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From:
Sent: August 11, 2023 10:06 AM
To:
Subject: RE: SIB 23/08-E WEAPONIZING FEMININITY: FEMALE INFLUENCERS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Classification: Unclassified / Non-classifié

Classification: Unclassified
Classification: Non-classifié
Not for PA / Ne pas classer

Here you go.

I note the comments on Social Media Algorithms and Artificial intelligence, in particular.

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From:
Sent: August 11, 2023 9:57 AM
To:
Subject: RE: SIB 23/08-E WEAPONIZING FEMININITY: FEMALE INFLUENCERS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Classification: Unclassified
Classification: Non-classifié
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Hi

Can you attach it to an email for the rest of us? Thanks!

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From:
Sent: August 11, 2023 12:55 PM
To:
Subject: RE: SIB 23/08-E WEAPONIZING FEMININITY: FEMALE INFLUENCERS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Classification: Unclassified
Classification: Non-classifié
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All,

I have CTSN. The document is UNCLASS//OFFICIAL USE ONLY and I don't see an impediment to sharing it. Does anyone want to read it? Although the title doesn't say so explicitly, it appears to focus on women within the IMVE online community.

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: August 11, 2023 9:47 AM
To: [redacted]

Subject: FW: SIB 23/08-E WEAPONIZING FEMININITY: FEMALE INFLUENCERS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Classification: Unclassified
Classification: Non-classifié
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Should you have CTSN

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: August 11, 2023 12:26 PM
To: [redacted]
Subject: SIB 23/08-E WEAPONIZING FEMININITY: FEMALE INFLUENCERS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Classification: Unclassified
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Please click on the link below to access this product (CTSN access required).

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IRCC – I [redacted] please forward to [redacted]

SIB 23/08-E WEAPONIZING FEMININITY: FEMALE INFLUENCERS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

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ITAC would like to express its gratitude to all agencies and departments of Canada's Security and Intelligence Community for the contributions they have made to this product, and invites those agencies and departments to provide feedback on the content of this threat assessment product.

SIB 23/08-E WEAPONIZING FEMININITY: FEMALE INFLUENCERS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Veuillez suivre le lien ci-dessous pour avoir accès à ce produit (accès au RCTS requis).

[redacted]

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Le CIET tient à remercier tous les organismes et les ministères de l'appareil canadien de la sécurité et du renseignement de leur contribution au présent document, et les invite à formuler des commentaires sur son contenu.

Thanks / merci,

[redacted]

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3103(18/09)

WEAPONIZING FEMININITY:
FEMALE INFLUENCERS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

ITAC CIET

STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

SIB 23/08-E
2023 08 11

KEY JUDGMENTS

In the online extremist milieu, **female social media influencers are active participants in radicalizing others**. Most limit their activities to promoting extremist ideologies, but some incite followers to violence, which could lead to acts of terrorism. *(U//OUO)*

Women who hide extremist messaging behind benign narratives are more likely to successfully radicalize new followers because average social media users do not intentionally seek out overtly extremist rhetoric. Female extremist influencers will likely continue to weaponize motherhood, hiding extremist rhetoric behind messaging about "traditional" values. They will also use approachable content to reach new followers, desensitize supporters to extremist rhetoric and promote radicalization. Although the **consumption of extremist content does not necessarily result in radicalization to violence**, it can give the appearance of broad support for extremist messaging, normalize the use of violence and build momentum for extremist movements. *(U//OUO)*

The convergence of **extremist content and artificial intelligence (AI) has resulted in AI acting as a force multiplier for extremist influencers**. AI is also able to co-opt, counter, and promote certain social movements, increasing the likelihood that vulnerable people and populations will be exposed to inflammatory content that could lead to radicalization and support for extremist beliefs. *(U//OUO)*

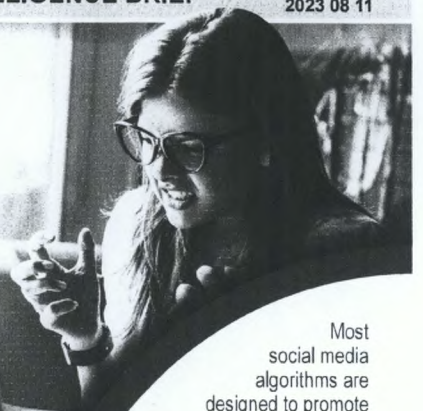
ASSESSMENT NOTE: *This report is based on open-source and media reporting and think tank analysis.*

(U//OUO)

MAINSTREAMING EXTREMISM

Women use social media just as frequently as men, and play important roles as consumers, creators and online influencers in general and likely also in the alt-right extremist online space. A RAND think tank analysis of social media platforms identified more than **6,600 Canadian alt-right extremist channels, pages, groups and accounts, with nearly 50,000 unique users.** Although RAND did not separate account users by gender, it is likely that women are as present as men on extremist social media platforms. *(U//OUO)*

A body of open-source research shows that **women in extremist communities are taking on an active role by creating content specifically on image-based platforms with livestreaming capabilities.** These women foster a sense of community and create spaces that **put their followers at ease, thereby normalizing and mainstreaming extremist rhetoric.** The reach and influence of these female creators can vary significantly; some have thousands of followers that they can mobilize to action while others have smaller audiences and no intent to inspire behaviour. Some female influencers openly advocate for violence, while others espouse extremist xenophobic, anti-government, anti-feminist and anti-immigration rhetoric. *(U//OUO)*



Canada-based female extremist influencers will continue to play an **important role** in the North American **extremist milieu**. *(U//OUO)*

CANADIAN IMPLICATIONS

Social media plays a role in radicalization to violence. The majority of existing analysis, particularly on threats of violence, has largely focused on men. The role of Canadian women has not been explored as widely, despite examples of known female radicalizers. The phenomenon of female extremist social media influencers has implications for Canadian counter-radicalization programming, as outlined in *Public Safety Canada's National Strategy on Countering Radicalization to Violence.* *(U//OUO)*

DIFFUSION *of extremist content* ONLINE

Posts by **INFLUENCERS with large or medium followings**

obvious

- Sharing conspiracy theories
- Posting calls to violence
- Mobilizing followers to action
- Fundraising for extremist causes
- Creating propaganda material
- Narrating, authoring or sharing manifestos

veiled

- Not encouraging violence explicitly
- Hiding extremist content behind everyday posts
- Posting memes and humour with extremist sentiment

Example: makeup tutorials with anti-feminist commentary, travel blogs that criticize 2SLGBTQI+ freedoms in other countries, videos about budgeting that include anti-immigration rhetoric about immigrants taking well-paying jobs

sporadic

- Women join chats or groups centred around a specific theme rather than an influencer
- Extremist discourse is triggered by a controversial event (e.g., COVID-19 lockdowns) or appears unexpectedly (e.g., in response to an innocent question)

Example: anti-government rhetoric appeared in forums about women's workout routines when COVID-19 vaccine certificates were required to enter gyms; xenophobic and anti-2SLGBTQI+ rhetoric appears in discussions about school rankings

SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS FAVOUR RADICAL CONTENT

Most social media algorithms are designed to promote content that generates significant user engagement. Because inflammatory and controversial posts receive more engagement, algorithms often push extremist content toward users who are not seeking it out.

These algorithms use trigger words to offer users similar inflammatory content, further amplifying extremist rhetoric. This automated process takes on a life of its own, overtaking the threat of a single person posting extremist content online. *(U//OUO)*

(U//OUO)

Canada

INFLUENCERS SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT THE ACTIONS AND BELIEFS OF THEIR FOLLOWERS

Among all **Canadian internet users**

31% FOLLOW influencers or content creators

Of those **Canadian FOLLOWERS**

66% believe influencers are **credible**

73% report **changing their views or habits** after being exposed to influencer content



SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS HELD BY CANADIANS

ALL CANADIANS		WOMEN	MEN
83%	FACEBOOK	87%	79%
77%	MESSENGER	82%	71%
63%	YOUTUBE	58%	69%
57%	INSTAGRAM	64%	50%
42%	PINTEREST	58%	23%
27%	TIKTOK	30%	24%

According to a 2023 Ressac Leger study, women tend **to gravitate to more visual social media platforms.** *(U//OUO)*

Extremist messaging **packaged in attractive content** that appears to represent users' interests (e.g., clothing or hairstyling tips) desensitizes users to extremist rhetoric and **can further a user's descent into extremism.** *(U//OUO)*

As of February 2023, **"TRADWIFE" CONTENT** on TikTok had more than **100M views.**

WEAPONIZING MOTHERHOOD

Some women-oriented blogs spread white supremacist narratives and exploit purportedly traditional values for recruitment and radicalization tactics. Social media is alluring to those who feel alienated from society. Many women who feel isolated because of motherhood find a sense of belonging in "mommy blogs." Certain bloggers promote xenophobic and anti-2SLGBTQI+ rhetoric under the guise of expressing concern for children's wellbeing. During COVID-19 lockdowns, disinformation and conspiracy theories flourished in social media spaces centred around motherhood. Grievances related to sexual education in schools or vaccinations **led to discussions that began with skepticism and concern and spiralled into anti-government extremism.** *(U//OUO)*

(U//OUO)



TRADWIFE PHENOMENON

Discourse about respecting women's contributions at home often strays into anti-immigration rhetoric. **Feminism is blamed for overburdening women** with work outside the home and multi-racial immigration is cited as the reason for white men struggling to find employment. The **trend expanded after lockdowns** as women struggled to balance work and family life. *(U//OUO)*

"TRADWIVES," women who **promote a return to traditional values,** came to prominence during COVID-19 lockdowns.

(U//OUO)

IN THE UNITED STATES (US)

Of all people facing charges related to the **CAPITOL HILL EVENTS,** fewer **WOMEN** than **MEN** were charged.*

32% vs **57%**

(U//OUO)



According to the Profiles of Individual Radicalization (PIRUS) dataset, the percentage of extremists who are **WOMEN more than doubled.**

6% 2018 to **14%** 2021 January

*Source: Hilary Matfess and Devorah Margolin, "The Women of January 6th: A Gendered Analysis of the 21st Century American Far-Right," George Washington University Program on Extremism (April 2022)

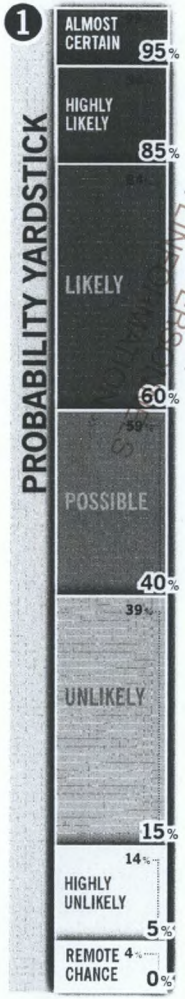
IMPACT OF FEMININITY ON CAPITOL HILL CONVICTIONS

Women who participated in the breach of Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, portrayed their actions as heroic and patriotic on social media, but often underplayed their contributions in court and sought leniency based on their roles as caretakers. These women, especially white women, have been overwhelmingly more likely to obtain pretrial freedom and less likely to be sentenced to an active period of incarceration compared with men facing similar charges. Women also tend to receive shorter sentences than men, with their defense attorneys often drawing attention to their roles as mothers and wives. In at least 77% of these cases, criminal complaints against alleged perpetrators include evidence from social media. *(U//OUO)*

(U//OUO)

Weaponizing Femininity: Female Influencers' Use of Social Media to Promote Extremist Narratives

1 PROBABILITY YARDSTICK



2 THREAT LEVEL

➡⬅ established ⬆ raised ⬇ lowered ⬌ remains

LEVELS	DESCRIPTIONS	LANGUAGE
CRITICAL		ITAC assesses that a violent act of terrorism is **HIGHLY LIKELY** and **COULD OCCUR IMMINENTLY.**
HIGH	*Intelligence indicates that an individual or group within Canada or abroad has the **intent AND capability** to commit an act of terrorism.*	ITAC assesses that a violent act of terrorism is **LIKELY.**
MEDIUM		ITAC assesses that a violent act of terrorism **COULD OCCUR.**
LOW	*Intelligence indicates that an individual or group within Canada or abroad has either the **intent OR capability** to commit an act of terrorism.*	ITAC assesses that a violent act of terrorism is **POSSIBLE BUT UNLIKELY.**
VERY LOW	*There is no intelligence indicating a terrorist threat.*	ITAC assesses that a violent act of terrorism is **HIGHLY UNLIKELY.**

3 CONFIDENCE LEVEL

CRITERIA	INTELLIGENCE	SOURCES	ASSUMPTION	REASONING
HIGH	multiple reports; well-corroborated information; range of reporting types; historical understanding of the issue; good understanding of the risk of deceptive reporting	proven and accurate	few; minimal intelligence gaps	strong logical inferences developed through analytic techniques or repeatable methodology
MEDIUM	multiple reports; partially corroborated plausible information; some historical understanding of the issue; some risk of undetected deceptive reporting	proven and semi-proven sources that have been fairly accurate	several, not critical to the analysis; some intelligence gaps	includes weak logical inferences developed through analytic techniques or repeatable methodology
LOW	few or single-source reports; uncorroborated information; some historical understanding of the issue; considerable risk of undetected deceptive reporting	semi-proven sources that have been somewhat accurate, or new, unproven sources	many; some critical to the analysis	dominated by weak inferences developed through analytic techniques or repeatable methodologies

4 TERRORIST GROUP CAPABILITIES

ADVANCED	Capable of sophisticated attacks, including against hard targets
MODERATE	Capable of high profile attacks against soft targets
GENERAL	Capable of simple attacks

1 **ITAC's Probability Yardstick** tool contributes to the understanding of the threat by providing readers with a common understanding of ITAC's probability statements.

2 **ITAC's Threat Level** chart defines each threat level and describes the assessed likelihood of a violent act of terrorism. ITAC uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis in applying terrorism threat levels. Threat levels are determined based on several factors, including current intelligence, recent events, and the assessed intent, capabilities and opportunity available to terrorist groups. ITAC cautions that its information may be incomplete and, regardless of the threat level applied, a violent act of terrorism may occur with little or no warning. See Confidence Levels.

3 **ITAC's Confidence Levels** chart outlines statements that accompany each ITAC product to inform the reader of ITAC's degree of confidence in its assessments. These levels are based on an evaluation of the available intelligence, the sources, and ITAC's assumptions and reasoning.

4 **ITAC's Terrorist Group Capabilities** chart describes the capabilities of a terrorist group to conduct an attack in a particular country where the group has already demonstrated intent. This metric is based on the methodology used to establish ITAC's terrorism threat levels. For the purposes of this metric, capability is defined as "the ability, capacity, competence or qualification" of a group to perpetrate a particular attack.

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