good in a sheet."*

During the course of the interview, the interviewee described childhood experiences that may account for the importance of hyper-masculine power in shaping his identity and adult associations with the American Nazi Party. He describes extreme physical abuse by his mentally ill mother and older sister leaving him feeling powerless, the abandonment by his father, and his father when present being dominating and highlighting strength, in particular white male strength, as being a main characteristic of manhood. He says his childhood was characterised by fear and describes how:

> *"I may have gotten past that sense of fear externally but subconsciously and inwardly there was still an element and here, finding myself in command of the most disciplined and possibly the most ruthless uniformed staff, it started to make me feel that I was in full control of everything now. If I can control these men then I am in complete and total control and then the fear element is gone and I just didn't seem to feel my sense of fear anymore, both consciously and subconsciously it was gone. I wasn't the same person that I had been and my compassion for the human element was greatly diminishing; I had less and less feeling towards people."*

In the interview extracts presented here, it is impossible to separate the role of gender in influencing, driving, and shaping the interviewee's participation in a far right movement and violence. The traditional gender constructs of manhood expressed in almost hyper masculine overtures and his experiences of them in childhood, adulthood, and with women, underpin his membership in a far right group. Membership in the far right group appears to have allowed extreme expression of that sense of hyper masculine manhood and his involvement in the group even reinforced it. So much so, that when it contradicted with the racial superiority ideology of the group, masculinity still took precedent. He continued to live with a Black American woman despite it posing risks to his safety and participation in the group because being a man (protector, disciplined, in control, responsible), was felt more strongly than the white superiority the group purported. Membership in the American Nazi Party allowed him to act out a masculinity that was simultaneously drilled into him and denied him. Racial superiority was almost secondary. Gender constructs are fundamental to the interviewee's involvement in the American Nazi Party, and when trying to understand the role of gender it is important to identify where its influence presents, and what it intersects with to facilitate membership rather than separate it from the complex and interwoven eco-system of influences.

In the case of this interviewee, his love for the American Black woman won over and after a cancer scare he left the American Nazi Party, and they were married in her church.

It is important to now turn to the experiences of female former members of far right groups to identify how gender shapes and influences those experiences. The comparison of female and male experiences allows for the revealing of how and where gender presents itself as an influencing factor or driver to far right violence. This is important because, as stated earlier in this report, the universalisation of male experiences has resulted in interventions designed to prevent far right violence that ignore or exclude female experiences and reinforce the gendered drivers of those experiences. Women's experiences have been rendered invisible in past responses and the unveiling of the influence of gender cannot be done without interrogating how, when, and where gender presents in the lives of men, women, and non-binary people directly impacted by far right violence.

As mentioned previously, a pattern within the interviewees included female interviewees noting past victimisation or victimisation during membership of a far right movement as significant elements of their experiences. This appeared far more common among female interviewees than male interviewees, with male interviewees often evoking traditional male gender norms of strength, authority, power, and control in how they described their experiences.

We will turn to an exploration of why women might evoke their own victimisation in describing experiences of involvement in far right movements and violence later. But it is worth first illustrating victimisation as described by one female interviewee.

In the below extended extract, the interviewee evokes a range of adverse childhood experiences from exposure to casual racism, sexual abuse and rape, bulling, divorce of parents, and sexual exploitation as creating vulnerabilities that intersect and drive her to risky behaviour including involvement in far right groups and perpetrating violence on behalf of that group.

> *"For as long as I remember my mum has always struggled with emotional and mental health – so depression. Back then they called it manic depression, today they call it bipolar disorder. She would say really inappropriate things, you know like, "there are people that want to steal you away and rape and murder you." These are things when I'm like a little kid, you know, hearing these things and I'm thinking, oh my god.*
>
> *From that young age I would hear that kind of stuff. I have always had a very vivid imagination, and I've had night terrors also from a young age which may or may not be related to some of my upbringing.*
>
> *I had early PTSD I think.*
>
> *I don't know how old I was, but something happened where she was so stressed out and depressed like her eyelashes fell out and I don't know how old I was but one day I got hold of a pair of scissors and cut all my eyelashes off, like just weird things, you know, would happen.*
>
> *This is something that I have not talked about often, my dad's dad, I was never allowed around him because he molested my dad's sisters, but my dad still talked to him, still associated with him. I don't remember ever being around him, but I think something happened to me as I remember, there are things from my childhood that are very hazy that I've kind of blocked out. I remember going through a period of time where my vagina hurt very bad, I remember being bathed by my mum and just screaming and crying because it burned, and it hurt so much...*
>
> *Going into the sixth grade I was horrified because you know, new school and I was a dork, like I was overweight, I had braces, I wore glasses, my mum gave me this horrific poodle perm mullet haircut and like that's great for some people but for a kid that age... not a good look. Immediately, going in there the students were so different from what I was used to, and it wasn't like I didn't hear cursing at home or know about sex or drinking or drugs, but it was people my age now that are all doing it and talking about it.*
>
> *Sixth grade in the school was the first time I remember being bullied horribly by black people and at that moment everything my parents told me was true...My mum's favourite saying when I was a child was; "you're my daughter, I will always love you, there's nothing you could do to make me love you less except never bring home a n****** or another woman" and I would randomly hear this stuff from her...*

*Once he [dad] was kind of bent over and either his glasses or his pen fell in the oil pan and he didn't realise I was there and he just unconsciously said, "you f****** n*****". So, it was things like that, that I would hear. It was very casual, I tend to refer to it as the old fashioned armchair racism, you know like they weren't out there going to rallies or anything, but they were racist and homophobic.*

When I started to go through puberty I was attracted to other girls, but I was so horrified because of what I was being taught in my catholic school plus what I heard from my mum. There was this tremendous amount of shame, guilt and I literally thought if anybody finds out I'm going to be, best case scenario, excommunicated from my family and worst case scenario I'm going to be stoned to death and burn in the everlasting pits of hell. So, this is like ten/eleven years old, and I walked around all the time just horrified like is somebody going to know? Could somebody look at me and know what I'm thinking or what I'm dreaming about or things like that and I started really struggling...

I also know the point that I broke, that was it, that was where my life went. I fought her [a bully] back. Something happened, something broke, I had never felt that much rage in my entire life, and I remember taking her and just slamming her into that wall and it just came off its tracks. I don't think I actually punched her, but I sent her almost backwards over a desk like that was it and I don't remember even like how it stopped, I don't think I got in trouble... something about me changed and something about the way I was perceived changed. My life literally changed overnight, and I went from being this like meek, timid, bullied uncomfortable young woman to still not comfortable with myself but feeling like, 'hey I have some power now, I have a way out of this', and once that happened there was just no going back for me.

I started hanging out with a group of kids who listened to heavy metal music and wore black all the time and it just literally changed me.

So, I finished that grade a different person, eighth grade, completely different person but what happened was I took her place, I became the bully. I think I thought that if I'm the one doing this it's not going to happen to me again. I became even worse than her, I really enjoyed the feeling of being recognised for something other than how I looked, how people felt I was a target, and I didn't understand it then, at all, I just knew that this was better than what I was feeling before...By that point, there were already parts of myself that I had compartmentalised and tried to bury.

I realise now that when I was doing the bullying I was not only doing it to try and prevent it from happening to me and because it made me feel like I had some power but also because I had so much internal pain it was almost like I was trying to beat my pain into other people. It was like I just can't hold this much anymore and that was part of the self-harm. I was like if I could take my mind off of this pain for a little bit – even the physical – for thirty seconds it was a break from that...

*My friend and I had friends that we went to school with who were just like, 'hey there's a place to go party', and squat or whatever, who would bring drugs or liquor and we probably slept with like a hundred guys over a summer and this is another thing that then I didn't understand it. As an adult and given everything I've done to kind of grow as a human being and work through these things, I realise I was trying to do things that I associated with being an adult – smoking, drinking, drugs, sex – these were all the things that I thought would make me an adult. Aside from that, I felt so unwanted and so unloved I associated sex with love and thought if I give them sex and I do what they want somebody is going to love me and I thought I could f*** myself away from being gay, like if I f*** enough guys I'm not going to be anymore...Now, you know what I think about? So, a lot of these guys that all of these years later I see on Facebook that are now married and have families, I can't tell you how many times I have thought about messaging and saying, 'you got a daughter? So, how would you feel if somebody did to your daughter the kind of s*** you used to do to people?'*

*By that time though, I was starting to get involved with the far right, so essentially in high school right, around fifteen, I was going into high school, I still had that reputation of like being this tough bully, always getting into fights and then I was the s***. Even though I had a few friends I still didn't feel like I belong,*

you know like I have the place where I'm supposed to be, so I literally went from little group to little group for quite a while in high school trying to figure out where do I fit, like where's my place.

So much of it [trauma], I didn't understand, I couldn't digest the stuff that happened to me, the things that I compartmentalised and tried to bury. It was all there under the surface, but it was like I tried to hide from it with the drinking, with doing drugs, with anger, with violence, with so many negative things it was nothing that I sat and did any critical thinking about then...I started hanging out with a little town gang, I started hanging out with them and I really felt like this is cool because I can be angry, I can get into fights, like they're doing criminal stuff, stealing stuff and I skipped school one day and I was smoking pot and drinking and I think one of them put something in my drink and I remember a little bit about it but I was raped and that was the first time I tried to kill myself.

*They traded like the anarchy symbols and that kind of stuff for confederate flags and swastikas. I fell through like every crack...I started hanging out with older skinheads. In the beginning, it wasn't so much that they were skinheads...Hanging out with them, the main thing for me was I could be as mad as I wanted to be, and they would never be like 'what the f*** is wrong with you?' I was attracted to that, like to me that was power, that was being put in a position where bad things couldn't happen to me because I'm the one doing these things, and I have the power...I was so willing to be violent they used me because that was double humiliation, you know, for a guy to be bullied by a woman and just take it. I was trying to be a feminist-Nazi but I kind of was. It wasn't like equal rights, but it was like I'm going to rise and be something here.*

So, that was kind of my entrance into the far right. If I wasn't violent and I wasn't willing to be violent I think my life would've been much different in that regard, I wouldn't have been accepted. That was one of the biggest things I think that kept me around was because they knew and because there are so few women compared to the number of men involved and then to be violent on top of it... I think that it was easy for me to accept because of my childhood.

All that time the very few experiences I had with people of colour or other people were very bad experiences, so it almost played right into what my parents taught me."

In the above extract, the female interviewee provides a comprehensive description of adverse childhood experiences and family conditions that are understood to have acted as drivers to her involvement in far right violence. These traumatising experiences coupled with the normalising of racism within her environment created vulnerabilities towards risky behaviour (drugs, sex, crime, gangs, etc.) and also made her susceptible to the influences of far right gangs. They victimised her in complex and interlocking ways so that taking ownership of violence (becoming the perpetrator of violence as a bully and as a member of a far right gang) allowed her to reverse the victimisation. Violence inflicted *on* her was disempowering, while violence inflicted *by* her on others was empowering. Her descriptions of gender based violence (GBV) such as child sexual abuse, rape, and sexploitation as a teenager are important in understanding how gendered power was experienced through victimisation and how far right violence (violence towards male members, feminist-Nazi, etc.) allowed her to acquire that power. The purpose of power is also understood differently for the female interviewee in that it's end purpose is not, like the male interviewee, to attain a feeling of strength, utopia, indestructability, and influence over others, but to protect her from the violence and power others may have over her. In many ways she sought protection in the power violence gave her.

The above two extracts provide examples of how gender presents in individuals who were once involved in far right movements and violence and how they understand and make sense of those experiences. Gender intersects with other characteristics and is woven into almost every element of their personal narratives. How it influences the sense making and personal narratives appeared to vary to some degree between male and female interviewees. This is not to say male interviewees did not evoke adverse childhood experiences or victimisation as drivers of their involvement in far right movements and violence. They did and often. Rather, there were nuances in that male interviewees often leaned into gender norms around masculinity to make sense of those experiences and female interviewees referenced gendered victimisation, a gender norm often associated with womanhood.

There are likely to be multiple explanations for why this general pattern emerged from the interviews and to determine those reasons would require further research. However, it is worth noting a number of them here.

Firstly, gender norms and societal conditions are influencing drivers of far right violence and position men and women as susceptible to the influence of far right movements in different ways. We are influenced from a young age by culturally dominant male and female gender constructs and norms. This may involve those gender norms and conditions shaping experiences, including the likelihood of adverse experiences such as gender based violence, sexploitation, etc. We experience power differently partly because of our gender, and women and girls are more likely to experience victimisation as a result of gender. The women interviewed may evoke victimisation as drivers of their involvement in far right movements and violence, because they are more likely to have experienced [gendered] victimisation.

Gender norms and conditions also shape how our identity is formed including how we make sense of past experiences. We lean into the gender norms we are conditioned into to make sense of those experiences. Men may lean into traditional constructs of masculinity and women may lean into traditional constructs of femininity to make sense of lived experiences, including involvement in far right movements and violence. That is to say, gender norms shape not just what we experience but also how we make sense of that experience.

The role of gender as a driver of far right violence has historically been overlooked in how we respond and intervene to prevent that violence. Yet it is stitched into experiences of far right violence in multiple, complex, and interlocking ways. Gender acts as a driver to far right violence and as a construct to make sense of our experiences of it. Interrogating the role of gender as a driver and sense-making construct is critical to addressing the wider cultural and social conditions that enable far right violence and to ensuring our responses do not reinforce those enabling gender norms and conditions. The interviewees demonstrated that how we perform gender in our environments and what we think about gender is important to how we make sense of far right violence.

Use of Traditional Gender Roles within Far Right Movements

There is a plethora of literature establishing how far right movements leverage traditional gender norms as part of recruitment strategies and management of far right group dynamics and structure. This trend is perhaps best crystallised by the modern far right 'trad wife' movement where women "as wives and mothers are celebrated as a pure, authentic form of white womanhood."[17] In the modern far right trad wife movement, women are encouraged to embrace their traditional gender roles of wife, homemaker, and child bearer to save the white race from a range of threats. Through women embracing the traditional gender roles, men are then able to fulfil their traditional masculine role of defender of the white race, protector of white women and the family, and provider. The spread of the far right trad wife movement has not gone unnoticed, with trad wife women leveraging social media to promote the ideology and lifestyle.

Modern technology has facilitated a transnational trad wife culture, expanding networks, organising capacity, and influence. American-based trad wife social media influencers are at the helm of the movement, amassing thousands of followers with some arguing they create a pipeline into the alt-right.[18] These trad wife influencers advance the internalisation of the far right and leverage traditional gender roles as gateways into white supremacy. However, the leveraging of traditional gender roles by the far right to recruit individuals (both men and women) and manage group or network dynamics through designated roles and responsibilities between the sexes is not new. The use of traditional gender roles within the far right in the United States has been used historically to stoke fear around the purity of the white race and the need to protect the chastity of white women from racialised threats.

Interviews revealed a sinister contradiction in how traditional gender roles are leveraged against white women within far right movements to keep them in their place, inferior to white men. Many of the women interviewed described how traditional gender roles are often used as a bait and switch scam in that white women are sold the narrative that their natural role is as wives and mothers, which entitles them to the protection of white men, but once in those movements, those white men turn on them. The women interviewed described those contradictions as creating a bind that makes exiting the movement harder and forces compliance with its rules and

objectives. The abuse they may experience from within the group is explained as a consequence of their failure to fulfil their role as a white woman correctly, as wife, mother, care provider, a woman of purity and in service to the white race and the needs of white men. A mythical white woman is evoked to reinforce the control men have over the women in the group with the binary of 'virgin' or 'whore,' which is leveraged against them to reinforce their submission to men. Far right movements and violence are not solely rooted in racial superiority ideologies, but also in gender superiority.

The below extract from an interview with a woman once associated with far right groups illustrates how traditional gender roles are leveraged against women in different ways to control them, sustain their membership, and exploit them for different purposes.

> *"The predatory nature of the people that were in like the higher up I can't imagine thinking, you know, it's the same as any other grooming. People see something, see someone that's vulnerable, and they start to say what they need. So, the ends justify the means like, you're so pretty, you have blond hair and blue eyes and these things, you know, we need you. I hadn't been needed for anything like ever...all of the men were abusive, but all of the women were insecure and seeking. I found people that accepted me and were going to keep me safe. And my parents failed to keep me safe because the worst thing was happening in our home. And so, there were these third parties that were going to keep me safe and love me...All the women just kind of like, took their lumps [physical abuse] because they were kept safe. It's such a backwards thing. As I understood it, the glass ceiling, like the best you could do is baby breed for the white race. We were constantly being pitted against one another. You'd think they'd want us bonded, but in reality, they don't because if you bond then you can become strong. I really thought that my future was going to be just living with my strong white husband raising our white children."*

Accounts of the leveraging of traditional gender roles and combining them with gender based violence to exploit women within far right movements were common within the interviews.

Another female interviewee provided the below description:

> *"Well, there's that whole traditional women's place kind of expectation, but women are also expected to be very tough, to be violent, if necessary, to be well versed on all this propaganda and the conspiracies, the whole belief system. Women are told 'you're our most precious commodity', 'you're the mothers of the white race', 'you're going to be cherished', and women are placed on a pedestal in this way but at the same time you say the wrong thing and you get a backhand."*

Traditional gender roles are not only leveraged to recruit women into far right movements, but also men. Male interviewees described how far right movements would leverage those roles, adapting narrative according to the target individual, to draw them into far right movements, white supremacy, and violence, as illustrated by the extract below:

> *"A regular recruiting tactic of mine was I meet a p****** off white kid who's 16 and the first thing I want to find out is what he's really p***** off about. What's wrong in his life? Usually he's unpopular, that hurts to be outcast, but what really hurts about being unpopular is that girls don't like you. So, rather than be like 'well, hey, dude, why don't you take a shower once in a while and stop drinking and smoking pot every day? Get your s*** together then maybe someone will want to hang out with you.' That's all hard to do. So, it's much easier to be like: do you know the reason why these women aren't interested in you? It's because the Jews put these black basketball players all over the TV and all over these billboards and all over every magazine to twist their minds. It's because they're all so weak. Their minds are twisted by a billboard to make them think that these black basketball players are ideal men. So, your whole beef, all of your misery, it's not your fault. It's the Jews' fault. It's the women's fault but yours because they had their mind corrupted... [when the target individual is a father] ...do you know what's going to happen to your daughter? What the Jews are going to do to your daughter? Women are a weapon... we love them so much and we're sacrificing for them and we're ready to kill and die to preserve their honour, it's all for them."*

Of course, there was diversity of experiences among those interviewed with other interviewees describing how traditional gender norms and roles were abandoned in the movements they associated with in order to attract individuals more inclined towards gender equality or because men in the movements felt traditional gender roles place heavy burdens on them that they did not want to fulfil. Some interviewees identified traditional gender roles as still important but incorrectly applied by far right movements.

It is important to unpack how traditional gender roles are used to reinforce discrimination towards and control of women within far right movements, while also exploited to further white supremacist ideas of racial hierarchy. Wider traditional gender roles, their presence, promotion, and weaponisation were described by many interviewees as enabling far right movements, dynamics, outcomes, and violence.

Gender Based Violence (GBV) and the Far Right

Another area of intersection between gender and far right violence involves the presence of gender based violence within the movements.

Many of the women interviewed reported being subject to violence from the group and other members. They often described how they thought being a member of a far right movement and willing (in some cases) to commit violence on behalf of the movement would protect them from being subjected to violence themselves. However, this was simply not the case and instead they seemed to exist within a cycle of violence that they helped create and sustain but could also be victims of. The nature of this violence varied but included intimate partner violence, sexploitation, sexual assault, physical attacks by the group, coercive control, grooming, trafficking of young women to older men, denial of reproductive rights and forced abortions.

Accounts by female interviewees were littered with experiences of multiple forms of gender based violence and as one interviewee described it,

> *"it's like being in an abusive relationship with fifty people."*

They also describe the normalisation of gender based violence and how it was often casual, expected, and something that comes with the territory for women.

As one interviewee described it

> *"I made a couple of really close guy friends as such and now they say, 'I can't believe I didn't treat women better. I can't believe I didn't think about, you know, that this is wrong.' But it was sanctioned...I'm sure that some people do love their women but what I found was it's just ownership."*

Female interviewees often described how participation in far right movements included experiencing gender based violence. Interestingly, they also described how after exiting the movement, shame and silence continued to surround their experiences of that violence. A number of women described how within the United States community of individuals who have exited far right movements, the dominance of male experiences rendered gender based violence invisible. Some of the female interviewees described how within the post-exit community there is space to discuss, acknowledge, and repair the harm caused by racially motivated violence, but that the same space does not exist for gender based violence. Some suggested this was due to an unwillingness on the part of the men to publicly acknowledge the violence towards women and girls they may have perpetuated and even some of those men covering up that violence to protect themselves and other men. This resulted in many of the women interviewed being unwilling to speak about their experiences of gender based violence within far right movements publicly for fear of retribution. It was not uncommon among the women interviewed for them to have experienced gender based violence while within far right movements, to have then left only to find past perpetrators dominating community and public discourse around far right violence. For many of the female interviewees this had a chilling effect on their willingness to share their experiences and reduced the visibility of gender based violence within the wider public conversation on far right violence.

In interviews with men, awareness and acknowledgement of gender based violence within far right movements varied. Descriptions of gender based violence within far right movements by male interviewees ranged from an acknowledgement that it was commonplace to presenting far right movements as a league of gentlemen.

For example, one male interviewee described the far right culture in ways that evoked chivalry towards women:

> *"Although chances are that the sign of the swastika will always be seen as something evil and malevolent these were still people who were still holding doors open for women, helping old people cross the street, things of that nature, setting a positive example..."*

Another described how domestic violence

> *"is second nature in the movement. It's a hidden thing; nobody talks about it."*

Later he describes how men within the far right group may experience retributive violent attacks by other males for intimate partner violence when that violence was considered unjustified or went too far. Justified intimate violence was described as dependent on the situation and whether the woman was perceived as a threat to the group as a whole.

The starkest difference between how female and male interviewees described gender based violence within far right movements was the capacity of both gender groups to talk about it in detail. Generally speaking, female interviewees were able to describe the nature of the gender based violence in detail as well as its purpose, whereas male interviewees acknowledged its prevalence and impact while offering accounts that in many cases glossed over it. Overall, male accounts of violence within far right movements did not treat gender based violence with the same gravity as racially motivated violence, while it featured heavily in the experiences of female interviewees.

Much has been written about the intersection of far right violence and gender based violence. Accounts of women involved in those movements detail how traditional gender roles and gender based violence are often combined to leverage power over women and girls and interlock to bind them to the movement. The interviews conducted appear to confirm existing research and evidence around this intersection. Women with lived experiences of involvement in far right movements and violence have much to say about the role of gender based violence in those movements and its impacts. Yet, the interviews indicate limited space for those contributions to feed into community and public debate on the far right. This limited space is partly driven by men and male experiences of involvement in far right movements and violence dominating those spaces, a limited capacity and/or appetite to include gender based violence in debate by those men, and consequently women being fearful of or having reservations about sharing their experiences. This can have a chilling and silencing effect on women, which then reinforces the dominance of male experiences and creates a cycle of gender blindness and bias in how we respond to far right movements and violence.

Victim/Perpetrator Binary

Historically, women have been perceived as victims of violence. Gender norms and biases have limited our capacity to perceive women as perpetrators of violence. The rise of terrorist groups such as ISIS and their success at recruiting women into their movement as active members created a global shift within the security and violence prevention sector so that our perception of women's involvement in violent groups was widened. A range of responses followed, aimed at challenging gender biases that position women as victims and developing strategies that respond to the risks women pose as perpetrators of violence. Subsequent research has shown that women play "many different roles, including as supporters, facilitators, or perpetrators [in violent groups]."[19]

Efforts to challenge gender biases that position women as victims have resulted in the normalisation of the truism that 'women can be perpetrators too'. Violence prevention interventions are often careful to scrutinise whether women are being treated as only victims or are also addressing the very real possibility that they may be perpetrators. There is a clear security and public safety need to recognise that women can be perpetrators of violence including, as the interviews showed, of far right violence. Disregarding the capacity of women to enable and perpetrate violence comes with very real world security and safety risks.

However, in our efforts to address one gender bias (women are victims) we have leaned into another gender bias, that of the victim/perpetrator binary.

How we interrogate women's involvement in far right violence is different to how we interrogate men's involvement. We do not require an assessment of how men might be victims and easily perceive their

capacity to be perpetrators. This may be rooted in the reality that men commit violence at a higher rate than women and so we overlook how men may be victims. It may also result in a disservice to men in that they may have also experienced victimisation as part of their involvement in far right movements. However, when we interrogate men's involvement in far right movements and violence, we generally start from a position of complexity, understanding that their involvement may be a product of various drivers. We do not see men's involvement in far right movements through the lens of the victim/perpetrator binary.

Very often, when interrogating women's involvement in far right movements and violence we channel our understanding through the victim/perpetrator binary. This may take the form of determining whether they are victims or perpetrators, ensuring we do not overlook that they may be perpetrators, or treating them as solely victims. However we lean into it, the victim/perpetrator binary frames our understanding of women's involvement in violence and narrows our ability to understand as either/or.

This is problematic for a number of reasons, not least because we do not treat women's involvement in violence with the same complexity as we do men's. We take a reductive approach to women, scaling down their role to that of victim or perpetrator. This may have consequences to how we prevent far right violence and how we design interventions and support services to support women impacted by it.

The common use of the binary is also problematic because it mimics a wider gender binary that has been leveraged against women and girls through millennia. The binary of 'virgin/whore,' sometimes described as the 'Madonna-whore complex,' positions women as either pure and saintly or debased and beyond retribution: victim *or* perpetrator.[20] It reduces women to one or the other and continues to shape our understandings of female assertiveness and agency.[21] Sociologists have argued the 'virgin/whore' binary or complex perpetuates patriarchal norms that allow the maintenance of male power through evoking shame, ridicule, out-casting, and female compliance.[22] The victim/perpetrator binary replicates that binary in our understanding of women's capacity for violence in that women are either innocent untainted victims of violence (virgin) or violent destructive perpetrators (whore). There is no room for complexity and women's role in far right violence is treated as one-dimensional. Women are not treated as muti-faceted whole people in our responses to far right violence. This not only risks narrowing interventions to support women to move away from far right movements and violence but also strengthens the wider 'virgin/whore' binary into our culture and society and embeds it into our security and public safety responses. It may be no coincidence that the same binary is leveraged against women inside far right movements (as discussed above) by those groups to lock them into subservient positions to male members. The Madonna/whore gender norm echoes in far right movements through the mythical white woman/promiscuous binary leveraged against women and also echoes in our responses through the victim/perpetrator binary.

Many of the women interviewed kicked against the labels of victim or perpetrator and were unable to identify with either. They perceived themselves as survivors. This does not mean they did not acknowledge their contributions to far right violence, but simply that those contributions could not be separated from their experiences of victimisation and wider non- victimising life experiences. While they enabled or perpetrated violence, they often experienced violence themselves. They also had other rich (non-violent) experiences that may or may not have influenced their involvement in far right violence. The lived experiences of women involved in far right movements do not fit neatly into our gendered binaries and cannot be reduced to one singular label or identifying marker.

Our gender bias, norms and constructs shape our responses in ways we may not even realise. The victim/perpetrator binary and its apparent mimicking of wider gender binaries that reduce female autonomy and agency and lock women in disempowering positions within patriarchal societies is a useful example of how wider gender norms can filter into and shape far right movements and violence *and* how we respond.

Unique Pathways to Far Right Violence

An important learning outcome of the research is around what might draw individuals (male and female) to far right movements and violence and what might sustain their involvement. Much has been written on radicalisation to violence and there exists an extensive body of research aimed at identifying drivers. Interventions designed to support individuals to move away from interest or involvement in far right movements and violence often start with attempts to identify what drives and sustains that

interest and involvement in the first place. Once those drivers are identified, interventions tend to seek to address them or offer alternative pro-social opportunities or connections for those individuals. The search for a list of drivers of radicalisation to violence continues and as violence prevention policies adapt to changing social realities. The list is forever reconfigured and added to.

However, the interviews conducted as part of this Fellowship indicate there is no universal list of drivers that when combined draw individuals to far right movements and/or sustain their involvement. Instead, the research indicates each individual trod a unique path, with their own set of drivers which, when combined, positioned the individual as susceptible to influence of the far right and capable of violence. Understanding what drives individuals towards far right movements and violence must include understanding what the unique drivers were for them and how and when they combined in their life experiences. Intervening in a person's life requires an understanding of that life.

It is worth noting that conditions which may protect from risky behaviour may do so in some cases and not in others. For example, while low socio-economic background is sometimes treated as a universal driver to involvement in far right violence, it may not always be the case. Individuals interviewed came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Many described middle-class childhoods, attendance at good schools, and relatively privileged upbringings. Poverty is often presented as a vulnerability to involvement in far right violence, and yet in the case of many interviewed wealth did not act as a protector. Again, understanding the unique experiences, histories, and conditions of individuals' lives should be the starting point of any intervention.

The same drivers that draw individuals to far right violence may also create other vulnerabilities and drive them towards other risky behaviour such as abuse of drugs and alcohol, other forms of violence, criminality, homelessness, and sex work. In fact, the interviewees described a range of vulnerabilities and risky behaviour, with far right movements and violence being one of those. Treating involvement in far right movements and violence as distinct and worthy of intervention may not be the best approach. Rather, intersectional approaches that treat the individual as a whole person with a range of complex needs, vulnerabilities, and drivers may provide more meaningful interventions. Tailored and holistic support and intervention packages that address interlocking vulnerabilities are more likely to create conditions for individuals where alternatives become more possible.

If a common driver of involvement in far right movements and violence were to be identified, perhaps the most repeated from the body of interviews was exposure to normalised racism in childhood from within their families, social network, school, and/or community. Casual racism, the normalisation of racism, racially biased structures, and discourses of racial hierarchy and superiority increase our capacity to tolerate more extreme versions such as white supremacy. White supremacy does not feel or sound extreme when individuals are conditioned from childhood to accept discourses of racial hierarchy. Committing acts of physical violence against those perceived as racially inferior can and was in some cases an inevitable outcome of being conditioned to feel racially superior. Racially motivated violence was perceived as not necessarily a right, but a duty.

The role of gender as a driver of far right violence has historically been overlooked in how we respond and intervene to prevent that violence. Yet it is stitched into every facet of life in the far right. The gender norms that underpin structures, power and privilege, bias, conventions and rules that regulate and govern our lives serve the same function in far right movements. The misogyny that fortifies women and girl's involvement in far right movements and violence is an extreme expression of the gender norms and bias that regulate our everyday lives. The complex intersecting and interlocking facets of misogyny in the far right are a product of and sustained by the continued gender biases present in our societies. Misogyny in the far right, like racial superiority, is a symptom rather than the problem.

Individuals engaged in far right violence are often labelled as extreme. Yet, they do not exist on the periphery of our social and cultural norms and structures. Rather, they are a distilled expression of those norms and structures. They are a reflection, extension, and product of us and emerge out of our societies. Fixating on interventions that target the individual, without simultaneously addressing the social and cultural norms, biases, and structures that create environments within which those individuals emerge risks reinforcing and embedding those drivers even more and creating social conditions that allow far right violence to thrive.

Survivor Communities and Transcending Violence

Concerned at how the 2016 United States presidential election took place and the polarising nature of public discourse and debate, the Jewish Community Centre (JCC) of Pittsburgh felt a responsibility towards strengthening the fabric of community. Rooted in its history of supporting communities on the fringes of American society and core Jewish values of 'love your neighbour as yourself' and 'do not stand idle while your neighbour bleeds', the JCC established The Center for Loving Kindness in 2017. Inspired by the interfaith work of Martin Luther King, The Center for Loving Kindness seeks to redefine the concept of 'neighbour' from a geographic term to a moral concept.[23] It does this through interfaith, intercultural, interracial, and civic engagement partnerships.

On 27 October 2018, a terrorist entered the Tree of Life – Or L'Simcha Congregation Synagogue in the Squirrel Hill neighbourhood of Pittsburgh (adjacent to the JCC) during Shabbat morning services, murdering eleven worshippers and injuring seven more. The attack brought the realities of hate unshackled to the door of a community already aware of and responsive to the potential violent outcomes of marginalisation and polarisation.

A week spent with the Jewish community of Squirrel Hill in the aftermath of the 2018 attack left lasting impressions on what far right violence does to individuals, communities, and even an entire city. It reveals that community conditions before the attack inform how a community responds and the shape that response might take.

Recovery from targeted far right violence can and will take various shapes and forms. Ensuring the availability and accessibility of resources that support individuals, families, and entire communities to recover from the trauma is critical. Those resources are diverse and multiple, including providing security, housing, and welfare in the immediate aftermath of violence, safe physical spaces for people to gather, short-term and long-term individual, family, and group counselling, financial and human resources to rebuild spaces and address loss of income, and specialist expertise. Well-tested national, regional, and local crisis management policies and practices should kick in when communities are targets of such violence.

But community recovery from such violence is not marked only by the availability and dispersal of those resources. Interviews with Squirrel Hill community members and survivors of the Pittsburgh attack left the impression that communities marked by awareness of social, economic, cultural, and political conditions, proactive engagement in community and wider social affairs, understanding of positionality, inequity, and marginalisation, are more robust and resilient, and therefore better able to rebuild in a collaborative way in the aftermath of violence. Recovery is influenced by the extent to which communities are tapped into internal and external social, political, and economic conditions, trends, and shifts coupled with the nature of collective identity.

The description by then Director of the Center for Loving Kindness of the weeks leading up to the attack provides an example of that:

> *"I'll give you an example of how we're, we're trying to learn from and with each other. Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish year. And we ran a seminar in the afternoon around remembering our dead, which is one of the standard things that happens on Yom Kippur. But in so doing, we went eight minutes down the road to Hazelwood. And we pulled a friend of ours, a woman who 25 years earlier, her two adult African American sons were killed by gun violence within 40 days of each other. And she then dedicated her life to being a grief counsellor, as a testimony to her children. We went just a little bit to the east of us to Wilkinsburg. And we sought out a pastor who was doing work on rebuilding Wilkinsburg after the Franklin Avenue massacre where a family of five was killed because of a drug deal gone bad. We asked them to help the people that were assembled to understand how you get beyond incredible trauma as a community, thinking that if we can learn from them about how to do it as a community, then each of us individually, in our own sense of trauma and loss can do it as well. But little did we know that three weeks later we'd have the shooting here, that we came to the realisation very quickly as a result of the shooting of two things."*

Perhaps the most lasting impression of time spent with the Center for Loving Kindness is that in the aftermath of the Tree of Life – Or L'Simcha Congregation Synagogue attack many of those impacted collectively engaged in a process of deep self-reflection. There was a sense that in the midst of

the long-lasting devastation, grief, and trauma, there was a collective effort to turn inwards to ask difficult questions. As described by the then Director of the Center for Loving Kindness:

> *"Antisemitism is a symptom of a larger hatred, and if we want to get rid of that larger hatred, we have to work with everyone else to get rid of that hatred. That was the first thing that we learned. The second thing that we learned is that the entire world stopped on 27 October. The entire world stopped for eleven white Jews who died. And just about once every ten days, there's a young black man in Pittsburgh who dies and no one cares, no one seems to care. We began to realise that even though we were dealing with a low frequency high impact event on October 27, there are high frequency, high impact events that happen all around us. It's not a converse relationship. It's not low frequency, high impact. And then high frequency, low impact. Everything is high impact, right, because it impacts a family, impacts the community, and impacts that individual. And we began to really open up our eyes to that. October 27 didn't teach us that. It just reminded us how much privilege we actually have. And so, throughout the course of these past months, we've been continuing to do what we're doing before, everything's exactly the same and incredibly different. We told ourselves it is all about relationships, getting to know other people and realising that the only way that we're going to fight that larger hatred is if we block out the concept that you're different than me."*

While self-reflection is not necessarily expected or required of a community targeted by violence, in the case of Pittsburgh it was an outcome of the experience. That outcome appeared to be influenced by a number of conditions, one of those being the strength of pre-existing interracial, interfaith, and intercultural relationships with others outside the 'community' as described above. An outpouring of practical, emotional, and psychological support from Black, Christian, and Muslim community members and institutions also drove that self-reflection. Pre-existing efforts to redefine the term 'neighbour' as a moral concept rather than marked by geographic borders and boundaries also created a community identity conducive to self-reflection. In the aftermath of the violent attack the pre-existing concept of 'neighbour' as a mutual moral duty came into play and supported how community members made sense of their experience.

In interviews with female members of the Squirrel Hill community they offered insights into how gender may intersect with recovery. Many of the women interviewed described how they individually engaged in the collective experience of self-reflective recovery. While active members of community institutions and organisations, they also described organic informal efforts they took. These included organising regular informal coffee mornings with women from other races, faiths, and cultures, creating spaces and platforms for individuals to write and share their feelings and experiences, organising regular welfare check-ins with vulnerable individuals, and youth discussion groups in living rooms. This is not to say women did not engage in or lead formal recovery efforts, as they did, or that men did not organically develop informal recovery efforts, as they did, but to recognise that alongside more formalised recovery efforts, informal micro efforts driven by individuals are also taking place and are important to that recovery. Women described those efforts as important to them, yet because of their informal nature they might easily be invisible. Making those informal efforts visible and understanding their significance is important to individual and wider community recovery.

For the Squirrel Hill community of Pittsburgh, self-reflection facilitated its capacity to transcend the impacts of the far right violent attack, and the attack was treated by many as an opportunity to reflect on wider violence that might affect the everyday lives of others – the high frequency, high impact attacks that the Director of the Center for Loving Kindness described.

The self-reflection the community was well positioned to engage in allowed what the Director described as

> *"leaning forward on the values that make us all connected as humans, as opposed to on the rituals that distinguish us as Jews. And I think that it's a very smart way to move forward. Because that's how we're going to be able to help people understand that all of us, every one of us matters, no matter what our life circumstances are."*

What the Director of the Center for Loving Kindness describes as privilege can in many ways be understood as community positionality. Time with

the Squirrel Hill community left the impression that robust and healthy communities are better equipped to respond to shocks and violence in ways that allow healing. Communities who experience disadvantage and depletion of social, economic, and cultural resources and disparity may not be as well positioned to tread their unique and ongoing path to recovery.

More than that, the pre-existing capacity of communities to respond to such violent shocks is also shaped by the often racialised and gendered social norms and expectations placed on them and how we have historically responded as societies to attacks on them. An example of this is an interview conducted at a Black church in Pittsburgh where the pastor described the ripple effects of the attack on the Tree of Life – Or L'Simcha Congregation Synagogue including how her congregation and community quickly organised to provide support to the Jewish community. She also commented on how during the galvanisation of the Black community of Pittsburgh to act as moral neighbours there was a feeling that Black churches have been attacked for as long as the existence of the nation itself. It was felt by some that far right violence comes as a national shock in some instances and not in others.

In June 2015, the historic and hugely significant Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina was attacked by a white supremacist resulting in the murder of nine members of the congregation and injury of one. The perpetrator turned his gun on the group of Black American church members after they welcomed him into their Bible study. After a sixteen-hour hunt for the perpetrator, he was arrested with reports that police officers then bought him a burger.[24] In an interview with Reverand Sharon Risher, the daughter of Ethel Lee Lance, who was one of the nine murdered in the attack along with two cousins, she describes how immediately after the attack there was a media fixation with the notion of forgiveness. In watching others impacted by the attack on news channels immediately after the incident talking about forgiveness she says:

> *"I started screaming when I heard* [*that*] *on the TV because I was like 'what? Wait a minute, who's forgiving what? We haven't even had time to process.' That was very hard for me, I just couldn't get with that thought of forgiveness so fast, so readily out there and the media ran with it. I felt like it was just like 'oh look at the black people.' Black people have been forgiving the atrocities that have been perpetrated against us for decades and here we are again talking about how we forgive, and I just wasn't on that bandwagon yet, I just didn't feel like that was what was in my heart."*

Reverend Sharon Risher now campaigns for common-sense gun reform in the United States. She often describes individuals who have lost loved ones to gun violence as members of the loneliest club.

> *"You have a group of people who have come together because of the devastation of gun violence and they are a group of people that understand everything that you are going through, it may be through different circumstances but death by gun violence is death regardless of the reason and nobody wants to be a part of that, nobody wants to be a part of that club but here we are and because we are in this group together we are going to lift all our voices collectively to be able to say we need to do something."*

The voices of survivors of far right violence are often drowned out by the priorities and fixations of others not directly impacted by that violence. Be it policy makers, politicians, those with social-cultural capital, experts, or professionals, what we can learn from survivors can be lost or hard to find.

Yet, they know first-hand the individual and community impacts of far right violence and have been placed in positions against their will to reckon with the forces that drive that violence. They have also through their experiences uncovered insights into conditions needed to prevent that violence and conditions needed for individual and collective recovery. Centring their experiences and insights is critical to both prevention of far right violence and recovery.

Conclusion

Sitting in the living rooms, kitchens, dining rooms, community centres, and faith buildings of individuals whose lives have been irreversibly changed by far right violence is not an exercise in academic learning. It is an existential experience and what can be learnt from the experience is difficult to reduce to a list of policy recommendations. Making sense of the experience takes time and emotional, intellectual, and even spiritual reflection. Some of that reflection was not necessarily available during the journey and making sense of it is never complete.

Tracking the devasting impacts of hate and violence on the lives of individuals and communities and seeing its long-lasting effects close up changes perspectives and attitudes. Policy recommendations do not do justice to the very real experiences of the individuals I met and the humanness of the issue.

It felt strange and discombobulating to one day be sitting in the living room of an individual who was once part of a far right group and proactively promoted and engaged in violence and the next to be sitting with a daughter whose mother and cousins were murdered by a white supremacist with aims to instigate a race war. Those feelings included rage, anger, disillusionment, fear, sadness, hopelessness, empathy and hope. At times I felt like a traitor for drinking coffee with former members of the KKK, that my presence in their home somehow validated their past convictions. At other times I felt an overwhelming sense of compassion for them and gratitude for their openness and hospitality. When sitting with members of the Jewish community of Pittsburgh and individuals like Sharon Risher my feelings were also confused. Drawing hope and resilience from their strength felt like a cliché and empathy felt like a disservice. The recommendations I might be able to draw from these experiences somehow still escape me.

Learnings

Perhaps reframing the question itself and moving away from policy or practical recommendations and towards alternative more creative ends might be more useful. Rather than searching for recommendations, the question I find myself asking is 'what have I learnt from the experience?'

Labelling

I have learnt that terms such as victim, perpetrator, survivor, and extremist are labels we use to categorise individuals and make sense of their place in the violence. Yet they are reductive and do not necessarily open up space for the profound private and public discussions needed to prevent far right violence. What those labels look like in the lived experiences of individuals and communities can be messy and confusing.

Within violence prevention circles labels such as 'extremist' and 'violent extremist' are used to describe any individual or group advocating, enabling, or using violence for a political, social, or ideological cause. Yet those labels disconnect those individuals and groups from us. They give us the false sense of security that they are somehow different from us and that they exist at the outer reaches of our moral and cultural norms and codes. They don't. They are not pariahs existing in the darkest corners of our communities. They are a distilled expression of the cultural norms and conditions that shape and influence the everyday life. Making those individuals exceptional has a pathologizing effect and sets us on a trajectory to heal or cure them of their violence. Yet, survivors of far right violence teach us to treat the social and cultural norms, conditions, and structures that position some individuals as capable of far right violence and others as the target. They teach us that far right violence is a symptom of an unwell society and that the treatment is to cultivate resilient communities built on loving kindness and to proactively and bravely address the societal conditions that enable hate.

Inclusivity

I have learnt that survivors also teach us that some experiences are given more significance than others. The experiences of women have for too long been ignored and their voices silenced. The dominance of male experiences has resulted in the reinforcement of the gender and cultural norms that underpin and enable far right violence rather than creating conditions that allow for the difficult task of dismantling those norms. The gender and cultural norms that shape our communities, families, and lives echo in the structures and norms of far right groups, the minds of individuals sympathetic to far right ideas, and how we respond to the physical violence

that comes with hate. We have developed a blindness to those connections because we have historically excluded the experiences and voices of individuals and communities that exist at intersections where they cross. Our public debates, consciousness, policies, and interventions must be inclusive in order to truly develop whole society solutions. We must ensure we see all the causes and impacts of far right violence in order to develop the right solutions.

Wider Social Context

Finally, I have learnt that we are all in some way complicit, consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or unintentionally. We are bound by the wider structures, conditions, and norms that enable far right violence and contribute to upholding those structures, conditions, and norms in our everyday lives and level of (or lack of) engagement in public affairs and life. For example, when we give weight to or validate gender norms that disadvantage women and girls and dehumanise those of non-heteronormative genders we reinforce the gendered distribution of power. This creates pathways into the far right and echoes in far right chambers.

Epitaph: The Summer of Far Right Riots

On 29 July 2024 an attacker entered a Taylor Swift themed party and murdered Isie Dot Stancombe (9 years old), Alice da Silva Aguiar (9 years old), and Bebe King (6 years old) in Southport, United Kingdom. Ten others were injured in the attack.[25] False rumours quickly spread on social media and in far right online chat rooms that the perpetrator was a Muslim migrant who arrived in the UK on a boat. Soon after the attack violence erupted in Southport with reports that members of the English Defence League, a far right anti-Islam group, took part in an attack on a mosque. Well-known far right agitators and figures repeated the false claims online despite the identity of the agitator being released and authorities making clear that the rumours were false.[26] Despite this, riots spread across the United Kingdom with hotels housing refugees set on fire, mosques attacked, roadblocks known as 'colour checks' set up, with individuals dragged off buses and out of their cars and attacked. As of mid-August 2024, almost 1,000 arrests were made and close to 400 people were charged with disorder offences.[27] The motive of the Southport perpetrator remains unknown.

While there was no singular far right group known to be coordinating the riots, reports indicated that many known groups participated and fuelled the riots online and offline both from within the United Kingdom and abroad. Some of the groups named include the transnational group Active Club Network,[28] Patriotic Alternative, British Movement,[29] National Front,[30] and Britain First.[31] The individuals rioting were not necessarily active members of any of those groups with many gravitating around key far right figures. In many ways the riots demonstrate how the far right has changed and evolved from what it once was, operating more as a complex ecosystem rather than an organised movement with structure and hierarchy. Taking place against a backdrop of wider cultural shifts, polarisation, and the mainstreaming of sentiments and policies once considered ultra conservative or far right, the riots also demonstrated that individuals do not need to be members of organised far right groups to be capable of and willing to engage in far right violence. Individuals can be galvanised into disconnected and unorganised groups of rioters through the sharing of a post on social media here and a click of a button there. When our wider social and cultural norms of human rights and democracy have been eroded and replaced with engineered grievances and misinformation there will always be individuals willing to take their hate to the streets.

Authorities and politicians fixated on tougher policing and a speedy and effective criminal justice response to bring the rioters to court. For many, when the riots stopped so did the public conversation. Yet the individuals involved will return to their families, homes, communities, schools, workplaces, schools, and online spaces with those resentments and grievances still intact, if not reinforced. Those resentments will be stoked by online agitators and well-known figures and allowed to fester. Unless we engage in honest and collective self-reflection that allows us to establish the facts, determine the players and engineers, and identify how we got here, the sentiments, mechanisms, drivers, and actors that fuelled the riots will continue. Organised spaces that allow social discourse that encourages interpersonal and intrapersonal self-reflection and commitment to a whole-society approach may offer a way forward.

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