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Turning Audiences into Activists: A Qualitative Case Study of PragerU and Moral Foundations Theory

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ABSTRACT

YouTube plays a significant role in the right wing media ecosystem, especially as an alternative source for news and information beyond traditional media outlets. PragerU is a far right YouTube channel with over 3 million subscribers and 1.7 billion views at the time of writing, which lies on the periphery of the Alternative Influence Network and subsequent alt-right pipeline. Using the organization PragerU as a case study, this thesis aims to understand how far the organization communicates their ideology via Moral Foundations Theory to further engage their viewers. PragerU structures its content offerings as a funnel system, designed to move viewers down a pipeline towards becoming monetary subscribers and volunteers. Using a qualitative content analysis, I examined PragerU's content through Moral Foundations Theory to understand how the organization moves individuals down this funnel, and how they craft effective and persuasive arguments for right wing ideology in the digital age. This study finds that PragerU's video content structures its rhetorical arguments in a way that mirrors its content funnel, moving viewers from fear and reactionary based content structured around the Moral Foundation of Sanctity/Degradation to deeper, more philosophical arguments around the Moral Foundation of Liberty/Oppression, posing the idea of what it means to be American.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The last 15 years of contemporary American politics has been marked by extreme polarization across the political spectrum, with an increasing shift in the directions of both left and right wing coalition and movement building. The American right has seen an increase in power and prominence on the national stage, beginning with the Tea Party movement in 2009, as a response to the election of Barack Obama, and growing in strength and size, culminating in the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016. While mass media organizations such as Fox News have played an outsized role in facilitating the growth of right wing ideology in the United States, digital organizations have become an increasingly large part in the communication of right wing social and political movements, particularly ones that fall outside the purview of the conservative establishment.

This master's thesis focuses on researching the ways in which right-wing digital media organizations in the United States engage in digital content creation, particularly using the medium of videos, to disseminate their messaging and influence their audiences in order to create momentum and build a political and social movement around Alt-Right ideas. Despite its opposition to establishment conservatives, the Alt-Right does not refer to a loose band of rogue media and political actors, but to a segment of right wing politics that is now well-funded and well-organized. Positioning themselves as well-educated, enlightened thinkers who only seek to ask questions, the Alt-Right and its many organizations are adept at using digital and social media to spread their political messaging, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers to build their social and political movement.

One of the biggest actors in the online sphere of right-wing video content is PragerU, an organization that produces edutainment videos on its own website and YouTube, with approximately 3 million subscribers and over 1.5 billion cumulative views on its YouTube channel (PragerU, n.d.). PragerU touts itself as an educational channel that creates content supporting "pro-American values" that provides viewers an alternative from "the dominant left-wing ideology in culture, media, and education" (PragerU, n.d.). As YouTube and its algorithm continue to act as a means of far-right radicalization (Bryant, 2020), this research aims to explore the ways in which PragerU leverages political communication tactics to create effective and

engaging messaging to build an audience as large as it currently stands, and to continue to attract and grow an audience around right-wing ideology.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

For the last decade, right wing populism has been on the rise around the globe, with countries such as Sweden, Italy, and the United Kingdom all experiencing a resurgence in populist ideology and election results in recent years. Specifically in the United States, the presidential campaign and election of Donald Trump in 2016 brought “alt-right” ideology to the forefront of American political conversations. Ideas previously thought of as “fringe,” such as the “Deep State,” Great Replacement Theory, false flag attacks, crisis actors, and cultural Marxism became more mainstream, amplified both by politicians such as Trump, but by other individuals, content creators, and influencers in conservative spaces online.

Organizations in the sphere of the alt-right have increasingly turned to nontraditional media outlets, such as social media platforms and web forums, to circumvent traditional media gatekeeping and to speak more directly to their publics (Perez Curiel, 2020). Various studies have focused on how actors in this sphere have utilized Twitter for their purposes. However, the activities of these organizations on YouTube have been missing from strategic communication research, despite the website’s importance as a player in organizational content creation and influence. These actors do not only include individual politicians, but political organizations, nonprofits, influencers, and media organizations, making up what Rebecca Lewis termed the “Alternative Influence Network” (AIN), whose content “promote[s] a range of political positions, from mainstream versions of libertarianism and conservatism, all the way to overt white nationalism” (2018). The interconnectedness of these channels and organizations, the way they crosspollinate each other’s guests and content, represents a strategic effort to build an ecosystem of information that is outside the mainstream. As YouTube and its algorithm continue to act as a means of far-right radicalization (Bryant, 2020), the strategy, messaging, and appeal of these organizations to a right leaning audience remains critically under researched. A diagram of the AIN can be found in Chapter 2.

Most research in the field of communication and extremism relates to Islamic terrorism and extremism, with subsets of how Islamic extremist organizations (i.e., ISIS) use communication tactics to recruit new members, as well as how communication strategies can be

used to deradicalize members. While there is growing literature about far-right actors in the US, especially around the way in which algorithms on YouTube perpetuate far right content, there are fewer pieces of literature detailing how specific actors within the sphere use their media to create influence and power. The research of organizational actors in the right-wing American media space is still in its infancy.

Organizations and institutions within the AIN are either overlooked or underestimated by strategic communication scholars as machines for spreading, promoting, and influencing political opinion, action, and activism. Particularly, organizations in the periphery of the AIN may act as *gateways* to right wing extremism, potentially setting unsuspecting individuals down a path of radicalization. Further research is needed to understand the ways in which these organizations establish themselves as self-described alternative sources of truth, news, and cultural commentary through sophisticated content strategies. Organizations in the AIN strengthen their positions within the communication and media landscape of contemporary American politics by becoming reinforcing feedback loops of each other. To understand their impact, and to contribute into the body of existing knowledge regarding digital misinformation and manipulation, this master's thesis will explore the way a specific media organization, PragerU, crafts messaging to gain a loyal audience, which has allowed the organization to establish itself as a leading gateway channel within the AIN. A detailed background of the case organization and the political environment surrounding it is presented in Chapter 2.

1.2 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this research is to examine how PragerU, a prominent member of the AIN, communicates a political moral world view via Moral Foundations Theory within its video content. As the AIN is a large, interconnected web of organizations, selecting one organization to study allows for a more in depth examination of its tactics. Further, the network functions by its members maintaining a reputation of authority and reliability (Lewis, 2018). Organizations must maintain these features to be viewed as legitimate members of their respective social movements (Walker & Stepick, 2020), something which PragerU explicitly defines in their own mission statements and descriptions, positioning itself as an educational channel that creates content supporting “pro-American values,” providing viewers an alternative from “the dominant left-wing ideology in culture, media, and education” (PragerU, n.d.). It could be argued that any

attempt by an organization to establish itself as an alternative source of political truth and ideology, particularly on that supplants current structures, must use communication to position itself as a channel that reflects the positions of viewers back at them via the communication process.

This study is guided by the following research question:

- Through which Moral Foundations does PragerU structure its video content to engage its audience into deeper levels of commitment?

Understanding the ways in which PragerU communicates their strong moral propositions and belief system through video is important because it allows a deeper insight into how right wing narratives on YouTube can be constructed, and how these constructs set up the possibility for radicalization through YouTube and other online digital content. These structures can then be understood and replicated by other organizations wishing to enter and proliferate the right wing media ecosystem for their own purposes. This research is relevant so those who wish to conduct further research or develop strategies to counteract disinformation and disrupt the right wing radicalization pipeline have a deeper understanding of the way these organizations operate and create content. Understanding the strategies right wing media actors in the U.S. are using is key to understanding how they are reaching new audiences and embedding their ideas into individual voters' identities. More importantly, this thesis intends to shed light on the vitality of content creation and influencing for 21st century strategic communication professionals. As individuals continue to turn to online sources to understand the world and make decisions, organizations and influencers that establish themselves with authority, credibility, and relatability have a higher chance of success in reaching and swaying publics to their message. PragerU's attempt at "winning the culture war" has taken place entirely online, through digital influence and media creation (Prager University Foundation, 2022b).

1.3 IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

In research regarding communication, extremism, and propaganda, the most common category of writing relates to propaganda and its relationship to the focus by western governments and countering radical Islamic terrorism. Communication about counter-terrorism efforts, however,

created a cultural shift in the United States that gave propaganda a wider reach, and in turn, refined how propaganda can be legitimately used by government actors (Briant, 2013). The nature of the alt-right, and the broad sphere of right-wing digital communication, can be viewed as a successor to these original seeds of propaganda and counterterrorism. Yet while there exists a growing body of literature about these far right actors and their strategies in the United States, there are fewer pieces of researching detailing the specific strategies being used at the organizational level to use media to create influence and power. Research done by organizations Data and Society (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Lewis, 2018) make the impact of YouTube algorithms, far right radicalization, and the moralization of politics and populism more pervasive. Yet still, there are fewer examinations of the *how*.

The phenomenon of right wing populism and politics is not just limited to the United States. Right wing politics are on the rise around the globe; the United States and Sweden are notable examples where far right parties have made great gains in their respective electorates pushing typical populist narratives (Greven, 2016; Silver, 2022). The success of these parties cannot be understood without also examining the media landscape in which they operate. Right wing parties have successfully leveraged digital media to circumvent traditional media and disseminate their views, with Twitter, Facebook, and alternative news websites playing prominent roles in populist communication (Schroeder, 2018). Further, scandals such as Cambridge Analytica's interference in the 2016 election on Facebook also underscore the critical importance digital media has in influencing the communication strategies and tactics of political organizations on the right (Schroeder, 2018). As communication and digital media gain a greater foothold in people's lives, and become the primary way individuals explore, learn, and process information, it is necessary to understand the ways in which organizations sell not only products, but ideas through digital means. Whether they are political or not, social and digital media expand the scope of the strategy in strategic communication and offer new tools and solutions for strategic communications professionals to leverage and understand. It also poses challenges to said professionals, as the agility needed to keep up with the ever-changing digital landscape may prove difficult, particularly those part of more traditional organizations. It is critical to understand the machinations of right wing strategic tactics online and efforts to spread propaganda and polarization. While this study focuses specifically on an actor that is firmly rooted in American

politics, this thesis may also provide a framework of understanding for those looking to understand right wing organizational efforts in other countries.

Finally, the use of Moral Foundations in this thesis provides an opportunity to explore strategic communication research through the frames of evolutionary psychology, moving towards consilience (Nothhaft, 2016). This research may shed some greater understanding on the intentional construction of strategic video content attuned to an audience's moral receptors, and therefore the impact of their own strategic goals in growing their audience in accordance with their own political interests. While PragerU videos may not be the end point for radicalization in far right activism, their videos serve as a strategic stepping stone for increased ideological thought. Additionally, this thesis provides an opportunity to explore strategic communication in an interdisciplinary fashion, understanding how its strategies and efforts also have an impact on the field of sociology, media studies, mass media, and politics.

1.4 LIMITATIONS

This study does not attempt to understand the decision-making process employees at PragerU undergo when developing content, and how their internal objectives manifest into tangible results. Rather, the study solely examines the output of the organization, and attempts to understand how PragerU links morality with its own communication strategy. This study also does not analyze the behavior or interpretations of those who regularly watch and consume PragerU content. The content is used as a vehicle to examine what kinds of digital media can be used to communicate moral values and political interest within the realm of online political education and entertainment. The study is intended to give insight into how the beginning of the alt-right pipeline manifests in the content through intentional strategic communication. Further, the study only looks at a selection of content created by PragerU for adult consumption and education. It does not consider any content aimed at parents and children's education.

1.5 DISPOSITION

This first chapter is an introduction and problematization to the issue at hand. In Chapter 2, a background of the case organization and the political setting is discussed. In Chapter 3, the literature review is presented, covering topics relating to digital media and politics, the alt-right and media manipulation, and research regarding YouTube's algorithm and radicalization, and

orients the fields of strategic communication this research contributes to. Chapter 4 presents this study's theoretical foundation and gives an overview of Moral Foundations Theory and its applications in strategic communication research. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, the methodology is outlined, discussing the selection of the organization in question, the study design, case study theory, and the logic behind the selection of the videos analyzed. Chapter 6 analyzes the empirical material collected at each level of the PragerU content funnel and discusses the implications and ideas which coalesced from the analysis. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the master's thesis, with suggestions for further research possibilities within this topic and in strategic communication.

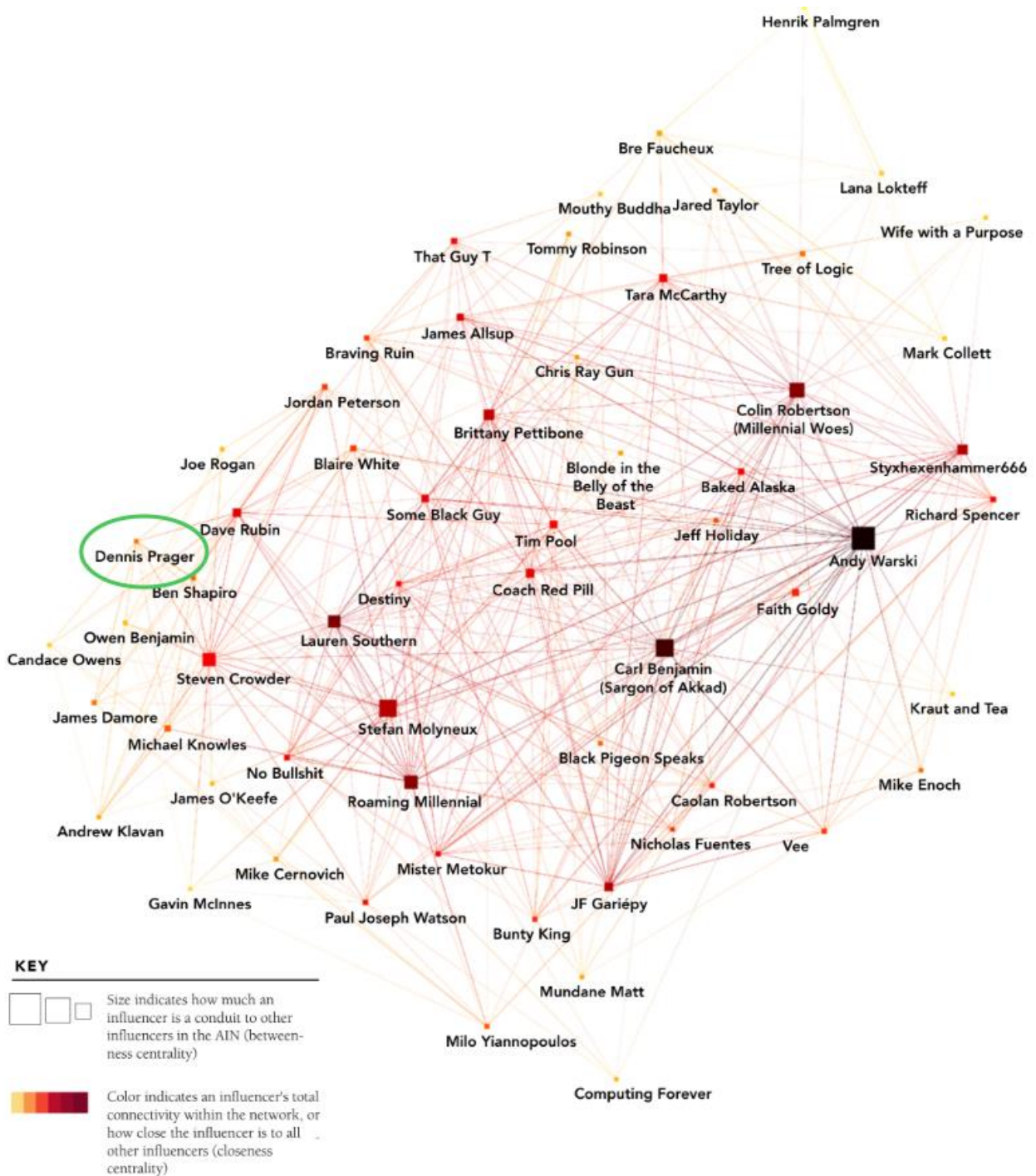
2 BACKGROUND OF CASE

2.1 PRAGERU

PragerU (short for Prager University) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 2011 by Dennis Prager, a conservative radio talk show host and writer, and Allin Estrin, a screenwriter and producer, and currently headquartered in Los Angeles, California. The organization releases weekly videos on its social media channels, most notably on YouTube covering a wide range of topics including issues of gender and sexuality, race, economics, culture, religion, and history. Though styled as a “university” via its name, PragerU is not an accredited academic institution and does not offer certificates or diplomas. To date, PragerU videos have over 7 billion cumulative views across all of its platforms, including its own website and Facebook, with 1.6 billion taking place on YouTube alone (Prager University Foundation, 2022a; PragerU, n.d.). In its Biannual Report for 2022, Dennis Prager described the organization as an “ideological fortress [...] to defend American values,” and ultimately “dedicated to creating an edutainment media enterprise devoted to [...] Judeo-Christian values and freedom-based ideas” (Prager University Foundation, 2022a, p. 5). PragerU’s operating budget for 2022 totaled \$65,000,000, of which \$38,000,000 (59%) went towards generating content for adults, with the remainder being spent on PragerU Kids (Prager University Foundation, 2022b). PragerU has been identified by Lewis (2018) as being part of the Alternative Influence Network (AIN), previously described in Chapter 1. A diagram of the AIN is shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

The Alternative Influence Network Diagram (Lewis, 2018, p. 10)

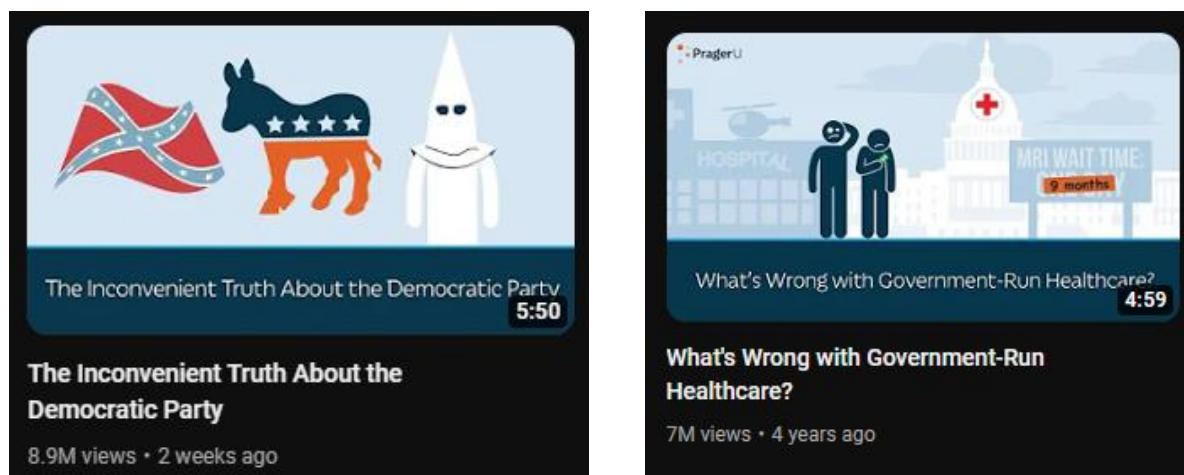


Note: Diagram is edited for clarity with circle placed to highlight Dennis Prager/PragerU

PragerU releases multiple styles of video content. Its most successful format by far is the 5 Minute “explainer” style videos, covering one topic from a conservative viewpoint. Screenshots from two of these videos on their YouTube channel are displayed in Figure 2. Using simple graphics and narrated by an individual “expert,” these videos make PragerU’s ideological messaging short, easy to consume and understand, and shareable; over 100 of these videos have 1 million views or more. In addition, PragerU also produces a number of other series, including “Man on the Street,” a series of improvised street interviews, and “Fireside Chat with Dennis Prager,” a long form video series hosted by Dennis Prager himself. Most recently, it has also expanded to making educational content aimed for children at all levels of schooling, from early childhood to high school. This content, created mostly for parents and educators, is intended to “lead [an] educational revolution” that “defends children from left-wing brainwashing” (Prager University Foundation, 2022a).

Figure 2

Screenshots of PragerU YouTube video thumbnails (PragerU, 2017; PragerU, 2018)

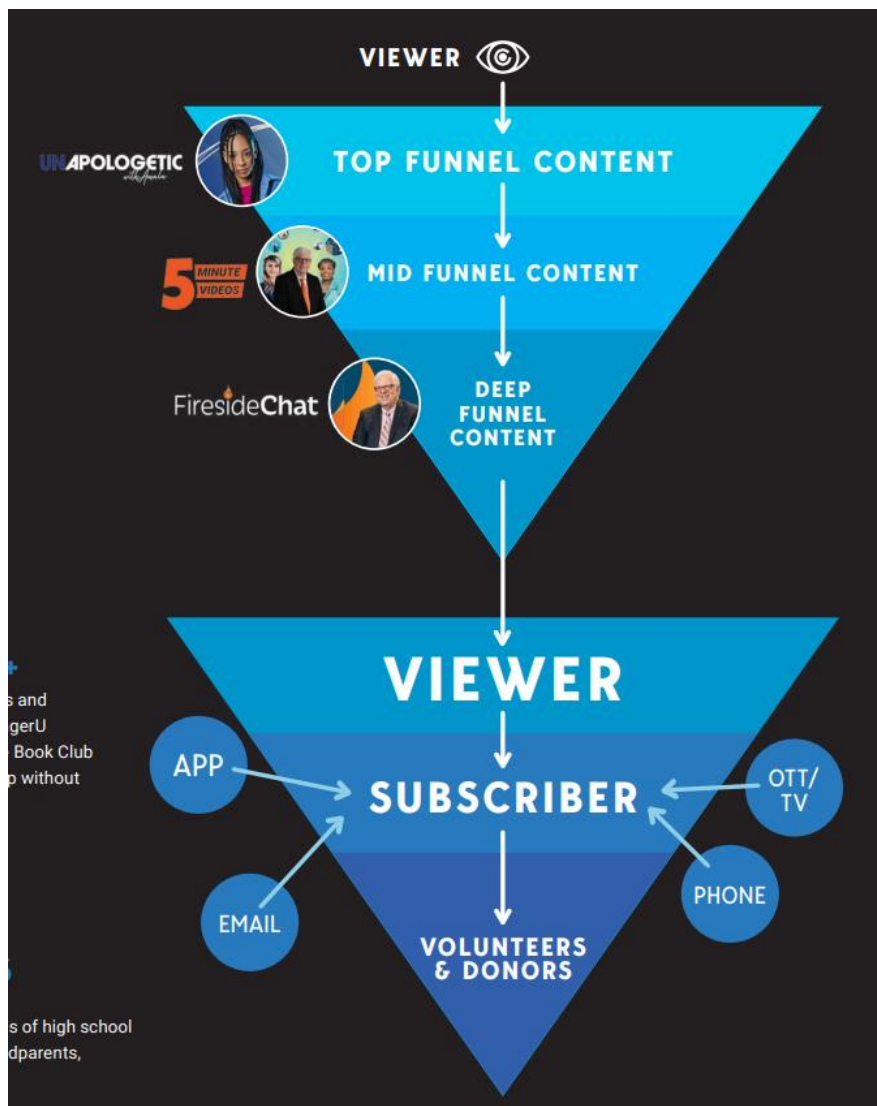


Apart from the children’s content, each of these video series are part of separate steps in PragerU’s content funnel and strategy. By producing multiple kinds of videos with different levels of engagement, PragerU works to push casual viewers through this funnel, turning them from one off or infrequent viewers, to dedicated subscribers, to volunteers who support PragerU’s mission with time or money (Prager University Foundation, 2022a). Volunteer communities of PragerU include PragerFORCE, a group for young people under the age of 35

who are tired of “the woke mob infiltrating schools and workplaces,” and PREP, a group for families and teachers to share ideas on how to “inoculate children from radical left-wing indoctrination” (Prager University Foundation, 2022b). A depiction of PragerU’s current content strategy funnel, created for the organization’s 2022 Annual Report, is displayed in Figure 3. The goal, therefore, is not just to simply *inform* through their videos, but to actively engage viewers into becoming advocates on behalf of PragerU and its ideology, and to ultimately contribute their finances or time to support PragerU’s mission.

Figure 3

PragerU’s Content and Marketing Funnel (Prager University Foundation, 2022a, p. 20)



2.2 THE RISE OF POPULISM IN THE US

The identity of conservative Republicans in the United States has greatly shifted over the last decade, along with the identity of liberals, Democrats, and the left, resulting in a divide of contemporary American politics, as well as the establishment of a new American populist movement. The election of Donald Trump was the most disruptive shift in the party's outward identity. White non-college graduates, defined by Nelson (2019) as "the working class," voted overwhelmingly for Trump, with a ratio of 64% to 28% (Pew Research Center, 2019).

American populism precedes the Trump era, as well as the emphasis on personal demographics and identity in right wing political discussions. The Tea Party movement of the Obama era brought a more public idea of how the modern right shaped itself around views of race, class, and gender. Its members were loud and public with their disdain for minority groups, carrying signs bearing anti-black, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic slurs and slogans (White, 2018 p. 107-108). The movement emphasized women's roles as caregivers within a family, despite the prominence of several female public figures, such as Vice Presidential nominee Sarah Palin (White, 2018). News coverage of the day emphasized the Tea Party's populist roots, a movement created and propelled by the working-class, average American despite its goals standing in direct contrast with historical populist movements and their opposition to the capital class (White, 2018). By establishing themselves as white, traditional, and working class, the Tea Party and its conservative successors of the Trump era created a distinct identity of who belonged and who did not.

Modern conservatives and Republicans in the United States exhibit aspects of both fight-flight regression, a "fantasy" involving "fighting or fleeing a threatening force," and pairing regression, a thought process which over-idealizes one group and its merits over others (Nelson, 2019, p. 5). These behaviors put them in contrast with those who are seen as the opposition to their ideals - non-Whites, Democrats, and others who do not fit their criteria of the in-group. Similarly, the ethos of "bootstraps" rugged individualism, Old South caricatures and other Puritanical foundational myths form the conservative idea of what "America" truly is (Nelson, 2019). These traditions are key to informing the idea of conservative identity, and furthermore, contextualizing the core issues of American populism seen in media and party politics today.

2.3 DEFINING THE ALT-RIGHT

It is important to establish a common definition of the “Alt-Right.” The Alt-Right, short for Alternative Right, is an international political movement which centers the idea that “whiteness” and Western civilization are threatened by globalist, liberal, and multicultural forces. The term was first coined by white nationalist Richard Spencer in 2008 with his blog *AlternativeRight.com* and rose to prominence during and after the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump (Lyons, 2017; de la Torre, 2018). The Alt-Right operates primarily in loosely connected online spaces, such as 4Chan and Reddit, and opposes social movements such as feminism, LGBTQIA+ equality, and the rights of religious and ethnic minorities (Hermansson et al., 2020). Importantly, the Alt-Right positions itself in opposition to current establishment conservative politicians and movements, though they are relatively aligned on the right side of the political spectrum. Members of the Alt-Right view establishment conservatives as “politically ineffective or culturally inarticulate,” and believe the old guard of conservatism is out of touch with the younger generations’ concerns and demands (Salazar, 2018, p. 136). Therefore, this paper refers to the Alt-Right as a conservative movement that rejects mainstream conservatives in favor of mainstreaming more extreme values rooted in racism, misogyny, and antisemitism.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 THE ALT-RIGHT, MEDIA MANIPULATION, AND DISINFORMATION

The internet and its subsequent social networks that were thought to be tools that could herald positive changes have also become hotbeds for conspiracy theories, misinformation, and radicalization. Online spaces from Facebook to 4chan host an ever-increasing amount of content promoting world views dominated by white nationalism, misogyny, and anti-globalism, created by a loose ecosystem of online, far-right actors (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, pp. 4, 9-13). While many of these actors and groups act independently from one another, their efforts to sow disinformation using bots, memes, and social engineering, work alongside each other to create an online culture targeting susceptible audiences to radicalization and extreme ideologies (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 34-38). This culture of disinformation on the web undermines trust in traditional media outlets - outlets which are more often than not painted by these groups as arms of the left and its “culture war” against America (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 4, 28). Alt-right outlets spreading disinformation mimic the format of journalistic integrity while moving against it, creating a shell of credibility around their disinformation efforts (Bennet & Livingston, 2018). These actions have political consequences as well - so evidenced by the trolls who boast they “memed Trump to the presidency” (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 2). Disinformation and manipulation are highly present within alt-right media circles, both by individual actors and larger forces, creating a concern for how communication is practiced in this space, and how it is used to enable the Alt-Right to achieve their political and ideological goals.

But what forces might be at fault, then, for the increase in disinformation in the United States over the last decade, and its real world impacts on politics and the electorate? Bennet and Livingston (2018) posit that increased distrust in political and media institutions is a result of “in the hollowing of parties and diminished electoral representation” (p. 127). Where there is no trust, those skeptical of those in power may find alternative ways to create narratives about the world and the challenges they see around them. They may view themselves as truth seekers, political outcasts who can weaponize digital and alternative media for their own ends. Those that manufacture disinformation are not always punished for their actions but rewarded for their success. On Facebook, the top 20 fake news stories during the 2016 election had a higher number

of likes, comments, and shares on them than the top 20 real stories, by a minimum of 7.3 million engagements. These stories typically favored Donald Trump or framed his opponent Hillary Clinton in a negative light (Bennet & Livingston, 2018).

Further, far-right media works against the mainstream, “left-wing” media’s efforts using tools to manufacture and sustain a completely different “collective memory” for their target audience, particularly constructed on the grounds of ethnic and racial divisions, attempting to challenge the contemporary political status quo (Wasilewski, 2019). Typical efforts in the mainstream to create a collective memory choose to leave out incidences or individuals that are too extreme on either end of the political spectrum. In alt-right media, however, their creation of collective memory is one that embraces the extremes of exclusion, erasing and altering historical events to rally their own supporters around their ideologies (such as the practice of removing racial, religious, and other ethnic minorities from important historical events in America) (Wasilewski, 2019). This effort to manipulate collective memory can be seen as a form of historical and strategic framing in alt-right media, in which certain aspects are highlighted and others are dismissed, diminished, or obfuscated (Riebling & von der Wense, 2019). The current Alt-Right continues to capitalize on Americans’ lack of trust in their political institutions, sowing the ground for their own ideology to take root using manipulation, disinformation, and alternative framing in digital and new media.

3.2 DIGITAL MEDIA IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

The last decade has seen digital media play a central role in the creation and acceleration of social and political movements. From the earliest discussions of social media’s role in the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, digital media has been seen as a key tool for both grassroots and top-level political movements to mobilize support for their causes. Thanks to its wide reach, digital media efforts allow causes to communicate with audiences who may not have been reachable before. Yet below the surface level benefits that digital media may contribute to political causes lies a more complex, nuanced interaction between the media, its creators, and its audience.

The speed at which information can be monitored and shared has created what is called a networked society (Jenkins et al., 2016). In a networked society, individuals can easily keep track of causes that are important to them. When there are new developments with these causes which prompt direct action, either online or off, individuals can alert their networks rapidly

(Jenkins et al., 2016). The speed at which these networked societies operate, however, does not always translate to true or authentic movement creation. The Kony 2012 campaign, for example, created viral interest in the crimes of Ugandan war lord Joseph Kony, which included but were not limited to his usage of child soldiers. Critics, however, point out that its popularity does not always translate to action. Easy to access, parsed down videos on complex issues, such as Kony 2012, can give viewers a false sense of participation (Jenkins et al., 2016). This idea of *slacktivism* has been pervasive in conversations of digital media and movement creation – that simply liking a video or sharing a repost is enough effort to cause change.

Yet other political movements, such as young Libertarians in the United States, rely on video creation and education as part of their own coalition building, particularly when their politics lay outside the mainstream zeitgeist. Though related to young conservative movements, their political agendas have distinct differences that require them to build awareness and educate in new and innovative ways. As the movement focuses on discursive politics, new media such as YouTube shapes attitudes and brings awareness, particularly to their critical attitudes towards the efficacy of existing political institutions (Jenkins, 2016). By using platforms like YouTube, the young libertarians bypass the gatekeepers of mainstream media, and can reach like-minded individuals who are politically isolated in their communities, who describe “realizing that they were ‘not crazy’ when they discovered others who shared their core ideological commitments online” (Jenkins et al., 2016, p. 237). By harnessing YouTube’s reach and algorithm, this political movement educates, entertains, and coalesces like-minded individuals, and spreads new information to new audiences.

At its most extreme, however, digital tools can be used to create new forms of propaganda, supplanting old techniques (Falkheimer, 2016) and introducing new audiences to radical thought. Askanius (2012) identifies three types of video activism conducted on YouTube: video as alternative news, video as empowerment, and video as documentation (pp. 64-65). This method of video activism is not exclusively the domain of American politics. The Swedish far-right, for example, has participated in widespread content creation on YouTube to push anti-immigrant propaganda, and to frame themselves as a group of victimization from the left and the mainstream to gain sympathy and bolster their position as a politically repressed group (Ekman, 2014). The tactics of video and their impact in social movements crosses international borders.

Mihelj and Jiménez-Martínez (2021) focus further on the way digital infrastructure reinforces nationalistic movements. Algorithmic biases reinforce nationalism within their own cultural contexts, creating filter bubbles and echo chambers which facilitate right wing nationalism and populism. The “participatory design” of digital media allows many users to make their views seen and heard (Mihelj and Jiménez-Martínez, 2021, p. 338). This creates opportunities for those with less mainstream views to establish a platform. However, many of these platforms may be closed circuits of information, such as the case of invitation only WhatsApp groups that disseminate information supporting certain political candidates. The lines between consumer and producer of media content blurs in social media, making one both an active participant on both sides of the media creation process. As social and digital media continue to become integral facets in people’s personal and professional lives, the potential for significant exposure or inclusion to digital political movement creation increases.

3.3 THE YOUTUBE ALGORITHM AND RADICALIZATION

In its report *Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube*, Data and Society, a nonprofit research organization studying the social impact of data, technology, and automation, laid out an “Alternative Influence Network” (AIN), an ecosystem of channels, organizations, and influencers who are characterized and linked by their right-wing positions and general opposition to left-wing politics (Lewis, 2018, p. 8). Channels in the AIN amplify each other, leading viewers down different paths that push out more traditional media outlets and expose them further to more extremist views. Creating this web of right-wing content facilitates radicalization by shifting an individual’s information and influencer ecosystem, pulling them away from traditional media outlets by sowing distrust and promising to reveal the “truth” of the world as they know it (Lewis, 2018, p. 35).

Munn (2019) outlines three phases through which individuals experiencing online radicalization move: *normalization*, *acclimation*, and *dehumanization*. In the *normalization* phase, individuals are exposed to extreme thoughts in the forms of memes, irony, or crass jokes, desensitizing the receiver over time to the content of the message. The second phase, *acclimation*, overlaps with the first, as the individual “establishes a new cognitive baseline for what is acceptable” due to the overwhelming amount of increasingly radical content that is never challenged by virtue of online and digital filter bubbles (Munn, 2019, p. 6). The final step,

dehumanization, marks a point in the radicalized individuals' cognition where they no longer see people who their ideology as marked as an undesirable other as human. This takes the form of language prevalent in far-right online videos, where broadcasters refer to "a transgender," "the Jew," or "the feminist" as less than human, distinct "others" that are to be opposed on their lack of humanity (Munn, 2019). While it is not guaranteed that all those who are exposed to the beginnings of the right wing pipeline will make it to the end of extreme, radical dehumanization, the existence of this formula remains a threat to political opponents of extremism, and an opportunity to organizations willing to capitalize on adjacent ideologies.

YouTube's algorithm perpetuates this problem. Designed to ultimately increase the visibility of advertisements to watchers, and keep those watchers engaged for as long as possible, the algorithm has established a link between extremist, right wing content and those with "the right amount of curiosity that prompts a person to continue to watch YouTube videos" (Bryant, 2020, p. 87). Studies on YouTube's algorithms and channels recommendations show that the website's algorithm is more likely to recommend far right and right leaning content to users generally interested in politics, and that users watching political content are less likely to be exposed to alternative points of view to their current one (Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2018; Ledwich & Zaitsev, 2020). Individuals moving through this ecosystem of content go through a closed-loop cycle reinforced by their own behavior and motivated by certain psychological principles (Haroon et al., 2022). The primary principles are selective exposure, in which a user is more likely to increase. Once a user arrives in the political filter bubble of YouTube, they stay there. The existence of this loosely organized, but tightly linked ecosystem of channels propelled by an algorithm with little transparency creates the potential for great harm to both unsuspecting users and to political society as a whole.

4 THEORY

The following chapter outlines the major theoretical foundation for this thesis: an overview of Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) developed by Jonathan Haidt and its implications regarding politics and communication.

4.1 MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY

Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) is a social psychological theory that seeks to explain the origins of human moral reasoning and its variability across cultures. According to its founders Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph, morality is organized into psychological systems “upon which cultures construct moral matrices” (Haidt, 2012, p.146). Haidt and Joseph originally created five systems, termed “moral foundations,” which are triggered by specific forms of social and emotional stimuli. These triggers evolved in response to various social dilemmas humans faced in our ancestral environments. Haidt theorizes that much of political ideology and belief rests upon these moral foundations, and polarization is a result of the conflict between the ends of the foundations’ spectrums. Further, communicating via the MFT framework is effective for political parties and related groups who seek to advance their interests and persuade voters and the public of their goals.

The original five foundations are:

- 1. Care/Harm:** An adaptation to the trigger of caring and protecting children, related to the virtues of caring and kindness. Haidt theorizes the majority of liberal politics in the United States and elsewhere primarily rests on this foundation. (Haidt, 2012).
- 2. Fairness/Cheating:** An adaptation to benefit from partnership outside close family/kind groups, to protect against deception, and related to the virtues of justice and trustworthiness. In politics, this foundation plays out in concerns regarding exploitation, social justice, and equality, whereas the right’s morality is based on fairness of opportunity and proportionality, not outcome (Haidt, 2012).
- 3. Loyalty/Betrayal:** An adaptation of tribalism, which protects coalitions from opposing teams or threats to the larger group, related to the virtues of sacrifice and loyalty. Haidt identifies this trait more strongly in conservatives, who often communicate that the left is treasonous to American values (Haidt, 2012)

4. **Authority/Subversion:** An adaptation by humans to work within social hierarchies to their own advantage, related to the virtues of leadership and respect. The American political right draws more on this foundation, and prefers signs of rank and importance, whereas the left often “defines itself in opposition” to this (Haidt, 2012, p. 168). One recent example can be seen in the praise Donald Trump received for his no nonsense, businessman persona by right wing pundits and voters, and his high-dominance leadership style, a clear demonstration of the value of authority (Immelman & Griebe, 2020).
5. **Sanctity/Degradation:** An adaptation initially evolved to avoid poison and danger in what humans eat as omnivores. In modern times, this foundation relates both to an individual’s openness to new experiences vs. preference for the known/safe, what is termed the “behavioral immune system” (Haidt, 2012, p. 172). This foundation becomes politically impactful when discussing issues such as the sanctity of national symbols (flags, etc.), discussions of bodily autonomy, and environmentalism. (Haidt, 2012).

Figure 4

The original Five Moral Foundations matrix (Haidt, 2012, p. 146)

	Care/ harm	Fairness/ cheating	Loyalty/ betrayal	Authority/ subversion	Sanctity/ degradation
Adaptive challenge	Protect and care for children	Reap benefits of two-way partnerships	Form cohesive coalitions	Forge beneficial relationships within hierarchies	Avoid contaminants
Original triggers	Suffering, distress, or neediness expressed by one’s child	Cheating, cooperation, deception	Threat or challenge to group	Signs of dominance and submission	Waste products, diseased people
Current triggers	Baby seals, cute cartoon characters	Marital fidelity, broken vending machines	Sports teams, nations	Bosses, respected professionals	Taboo ideas (communism, racism)
Characteristic emotions	Compassion	Anger, gratitude, guilt	Group pride, rage at traitors	Respect, fear	Disgust
Relevant virtues	Caring, kindness	Fairness, justice, trustworthiness	Loyalty, patriotism, self-sacrifice	Obedience, deference	Temperance, chastity, piety, cleanliness

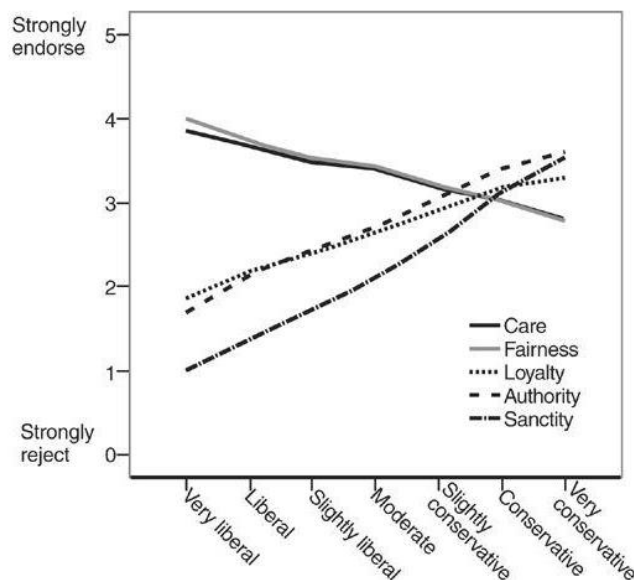
In *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt proposes a sixth foundation, created directly in response to criticism from the political right and left that the original five foundations leave out a key component of political thought in the United States. The sixth foundation is:

6. Liberty/Oppression: An adaptation developed in response to humans living in small clusters, where one human threatens to dominate and control the others in the group. On the left, this foundation manifests into an ideology of anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism. On the right, this foundation manifests itself into an anti-government ideology which prioritizes individual liberty and sovereignty (Haidt, 2012).

Contemporary American politics experiences a divide that Haidt owes to a division between the parties along the lines of these moral foundations, evidence of which can be found in the speeches of politicians, bumper stickers, and signs of each party. The left, he posits, revolves their messaging primarily around the care/harm and fairness/cheating foundations, while the right prioritizes the foundations of loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation. A survey done by Haidt in 2006 of more than 130,000 individuals, displayed in Figure 4, revealed the priorities of those across the political spectrum regarding the foundations.

Figure 5

Results of Haidt's original moral foundations questionnaire (MFQ) (Haidt, 2012, p. 187)



Self-identified conservatives, according to these findings, prioritize the moral foundations in closer proximity to each other than self-identified liberals. While the self-identified conservatives do not overtly or outright reject the more “liberal” identified moral foundations, they appear to place less value and importance on them. Issues of care, harm, fairness, and cheating are not as influential or as convincing to conservatives as issues of loyalty, authority, and sanctity. In this then, the theory provides an insight as to what themes we might observe in content created by right wing media influencers - not just in terms of topics, but appeals, rationale, and reasons that fit within the matrices of MFT. If conservatives prioritize and respond more strongly to themes of loyalty, authority, sanctity, along with the sixth foundation of liberty, then these themes may make conservative arguments and content more effective to their target audiences. By providing a powerful framework for understanding the psychological underpinnings of human moral reasoning, its cultural variability, and its impact on political ideology and communication, MFT is a useful framework for understanding how political actors, specifically on the right, draw on these foundations, knowingly or unknowingly, to create effective, influential, and engaging content.

4.1.1 Applications of Moral Foundations Theory in Strategic Communication

Haidt’s Moral Foundations Theory has been used in a multitude of disciplines and domains, including social psychology, politics, sociology, and communication. This thesis focuses on the ways in which MFT can be used as a parameter to better understand PragerU’s communication strategy of deepening viewer engagement through its content. Trayner (2017) discusses the importance of understanding MFT in the setting of corporate communication. Understanding MFT provides a deeper understanding of an organization’s messaging and the values they express to the outside.

Additionally, MFT provides a broader and more nuanced understanding of what individuals value, compared to “reputation indices” or “brand barometers” that view individuals as one-dimensional, singularly concerned people (Trayner, 2017). Today’s highly politicized world requires businesses and communications professionals to convey their values as quickly and convincingly as possible (Trayner, 2017). MFT provides one such framework for practitioners to understand not just what people value, but how their organizational goals align

with certain values. Moral Foundations has also been used to analyze word choice in the partisan framing of news and media, finding results consistent with partisan MFT concerns are described in the previous section (Hopp et al., 2020).

Indeed, moral foundations theory as a tool for informing strategic communication research and practice is expanding. Organizations are increasingly attempting to navigate a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, which demands higher cooperation and consistency to avoid risk (Wiencierz et al., 2021). Lenk (2023) draws a link between framing theory in communication and the “persuasive power” that MFT has in giving insight into a certain population’s moral mindset, which allows organizations to navigate a VUCA world more fluidly (p. 5). Additionally, these frames also give way for opportunities of enhanced storytelling and can allow for practitioners to construct strategic narratives by way of MFT (Lenk, 2023). By understanding where a specific communications tactic or approach lies on an MFT scale, and the intended audience’s moral values, practitioners can use MFT to craft stronger, more relevant messaging, and prevent clashes between the communicator and the receiver.

5 METHODOLOGY

The following chapter outlines the methods for the epistemology, data collection, and data analysis approach for this thesis. First, the epistemology of social constructionism will be defined, followed by a short writing on case studies and the justification in the selection of PragerU as a case organization, and an overview of the empirical material.

5.1 EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH

Social constructionism is defined as the process by which individuals interpret and understand the world around them according to lived experiences and social influences (Gergen, 1985; Garada, 2014). Constructions can exist at an individual or a group/cultural level, are alterable and are not evaluated on fundamental “truth,” but on whether they are “more or less informed and/or sophisticated” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111) Social constructionism in research relies primarily on the experience of those being studied, or the voice or opinions of those individuals (Creswell, 2007). In the case of this research, the videos produced by PragerU are the “voice” of the participant and the ideological content it espouses a construction of the political realities of conservatives and the alt-right movement. The viewer, the receiver of PragerU’s message, is intended to interpret the message being framed by PragerU and can use it to shape their experiences and opinions about modern political issues and arguments from a right wing frame of reference. As individuals make sense of the world through their experiences, they may also do so through the aforementioned Moral Foundations Theory. As moral foundations influence what someone perceives as right or wrong, facets of ideology that are so closely linked to the political phenomenon of populism, an individual may use these influences as building blocks for their worldview.

Social media and digital content influence how individuals make sense of the world. The internet is the primary source of modern information gathering, and one Google search allows us access to more knowledge than ever possible before. As digital sources, content, and media become a center for understanding, it stands to reason that these sources can influence how individuals make sense of the world as they search for experts or opinions on YouTube, Twitter, and other social platforms. Through social constructivism, this thesis sets out to understand how organizations create communication content to influence the realities of their viewers. As an organization with a specific goal - to create right wing content and instill right wing values in its

viewers - PragerU has a vested interest in influencing its viewers to perceive reality through the conservative lens. Viewers are to be influenced into determining what is fair or unfair, what is right or wrong, and what is objectively good or bad for American society.

5.2 CASE STUDY & SELECTION OF ORGANIZATION

This thesis makes use of case organization to answer the research question and aim set out as previously described. A case study is a research strategy which investigates a real world phenomenon within a certain, distinctive context (Yin, 2003). While case study research can be divided into different types, this project and study highlights PragerU as a type of instrumental case study. An instrumental case study is used when attempting to make broader generalizations about a certain issue or phenomenon (Silverman, 2017). In this instance, the phenomenon being investigated is how far-right YouTube channels and the ways in which they structure their video offerings to communicate and influence their audiences using strategic content creation, specifically through the lens of a moral attitudes. A case must be bounded, i.e. having clearly defined boundaries, and be either representative or atypical in the specific case selection (Kumar, 2019; Silverman, 2017). Further, Silverman (2017) emphasizes the importance of theoretical generalization in qualitative case study design. This thesis aims to ground the research design in an experimental case study using Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory, as described in Chapter 4. By using Moral Foundations Theory as the bedrock for this thesis, the research attempts to extend the theory to the world of online media, specific digital political content on YouTube, as it relates to moral populism and communication. The research of this thesis and the design of this study places right wing YouTube content within the framework provided by Moral Foundations Theory, thereby attempting to expand its generalizations around political communication to a newer area of digital relevance.

As a case organization, I selected PragerU due to its position in the periphery of the AIN. Its content does not represent the most extreme views in the web of influencers, content creators, and media organizations. Its rhetoric is not overtly hostile, and it has published videos that run counter to the most extreme of right-wing narratives (e.g., Holocaust denialism). However, its unique position in the AIN as a peripheral organization means that it acts as a gateway for viewers to more extremist views. Its content creation method is explicit about drawing viewers down a funnel to keep them engaged and dedicated to PragerU and its mission. The more

engaged in PragerU a viewer is, the more opportunities open to be connected to other parts of the AIN due to YouTube's aggressive recommendation algorithm.

PragerU has one of the largest reaches of the organizations on the periphery of the AIN. In 2019, PragerU received funding donations in the total of \$68 million (Prager University Foundation, 2022a). In 2019, 40% of its revenue came from individual donors, indicating both a strong structural backing of its efforts, as well as a thoughtful and intentional business structure that is encouraging to large and small donors alike (Dickinson & Cowin, 2021). Additionally, all PragerU videos are published on their YouTube channel or on the organization's own website. The research in this project is mainly conducted via YouTube, which will be described in the sections below.

5.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

To understand how PragerU communicates its ideas through Moral Foundations Theory, a qualitative analysis is designed and applied to the empirical material. The aim of qualitative research is to obtain a deeper understanding of phenomena where the issue is complex, and a more "detailed understanding" of the issue is needed (Creswell, 2007, p. 40; Kumar, 2019). Further, qualitative research relies on "interpretive inquiry," wherein the researcher understands and interprets data in their own manner, discusses this, and relays these interpretations in findings for the reader to then interpret themselves (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). This study relies on interpretive inquiry to investigate the complex and information-rich content that is published by PragerU in the form of video, rather than text, as is common with content analysis.

As such, the qualitative method used is content analysis, specifically directed content analysis. As described by Hsieh & Shannon, a directed content analysis is used to extend an existing theoretical framework, beginning with a structure informed by previous research, and categories derived from said theory (2005). In the case of this research, the informative theory will be Moral Foundations Theory, and work will be done to understand its impact on alt-right communication in the digital age. The six Moral Foundations are used as the codes for analyzing the empirical material, and interpretation of their place in the "funnel" structure, which will be described in the following section, is determined by the prevalence and position of the foundations in relation to the other material. The analysis of the research will examine how these Moral Foundations relate to each of the videos, their position in the funnel, and how they are

used to move the individual viewer down a path of activation so as to arrive at the bottom of the funnel. Ultimately, this study attempts to experiment with qualitative research by applying an analytical methodology to the chosen case organization and empirical material gathered through the selection process.

5.4 EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The empirical material analyzed in this project are the videos created by PragerU and published on their YouTube channel. While these videos are also published on the organization's website, YouTube will be used for its search convenience and access to other information, such as view and comment counts. YouTube's functionality also allows users to bookmark and compile playlists of videos, which is used in this case to track and organize the material covered. To avoid intersection with my personal account due to concerns regarding algorithmic recommendations, I created a new Google account to watch and save the videos for analysis.

PragerU produces and publishes many videos focusing on different topics, created in different styles to provide variety for their audience. For the purpose of this project, these different styles will be called "shows." The shows PragerU created are divided into three categories for the purpose of audience attraction and retention. These three categories are taken from PragerU's own marketing plan, the content funnel featured on page 9. This structure indicates what is important to the organization in question when creating content for viewers. At the top of the funnel, content is created for those who may be new or curious about their purported ideology. In the middle, the videos are for those who are well acquainted and have already subscribed to their ideas as a whole. Finally, the bottom of the funnel is for those who consider themselves their most ardent supporters; this support may translate into monetary and time commitment support as well. As such, the material is organized by position in the funnel, and each funnel position contains an associated show to be examined and studied.

The funnel categories and associated shows are as follows:

- 1. Top Funnel Content:** *Unapologetic with Amala Ekpunobi*

This video series features Amala Ekpunobi, a Nigerian-American conservative commentator, discussing various political and social issues from the conservative perspective. Ekpunobi is described as a former student activist who was raised in a left

wing activist household, who left the left after a “complete ideological transformation” (Prager University Foundation, n.d.). Part of Ekpunobi’s series is livestreamed on YouTube, where she discusses current events and topics such as race relations, “cancel culture,” free speech, gun rights, and the role of government with guests and livestream viewers. The livestreams are then archived on PragerU’s YouTube Channel, while shorter, edited clips are uploaded to PragerU’s website. Ekpunobi argues that modern topics such as “identity politics” and a “victim mentality” harm society. Like many other PragerU series, Ekpunobi emphasizes that individual responsibility, hard work, and traditional values are key to keeping American society as it should be, and that free speech, limited government, and personal liberty must further be emphasized in her generation, Gen Z.

2. Mid-Funnel Content: *Five Minute Videos*

PragerU's video series Five Minute Videos features short videos intended to give overviews on a wide range of topics, including history, economics, politics, and culture. The series includes over 500 videos. Each video is presented by one “expert” acting as the narrator, leading the viewer through the specific topic and arguments. The videos are animated with simple designs and flat, matte colors, making them simple and straightforward to watch. Topics covered in the series include the history of the United States, free speech, socialism, and the role of religion in society. The series also includes videos that address current events and contemporary issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and debates regarding immigration.

3. Bottom Funnel Content: *Fireside Chat with Dennis Prager*

PragerU's video series "Fireside Chats" features Dennis Prager, the founder of PragerU, sitting in front of a fireplace and discussing various political and social issues. The series includes over 100 episodes, with each episode ranging in length from a few minutes to over an hour. In each episode, Prager shares his views on a range of topics, including religion, politics, and culture which challenge progressive narratives. Prager emphasizes the importance of traditional values and principles, such as personal responsibility,

respect for authority, and the importance of family. He also stresses the importance of free speech and the need to defend Western civilization and Judeo-Christian values.

Videos that are the result of archived YouTube live streams are excluded from the selection, as live stream content can be shaped in real time by live audience chats, which are not the focus of this study. Transcripts of the top funnel and bottom funnel content were generated using Dovetail, a transcription tool used to analyze recordings for research purposes. Transcripts for mid-funnel content were taken directly from PragerU's website, where they are available to generate under the related video hosted on their own platforms. I read each transcript and highlighted sections of the transcript where I detected a Moral Foundation to be communicated. For example, if a video's transcript contained a claim that gender affirming care and intervention is harmful to children, I would label that section with a "Care/Harm" tag. Examples were identified by analyzing the language of the argument presented and comparing them to examples identified in Figure 4. This process was repeated for each video transcript, looking for incidences of each Moral Foundation in the arguments presented in the video's main messaging and rhetoric. After each transcript had been coded and tagged, I counted the incidences of each moral foundation across the entire category to understand the most prevalent theme at each level of the PragerU content funnel. These numbers were then used to generate charts demonstrating the breakdown of the Moral Foundations themes at each level, which are found in Chapter 6. These frames and selected quotes from the videos relating to the present Moral Foundations are in Appendix 1.

5.5 VIDEO SELECTION CRITERIA

To find the videos that were most impactful or salient to PragerU's audience, I sorted videos using YouTube's built in sorting tool in the chosen categories by popularity descending order. This arranged the videos from most popular to least popular. I selected the most popular videos from each category, keeping in mind to avoid videos that were repetitive in their subject matter to cover a variety of views. Videos within this assortment were then assessed by date of publication; videos that were to be analyzed should have been published at least after 2016, the year Donald Trump was elected. This year was chosen as a marker given the increased importance and relevance of right wing content and populist rhetoric in the United States. The

bulk of the videos analyzed were published on YouTube within the last two years, the oldest one being published in August of 2017. To cover a wide variety of topics, and to avoid repetitive messaging, I chose videos to cover a broader range of political and social issues including race, gender, sexuality, economics, socialism, and current politics. I made these assessments with the aim of acquiring a more representative sample of right wing or conservative ideology. Though many of the videos repeated certain points (i.e., socialism is harmful), the videos selected illustrated talking points in different ways and through different lenses, making the conversations less repetitive. The total number of videos analyzed at each level, and their run time, can be found in Table 1 on page 31.

5.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND REFLEXIVITY

The views that PragerU espouses are antithetical to my own personal beliefs. It is necessary to acknowledge my own personal biases in this study. The messages and videos often hateful towards minority groups (including racial, ethnic, religious, and LGBTQIA+ Americans), but are purposely misconstrued in order to spread right wing propaganda. This is in addition to the knowledge that PragerU lies within the AIN, which contributes and manifests to right wing radicalization on the internet. However, the coding and analysis of these videos is rooted in a strict theoretical framework, as described above, so as to remove personal bias from the interpretation of the empirical material. I acknowledge that immersing myself in this worldview may expose me to nationalistic, misogynistic, and racist rhetoric that could cause stress or negative personal impacts. However, I believe this work to be extremely important and highly topical, and therefore accept those risks to myself. Additionally, I acknowledge the ethical considerations of giving repeated views to PragerU's videos, therefore contributing to the amplification of this content and increasing its popularity at an individual level. Regardless, the videos cannot be removed from their online contexts, and therefore they must be considered and tolerated as part of the risk of this study.

Table 1*Total Video Overview & Breakdown*

Title of Video	Prevailing Moral Foundation	Run Time	# of Views
<i>Unapologetic</i>			
U1. Black People, You Don't Own This	Sanctity/Degradation	12:01 minutes	472,468
U2. Children Should Not Choose Their Gender: An Unapologetic Special	Sanctity/Degradation	8:49 minutes	908,716
U3. Don't Sexualize Yourself and Then Complain About Being Sexualized	Sanctity/Degradation	9:25 minutes	1,042,964
U4. Fix Fatherlessness, Fix America	Sanctity/Degradation	7:48 minutes	687,831
U5. What's Wrong with Being a Trad Wife?	Sanctity/Degradation	7:12 minutes	208,623
U6. How I Stopped Hating the Police: An Unapologetic Special	Authority/Subversion	6:51 minutes	1,749,926
<i>5 Minute Videos</i>			
M1. How's Socialism Doing in Venezuela?	Fairness/Cheating	5:30 minutes	12,724,461
M2. Left or Liberal?	Loyalty/Betrayal	5:57 minutes	20,423,357
M3. Make Men Masculine Again	Sanctity/Degradation	5:08 minutes	10,603,657
M4. Where Do You Want to Live: Red State or Blue State?	Care/Harm	5:46 minutes	10,562,258
M5. The Inconvenient Truth About the Democratic Party	Loyalty/Betrayal	5:49 minutes	9,006,926
<i>Fireside Chat with Dennis Prager</i>			
F1. A Dialogue About God and Ayn Rand	Liberty/Oppression	1:21:41 minutes	2,702,959
F2. Why Millennials Support Communism	Liberty/Oppression	32:16 minutes	881,752
Total # of Views:			71,975,898

6 ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

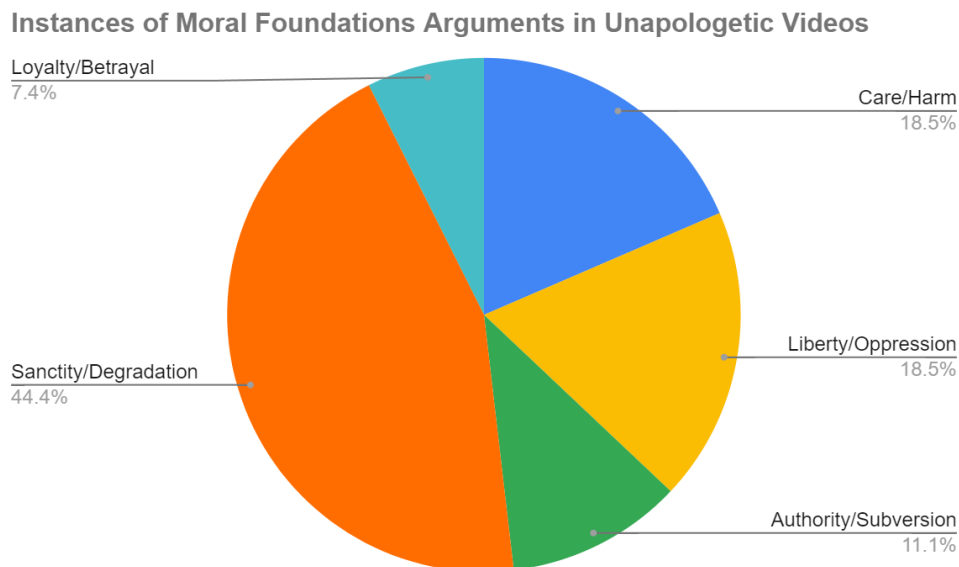
The following chapter describes the findings of the content analysis performed on the three different genres of PragerU videos. The analysis presents the prevalence of different themes (i.e. Moral Foundations) at each level of PragerU’s content funnel and how the presence of those Moral Foundation themes serves to lead their users down their own funnel of audience engagement and activation. The analysis presents ideas as to which Moral Foundations Theory plays the most important role in PragerU’s content and communication strategy. The discussion also examines why these Moral Foundations may be effective in executing PragerU’s marketing and audience activation strategies with the arguments and discourse presented in these videos. The discussion also places the tactics of PragerU and its moralization in its modern political and societal contexts to underscore the relevance of the organization’s efforts.

6.1 UNAPOLOGETIC AND TOP FUNNEL MORALITY

The first set of videos, the *Unapologetic with Amala Ekpunobi* series, makes up the beginning, or the entrance point, of the PragerU content funnel. After examining seven videos, the presence of Moral Foundations arguments across the videos are displayed in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Unapologetic Videos MFT Breakdown



Nearly all Moral Foundations were present in the Unapologetic videos, with the exception of Fairness/Cheating, which was not found in the videos examined for this study. Overwhelmingly, the most present Moral Foundation was Sanctity/Degradation, making up nearly half of the recorded instances. As Unapologetic is meant to be top funnel content, topics around current conversations that grab the attention of the viewer are going to be more prominent. Its topics generally examine issues prominent not only in current news, but in pop culture, such as political discussions on TikTok and other YouTube channels. In an era of “culture war”, where discussions around “identity politics” remain hot button issues, videos discussing sex, gender, and race, and their relationship to the political right and left have the potential to attract the most attention. As the Sanctity/Degradation foundation can elicit feelings of disgust or anger, this foundation is well suited for driving clicks through to videos, especially to viewers who may be tangentially interested in the topic, but not yet engaged in the PragerU sphere on YouTube. An overview of the *Unapologetic* video titles and the dominant Moral Foundation in each of the videos can be found in Table 1. This is not an exhaustive list of the Moral Foundations found in each video, but an identification of the prevailing themes. The coding frames of each video can be found in Appendix 1.

Prominent in *Unapologetic*'s content are discussions of sex, gender identity, and the right of transgender people in the United States. The issue of LGBTQ+ rights, particularly transgender rights, is a highly contested topic in politics at the moment; 453 anti-LGBTQ bills have been introduced in state legislatures since the start of 2023 at the time of research, compared to the 180 introduced in 2022 (Choi, 2022; ACLU, 2023). Additionally, a report from Pew Research Center evaluated Americans' opinions on multiple issues around trans identity. While there is overall acceptance (64%) that trans people should be protected by law from discrimination, attitudes around certain aspects about transgender, nonbinary, and gender identities are more nuanced. According to the survey, 66% of Republicans or those who lean Republican say that society has gone too far in accepting people who are transgender, compared to 60% of Democrats who believe society has not gone far enough to accept people who are transgender. At the same time, 43% of Americans overall believe that societal views on gender identity are changing too quickly – a number that steeply increases to 70% when examining the responses of those who identify as Republican (Parker, Horowitz, and Brown, 2022). Given the political momentum around anti-LGBTQ sentiment, the strong opposition that conservatives feel towards

trans identities, and the fear that societal ideas around gender are changing too quickly, and going too far, it makes sense that a show such as *Unapologetic* would move to take advantage of these fears for their audience. Capitalizing on fear and disgust some may feel towards those with LGBTQ+ related identities is a lucrative strategy in this context.

Other videos related to gender, though not necessarily LGBTQ+ related issues, specifically examine discussions around women in pop culture. One such video, titled, “What’s Wrong with Being a Trad Wife,” examines a TikTok where a woman explains her “tradwife” lifestyle, an anti-feminist movement that promotes traditional gender roles, and that a woman’s place belongs in the home. TradWives are often discussed in the context of and linked to alt-right, white nationalist circles, which decry the impact modern feminism has had on women. TradWives believe that feminism has failed women and praise the virtues of returning to a 1950s aesthetic, rooted in white femininity, where women rely on a male provider and extol homemaking as their ultimate purpose (Lewis, 2018; Love, 2020). It is a place where women can exist in a typically male dominated ideology. In the video, Amala comes to the TikTokers defense, maintaining that this lifestyle has its own merits and, in some ways, is beneficial to both men and women:

Her husband is [...] providing for the family, and while he's away from the household, a household that he can't take care of [...] kids that he can't rear while he's out at work and she's taking on that separate but equal role in the household and making sure that everything runs smoothly for both of them. (U5)

In this video, as in many other PragerU videos, the virtue of creating and maintaining a strong family unit is reinforced. Many conversations related to gender in PragerU’s videos circle back to the typical nuclear family, which is seen as a key aspect of leading a successful life. Traditional gender roles and gender dynamics within a family are reinforced and celebrated. Potentially problematic concepts, such as “TradWives,” are hand-waved away as being examples of strong, traditional values, with attention diverted from their origins and relations to extreme groups.

These videos, then, can be seen as a pushback to mainstream ideas. While a majority of Americans accept people who are transgender and wish to see them protected by the law,

PragerU's videos reiterate myths about trans individuals and paint the support of trans access to healthcare and acceptance as a dangerous and degrading thing. The videos also discuss women's issues with some contempt and praise more stringent adherence to traditional gender roles, including limits on dressing and modesty. These videos, then, also act as a signal to those with their political leanings that PragerU is not only in line with their beliefs, but willing to stand up for them as a prominent voice in alternative, right wing media. The videos position the channel as a contrarian voice against more typical sources of news and media, and there is sympathy to even the most extreme of positions even at the top of the funnel. This tactic reaffirms PragerU's position as a channel that that goes against "left wing" and liberal narratives, and a voice that is not afraid to speak "the truth." In fact, the Liberty/Oppression foundation is often framed in this context in *Unapologetic* videos – that liberals and the political left are *censoring* conservatives' opinions, and that Amala is standing up for these opinions and what she believes in. One such quote from the video "Children Should Not Be Allowed to Choose Their Gender" is:

He's been canceled by the medical community for not going along with the gender affirmation ideology that they've been trying to push. And it's not just people like me and Ken Zucker who are getting censored on this stuff. (U2)

Here, we see Amala insist that she and others are being "canceled" by the medical community for opposing medical transitions for minors. While the Liberty/Oppression foundation is more prominent in down funnel videos that will be explored later in this chapter, it is still used at all levels as a useful leverage for the video and the audience. If the alt-right can continue to position itself as an oppressed and censored political minority, it may continue to bolster its viewers in becoming more fervent supporters of their political goals. By framing the opinions expressed in these videos as a target for censorship or "cancellation," viewers may feel that by watching and engaging, they are fighting against such ideologies, and are drawn closer together by this act, not only to each other, but to Amala herself and PragerU as a whole.

After Sanctity/Degradation, the Care/Harm foundation was the next most prominent foundation in *Unapologetic's* rhetoric. This foundation was often found in conjunction when talking about gender identity, and the degradation of traditional gender identities. For example, in the video "Children Should Not be Allowed to Choose Their Gender," Amala claims:

The truth is these children are being exploited. They are vulnerable, they're alone, they're confused [...] can we really in good conscience and good faith say that blind affirmation of gender identity and medical transitioning for children is the compassionate route to take here? (U2)

While the conventional, liberal position on this may be that supporting a minor through gender transition is a form of care, here, the argument takes the opposite form. Supporting a minor through medical gender transition is *harmful*, full stop. What may seem supportive and beneficial on its face has, according to this video, greater unintended consequences, and is even exploitative. The Care/Harm foundation, while most often associated with the political left and its positioning, is still used by right wing communication. It is the framing and frequency that differs, and here, we can see it being used as a tactic to oppose and defy liberal positioning, and bolster PragerU's own anti-LGBTQ+ stances.

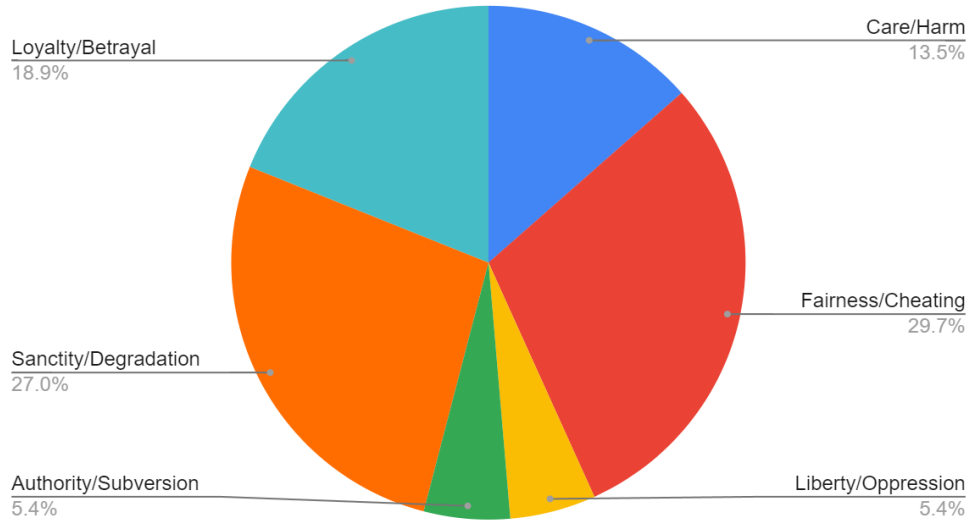
6.2 5 MINUTE VIDEOS AND MID-FUNNEL MORALITY

The next series of videos in the PragerU content funnel is the *5 Minute Videos* series, representing the level at which PragerU expects individuals to be consistent viewers and subscribers (see Figure 3). The following figure on page 36 examines the breakdown of the prevalence of Moral Foundations in the 5 Minute Videos, where Table 1 provides an overview of the videos and the strongest Moral Foundation found in each of the videos.

Figure 7

5 Minute Videos MFT Breakdown

Instances of Moral Foundations Arguments in 5 Minute Videos



In these videos, the focus widens to many conservative issues and the different moralities that beget those arguments, as compared to *Unapologetic* videos, which relies heavily on Sanctity/Degradation arguments. Instead of being purely commentaries and reactions to popular culture, news, and current events form a political position, PragerU produces videos that discuss political issues more broadly. While there are often videos published that are relevant to current events (such as videos regarding COVID-19 and vaccinations), the videos focus on larger scale ideas and the channel's overall ideological positioning. Prominent themes include debates regarding socialism vs. capitalism, gender roles, taxation, religion, and the virtues of United States history and their institutions. There is a broader representation of the different Moral Foundations at this level, while still focusing on themes of Sanctity/Degradation. Arguments about Fairness/Cheating expand at this level, along with Loyalty/Betrayal. In many ways, these videos act as an encyclopedia for both the political positions and ideological values of PragerU. Despite speaking through more Moral Foundations at this level, the prevailing theme of these videos is an effort to set up an in-group, out-group dynamic between conservatives and liberals (namely, Democrats and leftists).

Throughout each of the videos examined, there was a common thread regarding the way PragerU and its speakers discussed the Democratic Party in the United States. In videos such as “The Inconvenient Truth About the Democratic Party” and “Where Do You Want to Live?,” the messaging is more overt: Democrats are a party that wish to cheat Americans out of their fair share of wealth, pass harmful policies that expand the role of government and create harm, and is a historically racist party with roots. The former video is clear in its inflammatory and accusatory rhetoric:

The Democratic Party defended slavery, started the Civil War, opposed Reconstruction, founded the Ku Klux Klan, imposed segregation, perpetrated lynchings, and fought against the civil rights acts of the 1950s and 1960s (M5).

This video oversimplifies and misconstrues large swathes of history, obscuring a more complicated truth in order to demonize the Democratic Party. There is no mention of the well-known “Southern Strategy”, a campaign undertaken by the Republican Party to exacerbate racial tensions in the American South for electoral advantages following the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Southern Strategy appealed to ideas of the “Old South,” namely that traditional ideas of racial and family structures should be maintained, and that the government had no place in regulating such matters (Aistrup, 1998). The Southern Strategy also intertwined values of racial segregation and anti-government sentiment with Evangelical Christianity, repackaging ideas of conservatism to align with Republican party messaging from the 1960s onward (Maxwell, 2019). Though the strategy did not change the political landscape of the South overnight, it set in motion a change of ideologies for the Democratic and Republican parties, which we can see reflected in contemporary politics. By eliminating this key fact, PragerU constructs, with its viewers, a different reality than the historical truth, one where Democrats are the true enemy of the American people, particularly minorities and black Americans. It then follows that the policies put forth by Democrats are nothing more than hypocrisy, given what is presented in the video.

Despite this, PragerU maintains that the Democratic party is responsible for some of the worst atrocities in American history. This messaging functions through the rhetoric of Loyalty/Betrayal, where Democrats stand in opposition to American ideals. However, this is not

the only Moral Foundation. This thread is also continued in the “Where Do You Want Live,” video, which compares Democratic or blue states unfavorably to Republican or red states. The video begins divisively:

We're supposed to be the United States of America. But in many ways, we're now divided into two very different nations (M4).

It continues by comparing states' crime rates, taxation policies, and COVID responses.

Progressives and liberal Democrats may mean well. They certainly talk a lot about how much they care about the poor, minorities and the working class. Yet somehow, it's always the poor, minorities, and the working class who pay the price for their bad policies. That's why those who can move, move. Those who can't get stuck with the short end of the stick (M4).

This paints Democratic and Republican states in stark opposition with each other, where one represents a true America that is a land of equal opportunity, and one that is not. This quote, however, does set up a reasonable appeal to those who may not yet be fully convinced of PragerU's messaging. By acknowledging that Democrats *may* mean well, they do not completely write off the intentions of the opposite party, but the simultaneously cast doubt on their meaning by bringing up and highlighting a lack of effectiveness around policies. These ideas are taken to the extreme in the video “Left or Liberal?” It is in the videos that move beyond mainstream Democrats to discussing “leftism” that PragerU's us vs. them mentality is showcased. Not only do so called “leftists” have different political values and positions from Republicans and conservatives, like Democrats, but the videos go so far to position the left as having anti-American views and goals, such as attempting to limit free speech:

The left, however, believes the left is the last, best hope of earth and regards America as racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, violent, and imperialistic. [...] The left is leading the first widespread suppression of free speech in modern American history—from the universities to the tech companies that govern the internet to almost every other institution and place of work (M2).

This video works to paint new divisions, and to define, based on political affiliation, who is a “real American” and who is not. Ultimately, PragerU’s videos at this level depend on producing anxiety in its viewers about threats to America, which largely rest on the idea that socialism will destroy the fabric of American society as we know it. The video even posits that nationalism is a more righteous American value, something that the left opposes:

The left has contempt for nationalism, seeing it as the road to fascism. Better that we should all be “citizens of the world” in a world without borders (M2).

As this extreme is arrived at, the videos have created a new target that viewers should attempt to take issue with. It is not just the Democratic Party, but leftism and leftist ideas, and even further, the *people* who believe in it.

Though these videos are presented as simple statements of the facts, the rhetoric in these videos depends on activating the emotions and *pathos* of the viewer (Ethos, Pathos & Logos – Modes of Persuasion, n.d.). In a similar vein to the *Unapologetic* videos, which leverage emotions of fear and disgust to engage viewers, the videos examined here attempt to elicit emotions from their viewers. Pointing fingers at the Democratic party and naming them the cause of the Civil War, the KKK, and racial segregation is inflammatory, hoping to both bring about disgust and anger from conservative viewers. Discussing the unfairness of socialism in Venezuela, and the perceived threat of socialism in America, not only plays on the fear of conservatives, but elicits anger at the thought of leftism threatening American values. This fear continues to bring viewers closer together, and perpetuates an in-group mentality, where Democrats, leftists, and the states and people of “Blue America” are a completely different “other.”

“Othering” refers to the act of marking individuals or groups as fundamentally different from oneself one’s own group based on any number of perceived differences regarding race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, and political belief. Othering is not limited to these axes but they are frequent components of othering discourse. Brons (2015) describes the process of othering as one which always put the in-group, or self, in the superior position, while placing the out-group, or other, in an inferior position. Further, there is a distinction that constructs of othering can be analyzed along the dimensions of crude vs. sophistication, where the superior self is put in

contrast with an other that is either inferior or radically alien (Brons, 2015, p. 72). These dimensions set up an in group which believes itself more relevant or human than another, risking the process for dehumanization of the other to occur (Brons, 2015, p.72). Multiple videos in the 5 *Minute Video* series work along these lines, either painting Democrats as cosmopolitan elites out of touch with the average American, or destructive, un-American forces that wish to see the country destroyed.

Othering is often a leveraging of power dynamics by a dominant group, which has the power to shape norms, values, and expectations. In the case of PragerU, these expectations are created by drawing a clear line between the channel and its viewers and the channel's political and ideological opponents. The channel and its viewers are the ingroup of conservatives committed to upholding their own version of American values and righteousness. The outgroup are Democratic voters, leftists, and those who would seek to "destroy" American values; these groups are hardly, if ever, made distinct, and the rhetoric of many of these videos conflate them into one enemy "other." Mechanics of "othering" are not confined to these videos. Othering exists at multiple levels of online discourse and is prominent in far-right circles. Harmer and Lumsden (2019) explore the way that othering takes place in multiple different online communities. In online communities, boundaries are drawn between those who have power in any given space, and those who are without power. These dynamics leave them open to the potential for trolling, harassment, and abuse in the online space, but beyond into the real world, where toxic behaviors can turn into real world stalking, threat-making, and other forms of potential retribution for the others' existence or appearance in a certain space (Harmer & Lumsden, 2019). PragerU videos may not explicitly encourage its viewers to involve themselves in such means of harassment, however, the videos maintain and reinforce both an ingroup and outgroup position, as well as a position of political victimhood which is perpetrated by the American left.

This rhetoric accelerates and enhances the divide between American politics – it does not seek to ameliorate the polarity between the parties, but to exacerbate it. There is a reason that these divisions exist, and it is because the Republican Party, and more broadly, American conservatives, oppose these policies from a moral standpoint. Speaking out against liberal and Democratic politics, in their view, is a moral responsibility essential to keeping America and its values intact. The rhetoric in these videos paints a Democratic party that desires to destroy or

degrade the sanctity of American values and replace them with something harmful; that socialism is a destroying force in the United States, perpetuated by leftism and Democrats, and only those who hold similar ideas to PragerU can prevent it from taking root in America.

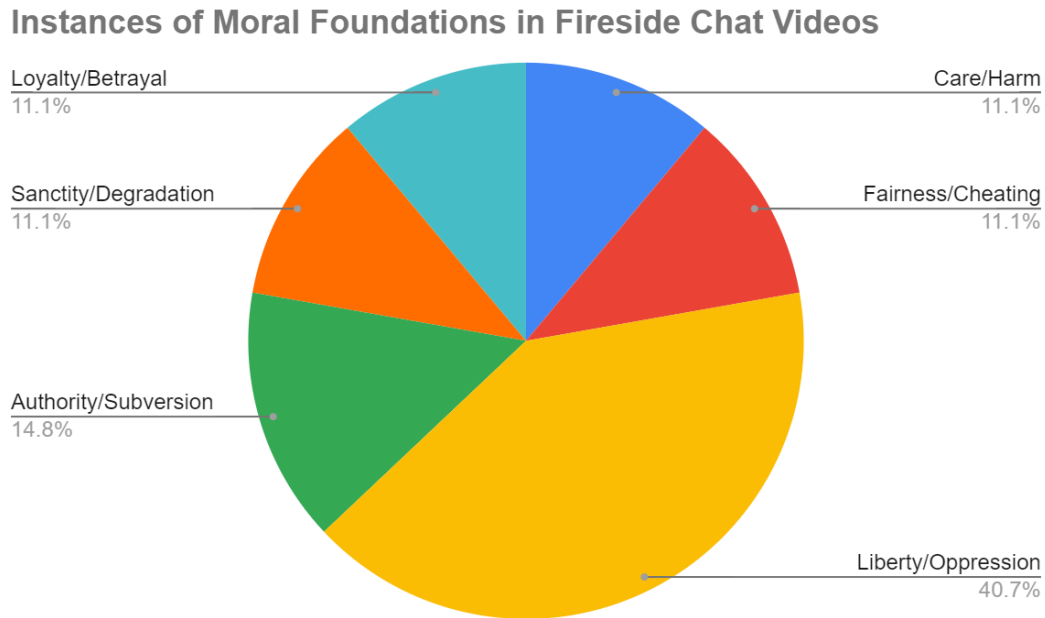
This is not merely conjecture; this mission is also repeated in their Annual and Biannual reports, which position PragerU as a line of defense between liberal politics and Western, Judeo-Christian values (Prager University Foundation, 2022a; Prager University Foundation, 2022b). PragerU doubles down on this us vs. them rhetoric in their videos, seeking to alienate their viewers from fellow Americans who may have different political beliefs from them, or who lie further left on the political spectrum. This continued polarization and act of othering perpetuates the erosion of social trust and cohesion and normalizes exclusive politics. PragerU's communication encourages its viewers to form a strong coalition with each other and PragerU. The videos at the mid funnel level want viewers to stay as perpetual consumers of their content, and to ingrain the ideologies of their videos within their own construction of the world around them. While PragerU leads its viewers through its marketing funnel, however, it does not care for making these nuanced distinctions. It is more imperative to paint a common enemy, to gather its audience around its ideologies, and to push them forward through the funnel to the end point.

6.3 FIRESIDE CHAT WITH DENNIS PRAGER AND BOTTOM FUNNEL MORALITY

The PragerU content funnel ends with its video series *Fireside Chat with Dennis Prager*. At this level, viewers are expected to be much more engaged and enmeshed with PragerU's content, to the point where they, ideally, may become PragerFORCE volunteers or contribute financially through donations to the PragerU Foundation. The intended audience for these videos, then, are those who have or are willing to invest in PragerU with their time, money, or actions. One aspect of this can be seen in the length of the *Fireside Chat* videos; these videos are regularly at least 30 minutes long, with some extending up to an hour and a half long, such as one video examined in this research. An overview of the Moral Foundations arguments present in the two videos examined at this level is displayed below in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Fireside Chat with Dennis Prager Videos MFT Breakdown



Unlike the previous level of the funnel, the Moral Foundations arguments at this level coalesce again around one Moral Foundation: Liberty/Oppression. While there is a representation of each Moral Foundation in the videos, the discussions in *Fireside Chat* largely involve more philosophical discussions and debates regarding the idea of liberty, what it means to be free, and how freedom is promoted, or rather, prevented, in current American politics. Each of the videos examined also had Liberty/Oppression as the dominant theme of their arguments, conversations, and discussions, as shown in Table 1. Many of the lines of thinking in these videos border on almost existential, often discussing what it means to be a “righteous” or “good” person in America, and what values truly constitute the idea of freedom, a dearly held American value. Because each of these videos star Dennis Prager, the founder of PragerU, these videos offer a closer look into how Prager conceives the world, and by extension, how his conceptions affect PragerU as an idea, a brand, and an organization.

The more philosophical discussions that take place at this funnel level may be seen are more appropriate for the deeply invested audience for which these videos are created. Conversations which revolve around liberty, oppression, and existential threats to the United States may be more engaging, as the intended audience is meant to be more invested and deeper

in the sphere of PragerU than the casual, almost incidental viewer of earlier content. The appeal of these videos relies on the thoughtfulness and commitment of the viewer, given the length of the video, but also given the relatively dense subject matter. While the top funnel videos leverage Sanctity/Degradation through the lens of disgust and rage at liberal stances on social issues, the tone of the *Fireside Chat* videos aims to be more thoughtful, mature, and serious than the previous levels. However, these videos do not go without mentioning disgust. Rather, though, they observe the same issues with a more critical lens, and aim not to create just *disgust* over thing, but to discuss them through the idea of liberty, and how the root of that disgust should originate from a rejection of their perceived values of liberty.

The first video examined, “A Dialogue About God and Ayn Rand” (F1), features a one hour and twenty-minute conversation between Dennis Prager and Craig Biddle. Craig Biddle is the executive director of the Objective Standard Institute, a libertarian non-profit devoted to the teaching of Ayn Rand’s principles of Objectivism. Though atypical for the Fireside Chat format, this video had the highest views of any Fireside Chat, totaling 2.7 million by the time of writing, surpassing many others by a large margin. Prager begins the video by explaining that while he and Biddle disagree on much regarding morality and God, the core principle that connects them is liberty, saying “I am much closer philosophically, morally, emotionally to an atheist who loves liberty than to a God believer who doesn’t” (F1). This establishes that main thesis of the video: that liberty, above all, is such an essential principle to the worldview of Prager, more foundational and influential than a connection of religion or its resulting world views. As such, it is made expressly clear that liberty, and a love of liberty as defined by both Prager and Biddle, may be the strongest connector between two individuals, even in disagreement on other things. Biddle describes the value of liberty as an objective virtue, saying:

Why is freedom objectively good? Because [...] human beings in order to live, in order to live and prosper, must be free to act on his judgment, to produce goods, to trade them voluntarily, to mutual advantage and so on. If he can't do that, he can't live as a human being. [...] To live as a human being the way that you and I want to live, we must be free. This is not an opinion, it's a fact (Craig Biddle, F1)

This disagreement, however, cannot transcend all disagreements. In the world constructed by Prager himself and PragerU in general, leftism is in direct opposition with the idea of liberty,

extending and reinforcing the “us vs. them” ideas established in the *5 Minute Video Series*. This antagonism is made explicit by Biddle:

I think much of the left really wants to destroy America and they're adamant about this. They don't like this country, they don't like the freedom that it represents and that it's supposed to protect. And they're, they're really trying to, to destroy this country.

It is also made explicit by Prager himself in the second video, “Why Millennials Support Communism” (F2), in which Prager states:

That's why the left is so scary. It wants to control how you think and how you speak. There is no exception to that. And the entire world of the left liberals don't think that way. Conservatives don't think that way. But the left does, always, did, always will. It's a distinguishing feature of leftism, controlling how people think.

In these moments, Prager acts as a leader, urging his viewers to acknowledge the existential threat the left poses to the United States. Yet at the end of these videos, Prager does not urge the viewer to specific action beyond a call for a donation to the PragerU Foundation. He does not ask them to vote for a certain candidate or donate to causes beyond the organization’s own foundation. He does, however, leave the viewer pondering certain aspects of Prager’s world view that are meant to inspire fear and pose a threat to the viewer. If the left is scary, and the left wants to destroy America, what can be done? By undertaking these questions, Prager and his potential guests pose larger questions to the audience. What does it mean to be American? What values are at stake in the current climate of American politics? Who is able to call themselves a true patriot, or believer in American values, and who is not? These conversations are an extension of the us vs. them dynamic seen at the previous level, but with a call to both higher ideas and higher powers and a stronger reliance on more philosophical takes that are not accessible or realistic to discuss within a time frame of five minutes. Prager gives not just tacit endorsement to these claims, but echoes them in the video himself, saying “Every leftist movement is totalitarian” (F2). Again, there is no room for true nuance, despite appeals to the potential natures of those who disagree with him. There is no goodwill given towards anyone who may identify as a “leftist,” that their intentions may be just as well-meaning as Prager’s.

Instead, they are cast as blanket enemies to be looked at with skepticism at best and animosity at worst. What is to be done? There must be something; in the sphere of PragerU, this is achievable by making a tax deductible donation. But beyond this, the viewer is left to their own answers. While these answers may be found by consuming more PragerU videos, the ecosystem within which the viewer operates does not confine the viewer to just PragerU videos.

It is at this point where the threshold from PragerU to other parts of the Alternative Influence Network may be crossed. While it is impossible to pinpoint an exact moment in viewership or video that would break this boundary, those deep in the bottom of the funnel are likely, based on the workings of YouTube's algorithm, to be continually fed more right wing videos that pull the viewer deeper into the rabbit hole of conspiracy theories, extremism, and more. Other channels connected to PragerU through the AIN may be more inflammatory in their rhetoric, or more suggestive as to what could be done to prevent America from succumbing to the alleged dangers of leftism and socialism. This is a moment where individuals may be vulnerable to falling further down the right wing extremism pipeline described earlier, as they seek out answers on how to combat these existential threats to the United States.

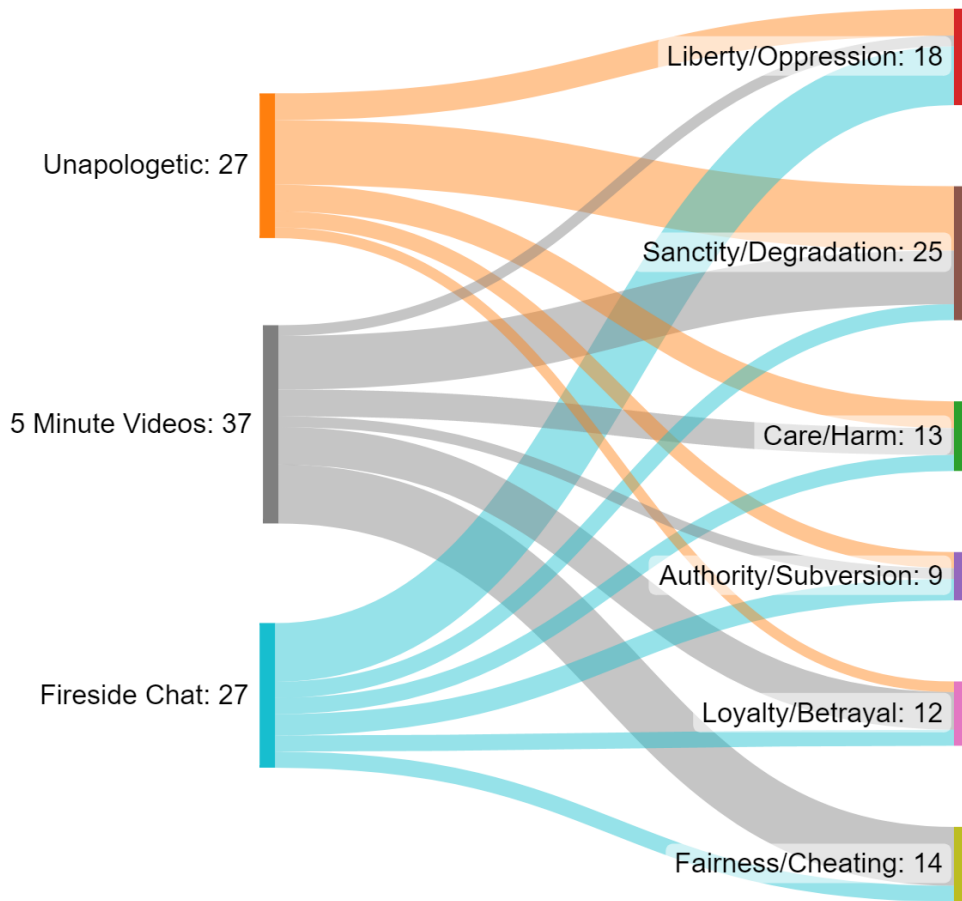
6.4 MORAL FOUNDATIONS IN USE

This research project began to understand the ways in which PragerU constructs rhetorical and communication strategies through Moral Foundations Theory to move audience members down their content funnel. At each level of its content funnel, PragerU creates a unique and effective line of communication that not only draws in the viewer to engage with the organization's content further, but clearly communicates their own moral positioning as they work to advocate for right wing political causes in the United States. These modes of communication and rhetorical analysis are leveraged in unique ways that strengthen the message of PragerU across each of its video content offerings. At the top of the funnel, Sanctity/Degradation are prominent in the *Unapologetic* series, which takes advantage of feelings of fear and disgust around contemporary issues regarding, sex, gender, and race. It is particularly the former two that are the target of these emotions. This Moral Foundation is found through the subsequent levels of the funnel and is enhanced by the mixing in of more rhetorical arguments. At the mid-funnel, it is Loyalty/Betrayal and Fairness/Cheating, and the bottom of the funnel, it is Liberty/Oppression. By keeping a red thread of reasoning through each video series, at different levels of the funnel,

PragerU is consistent in their argumentation of why certain things should be the way they are, and what issues are the most pressing or concerning for Americans. The diagram in Figure 9 on page 49 shows the flow of rhetorical arguments in each video series towards specific Moral Foundations. The flow shows clear themes from each of the video series, and that as users progress through the content funnel there is a concerted effort to lead viewers in examining arguments through these specific perspectives. Though at face value, the Moral Foundations covered may seem broad, the analysis here displays a push towards specific belief frames depending on the level of the content funnel.

Figure 9

Flow of Moral Foundations Rhetoric in PragerU Videos



Made with SankeyMATIC

Moral Foundations assist PragerU in constructing a consistent worldview for their audience. If the user reaches the bottom of the funnel, they will be well versed in certain ideas that PragerU argues for in their videos. For example, when a viewer first encounters an argument in favor of the gender binary and traditional gender roles at the top of the funnel, they are exposed to justifications for why this thought process is correct. If the viewer makes it to the bottom of the funnel, when Dennis Prager discusses the same matter, he does not need to discuss *why* he finds such a thing objectionable, but rather, is able to then explain why it is, in his opinion, dangerous for America, without over-explaining beliefs to the viewer. These rhetorical arguments build upon one another and impress upon the viewer that because there are many ways one can argue against something, these lines of argumentation must be correct. If one can argue against gender affirming care for minors, and criticize the entire idea of nonbinary gender, how could such a thing be incorrect? This creation of logical consistency, even if factually incorrect, provides a strong justification for PragerU viewers to be aligned with the organization, and to take their arguments at face value.

6.5 US VS. THEM, OR ACTIVATING THE HIVE SWITCH

As previously discussed, a larger portion of PragerU videos, particularly those at the mid-funnel level, look to exacerbate political and identity divides within the United States to stoke fear, and to create an in group vs. out group mentality. These videos mainly argued through the Moral Foundation of Loyalty/Betrayal, posing leftists, Democratic politicians, and their voters as individuals who hate America and threaten its values. This is one example of what Haidt discusses as the “Hive Hypothesis,” which states that humans are groupish creatures with the ability to set aside self-interest for the benefit of something larger than themselves, sometimes to their own detriment (Haidt, 2012). When scaled up, single hives have the potential for authoritarianism to take root. It is much easier for authoritarianism to take root in a society where the individuals do not have “cross-cutting hives,” which are interlinked, and over time increase exposure to those who think differently, look differently, and act differently from them, yet are bonded to each other due to the hive (Haidt, 2012). As Americans lose trust in their institutions, online and digital spaces replace the former “hives” of communities past. These groups are often insular, such as private groups on Facebook, or hyper-focused, such as niche fan interest circles on Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube. The algorithms of most of these platforms continue to serve up

content that aligns with the hives created by the user, establishing a bubble, or echo chamber, around the user that prevents exposure to other thoughts, leading to weakened links to others of differing opinions.

Therefore, organizations interested in maintaining and exploiting the hive switch can reliably pinpoint those whom they believe to be susceptible with the right tactics, the write strategies, and the right communication. If someone loses themselves in something larger than themselves, they become more committed, more loyal, and more fervent for that cause of purpose. When PragerU manages to activate this hive switch using its digital strategy, they are exploiting our natural tendency to be groupish, as Haidt discusses. Taking advantage of this groupish tendency provides positive outcomes for the organization in terms of video views, donations, newsletter sign ups, and volunteers. It is in their greatest interest to keep individuals activated for the right wing hive and against the left wing hive. This tactic may also be exploited by other organizations in politics and is important for researchers to be able to identify when this is occurring as part of an organization's strategy.

6.6 ESTABLISHING LEGITIMACY AGAINST STEREOTYPICAL EXTREMISM

The alt-right has leveraged multiple ways to differentiate itself from what we may perceive as stereotypical extremism. To separate themselves from stereotypical extremism is to open up new doors to new audience members and potential supporters of their beliefs. The alt-right's savvy use of social media is one such mode of establishing this legitimacy. Its presence on Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube has created opportunities for community formation that far exceed the effectiveness of movements of the past, which were confined to one's local areas. The creation of social media accounts and networks also lends a layer of sophistication to new alt-right communication, coming across as savvier and more modern than their previous counterparts. In the case of PragerU, this is achieved with its high budget, leading to a high production value and a more effective display of legitimacy. The large organizational structures that support PragerU and the Prager University Foundation allow for sophisticated networks of information, along with its in-person and volunteer efforts on college campuses, such as the PragerFORCE volunteer network. By providing an alternative place to discuss and disseminate ideas outside traditional media, this network also allows them to leverage and exploit their target audience's distrust of mainstream media. A 2022 poll by Gallup showed that 34% of all Americans have

trust in mass media. This number sinks to 14% when examining Republicans' trust in mass media to be a fair and accurate source for news and is only 6% among Republicans between the ages of 35 and 54. (Brenan, 2022). In creating a new space for right wing political discourse, PragerU leverages feelings of anger and disconnect from mainstream media and ideas to their own benefit.

The new alt-right also focuses on creating a persona of intellectualism. This can most clearly be seen reflected in the *Fireside Chat with Dennis Prager* category of videos. Not only are the visuals of the content created to construct an image of intellectualism - Dennis Prager sits in a large, leatherback chair wearing a suit and tie next to a fireplace – but the discussions are framed around philosophy, morality, and existentialism, rather than just responses to current events or news headlines. Yet even in the higher funnel content, the elements of serious intellectualism remain, and the aesthetics of their delivery are neatly maintained. The discourse in other videos as well is framed as reasoned and balanced; the delivery is calm and professional. Even the hosts of top funnel and mid funnel content convey a sense of seriousness. As the host of *Unapologetic*, Amala stands as a young black woman who, in the eyes of conservatives, speaks truth to the power and hegemony of liberal mainstream media. Hosts of videos in the *5 Minute Videos* category are doctors, professors, and economists, among other things, dressed in professional, tailored clothing. They speak with authority and confidence, without accents or stereotypes that one might associate with nationalism, extremism, or white supremacy, such as strong southern or “hillbilly” like mannerisms. Here, right wing extremism has a new identity, one that is buttoned up and well groomed. The white robes of the Ku Klux Klan, Swastikas, and other symbols of white pride are nowhere to be seen – unless as illustrations showing a connection to the Democratic Party (see Figure 2). By leaving old and emotionally charged symbols behind, PragerU can approach and appeal to new audiences

7 CONCLUSION

The rise of right-wing extremism continues to be a concern in the United States. Even in a post-Trump era, populist rhetoric remains politically useful to many across the right wing political spectrum, at multiple levels of governance. These actors continue to grow in relevance and power and are aided by the construction of a new media system that enables their ideas to be more freely discussed and traded. Doubt and distrust in traditional institutions is encouraged not only by politicians, but by a constant exchange of information between skeptical individuals on social media. Individuals turn to other avenues for information, going around traditional media gatekeepers to find alternative sources or media; to find those who may be telling the real “truth,” which is obscured by mainstream organizations. PragerU is one such organization. Sitting at the edge of the Alternative Influence Network, it leverages its large funding base to create both a wide variety and a constant stream of video content for viewers to engage with. Where there are questions skeptical of mainstream politics, of Democrats, of leftism, PragerU is there to answer. Using a variety of rhetorical strategies, PragerU communicates across the spectrum of right wing voters by appealing to a viewer’s moral senses to engage them at different levels of curiosity in right wing politics and ideas.

This thesis set out to understand through which Moral Foundations PragerU structures its video content to engage its audience into deeper levels of commitment. Using PragerU’s own internal marketing and communication funnel structure for their video content, I analyzed their content offerings in this manner, and sought to understand both how the videos’ positions in the funnel affected the Moral Foundations in use, and how these Foundations worked to guide viewers through the funnel. At the top of the funnel, the *Unapologetic* series attracts new viewers in with highly topical and current events related subjects. These subjects, often revolving around gender roles, sex, and race, were most often discussed using the Sanctity/Degradation arguments. This framing leans into factors of shock or disgust. The second part of the funnel, *5 Minute Videos*, uses arguments based in Fairness/Cheating and Loyalty/Betrayal to set up an us vs. them dynamic between conservatives and liberals. These arguments position PragerU and the viewer as an in group, an “us,” to the liberal and Democratic other, building a coalition around their ideologies. And finally, at the bottom of the funnel, *Fireside Chat with Dennis Prager* makes an appeal for the soul of America by emphasizing the importance of liberty, and the resistance of so called leftist oppression.

Digital movement creation on the American right is a powerful, well organized, and well-funded force. New technologies and developments in artificial intelligence may open up even further pathways for alt-right and far right actors to create content that further manipulates their intended audiences and puts them on potential paths for radicalization. When modes of radicalization may no longer be so overt, it is imperative for scholars to understand how these pathways begin, and how they connect to deeper parts of the web. To understand the why, one must know the how. The hope is that this study sheds light on the sophistication of right wing rhetorical strategies in a digital context and opens new possibilities for researching the machinations of right wing movement creation on YouTube in the discipline of strategic communication.

7.1 OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research of this thesis contained only an examination of the discourse and rhetoric within PragerU videos. Due to time constraints, the study is limited. However, there are more opportunities for research within this area, as the examination of strategic communication in right wing digital actors remains under researched. Further research could focus on the employees and content creators of PragerU, and how they develop content in tandem with PragerU's strategic organizational goals. On the other hand, research could also focus on those who watch and consume PragerU content to see if the messaging PragerU hopes to communicate via its content funnel is truly impactful. This research would allow further understanding of both the sender and the receiver of digital media and communication, and how organizations, particularly political ones, may use these strategies to amplify their causes.

There also exists the possibility of using AIML frameworks to analyze video on a larger scale. AIML models trained on the examination of video content could more easily and more quickly examine both the discourse and the visuals in larger sets of videos, a constraint of this study due to the reliance on "hand examining" videos. This model could be used to analyze and expand the scope of videos examined in the research to include its different video segments, as well as look at the content created and aimed at children. The results of this output could then be used to make more concrete generalizations regarding the different kinds of content, as well as to analyze any relationships between the semiotics of the videos and their rhetoric.

It would also be interesting to focus on the connections PragerU has to other points within the Alternative Influence Network. Which connections are strongest at the top of the funnel? Which connections emerge as a viewer descends through the funnel? This research could be interesting to discover how strong or weak a recommender PragerU is to other channels across the AIN, and which videos may have the most impact. It may also be interesting to categorize the videos recommended to discover any patterns in content categorization. Are more videos regarding culture, race, gender, religion, etc. recommended when PragerU acts as a conduit? What links can be established? These questions could be used for further study to round out research and discovery on PragerU and other parts of the Alternative Influence Network.

Finally, there is also an opportunity to understand the impact of PragerU as a brand specifically through the lens of the viewer. While digital media organizations do not necessarily sell a physical product, they may be in the business of selling an idea. PragerU is one such organization, committed to influencing new and current audiences towards right wing and conservatives' ideas. In this way, organizations such as PragerU are not so dissimilar to organizations that sell hard products, and therefore still must concern themselves with the ways in which their target audiences perceive, understand and value them in the wider marketplace of ideas. By conducting focus groups or interviews with PragerU viewers, further research could be done to understand the impact of PragerU's content on its perceived brand image and identity in the eyes of the viewer. Parameters that could be evaluated include aspects of authenticity, trust, authority, and legitimacy. These dimensions could be used to gain greater understanding of the way PragerU viewers understand the brand, and what values they perceive to be central to the channel.

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9 APPENDIX

Video Title: Children Should Not Choose Their Gender: An Unapologetic Special

Video Description: Four years ago, as a far-left activist, Amala fought for her trans classmate’s right to use the bathroom that matched his gender identity. At the time, she believed that trans kids’ wishes should be affirmed socially and medically. As we witness an epidemic of trans-identifying children and the widespread acceptance of “gender-affirming” ideology, Amala now asks whether the outcomes of these views cause more harm than good.

Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUZ_o5kX6u0&list=PLIBtb_NuIJ1xZa9AYgjpWI1kzccbAjSsq&index=20

Moral Foundation	Description/Notes	Example/Quote
<p>Care/Harm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender transition therapies are actually harmful -> this does not talk about caring for trans youth from any perspective, but is based around liberal policies and ideas causing harm rather than providing care Children are being exploited and harmed by liberals, leftists, and those supporting gender transition online. 	<p>“But upon doing some diligent research, I actually found the opposite, that allowing a child to go through medical transitioning is inherently harmful, harmful and more ways than anybody is willing to admit, but we're here to talk about that now. Here's why you should not allow children to transition their gender.”</p> <p>“The truth is, these children are being exploited. They are vulnerable, they're alone, they're confused, and suddenly they meet this community of people online who are telling them that everything is going to be fine. And if you deviate from that narrative, you are censored and silenced. In fact, I'll be amazed if this video even stays on YouTube. All that being said, the studies, the rates of suicide and mental illness, the influence of social media, the different countries who are taking different routes, these stories of detransition, can we really in good conscience and good faith say that blind affirmation of gender identity and medical transitioning for children is the compassionate route to take here?”</p>
<p>Sanctity/Degradation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender transition for trans youths is a threat to the natural order of gender and sex in the conservative world 	<p>“And of course, if you go down the route of sex reassignment surgery, your kid has been sterilized.”</p>

	<p>view. Given that traditional families are the goal, so called ‘sterilization’ and transition is the ultimate degradation of the natural order of sex and gender</p>	<p>“Where are the facts to support that? These same people say that gender is a quote, social construct? Well, so is race and age and time, but we don't see people running around trying to change those realities and expecting others to affirm it and offer an ideology that doesn't really make much sense. The same people who are telling you that gender roles don't exist and that boys can love pink and girls can love blue. Look at a little five year old who suddenly likes dolls and dresses and tells him that he could be a girl. If gender roles don't exist, then how can a boy that exhibits feminine traits somehow be a girl? One of these two things has to give way. If we're advocating that children be able to medically transition, we should prove that it makes them happier, healthier, safer. All the evidence that I've found shows the opposite, yet this harmful narrative still persists.”</p>
<p>Liberty/Oppression</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with conservative views on gender transition and transgender rights are being “suppressed” by the left and by other doctors - calling their adherence “blind orthodoxy” • Claims of threats of individual rights being taken away from parents and families if transition is refused by them 	<p>“Because he's been canceled by the medical community for not going along with the gender affirmation ideology that they've been trying to push. And it's not just people like me and Ken Zucker who are getting censored on this stuff. The American Academy of Pediatrics told more than a hundred clinicians and researchers that they were not allowed to attend their national conference because they deviated from the reigning orthodoxy that is blind affirmation gender theory. Target refused to sell Abigail Schreyer book, Irreversible Damage that put a microscope to this issue. And what's even more insane is that as this ideology is adopted by our courts of law, we have parents that are getting their children removed from them if they disagree with medical transition.”</p>

Video Title: Black People, You Don't Own This!

Video Description: I keep seeing TikTokers calling white people out for using black slang, also known as AAVE (African American Vernacular English). Why do black people feel the need to gatekeep this language, and do they even understand that it actually originates from low class white people? Let's get into it.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eg0i7iw7Ykk>

Moral Foundation	Description	Example/Quote
Sanctity/Degradation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is degrading to black Americans for not being “proper” enough - it is not worth of respect, and betrays the “sanctity” of proper English • It's not a culture to be proud of, and therefore should be gotten rid of, dismissed 	<p>“Of all the things to gatekeep and say that this is specific to blackness is broken English and slang and Ebonics, although it's offensive to call it that now, is that really what we want to gatekeeper as a culture and say that's ours.”</p> <p>“And if you are gonna get keep language, please gate, keep language that benefits you, that does something for you and that garners respect for you in this society. Because if not, you're simply making a choice that's not going to make you better off in this world.”</p>
Liberty/Oppression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is actually <i>white people</i> who were/are oppressed for using this type of language, not black people • Perpetuating narratives of northern whites being hostile to southern whites in the Civil War - that the northern liberal is actually the “oppressor” in situations such as this. 	<p>“And when these white southerners came and took their roots in the United States, they were looked down upon by people living up in the north for the way that they spoke, the crime that they involved themselves in, how broken their families were. And northern white people looked down upon southern white people for the language among all those other reasons that I stated before.”</p>

Video Title: Don't Sexualize Yourself and Then Complain about Being Sexualized

Video Description: There has been a recent trend on TikTok of girls who wear revealing outfits to the gym complaining about being looked at and sexualized by men at the gym. But if you sexualize yourself, can you really complain when you're being sexualized? Let's get into it.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZOiqQTFFyY>

Moral Foundation	Description	Example/Quote
Sanctity/Degradation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dressing “provocatively” in the gym is always going to result in sexual attention from men• Very similar to an “asking for it” narrative• Women are able to choose how they dress, but they shouldn't be surprised or upset when they are sexualized by men overall - not JUST in the gym as the last quote puts in, but also in every day life/the rest of the world	<p>“I've seen so many women on the internet making these gym videos of themselves pretty scantily clad and if not scantily clad in skintight clothing that is essentially tantamount to body paint and then complaining about men staring at them or glancing at them or asking to help them or use their machine at the gym. This has become quite a big epidemic, and it's not just in the gym, although that's the lens through which we'll have the conversation today.”</p> <p>“Now I'm fully on board with people who wanna say, you know, I should be able to wear whatever I want. I make my own choices. I dress for myself. Sure, you can go ahead and do that, but we also need to be aware of the reality that wearing certain things does bring about certain attention and we can accept that move forward with our lives. The issue is a lot of these girls are hopping on the internet and complaining about the attention that they're getting.”</p> <p>“And like I said, this is not just happening in the gym, it's happening all over the place of girls sexualizing themselves and then complaining about being sexualized. And while there's plenty of room for women who are not sexualizing themselves to have that complaint, if you're sexualizing yourself, you might wanna walk it back on that first and then see if people and other men are still sexualizing you.”</p>

Video Title: Fix Fatherlessness, Fix America

Video Description: Fatherlessness is the root issue beneath so many ills that plague society today. Statistically speaking, a child who grows up without a father in the home is more likely to experience homelessness, commit crime, serve time in prison, abuse drugs, drop out of school, be obese, suffer from poverty, and so much more. And the United States has the highest share of single parenting in the world. How did we get here, and is there anything that can be done to reverse this trend? PragerU personality Amala Ekpunobi breaks it down.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=917J0pFXKis>

Moral Foundation	Description	Example/Quote
<p>Care/Harm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising a child in a single parent household is the ultimate harm one can bring to a child in the United States 	<p>“Well, I found that when compared to children from two parent households, fatherless kids had a two times greater chance of infant mortality. They were more likely to face and perpetrate abuse and neglect.</p> <p>They were more likely to experience obesity. They were more likely to become pregnant as teens, more likely to drop out of school, more likely to abuse drugs and more likely to go to prison. And those are just a few of the negative outcomes that we can trace back to fatherlessness. Imagine all of the things that we're missing. No, I didn't know this, but according to Pew Research Center, the United States is the highest share of single parenting in the world. And the issue of fatherlessness and single parent households is an issue that continues to grow in this country. According to us, census data, in 1968, about 15% of us kids were living in a single parent household. Jump forward to now, and that number has doubled to 30%. Now I live in Los Angeles, a city that's notorious for running rampant with drug abuse and homelessness and crime”</p>
<p>Fairness/Cheating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A historical precedent of generous welfare cheats traditional families out of benefits that would support them -> leading to the degradation of the family. 	<p>“There's two areas we have to look at politics and culture. Politically, the welfare system comes into the discussion. In the 1960s, some well-meaning policies were put forth that ended up not doing so well. In fact, they actually incentivized single mother households. Specifically. In 1964, president Lyndon b Johnson launched his great society, an initiative with the goal of</p>

		<p>beating poverty, reducing crime, and promoting a quality in America. His welfare system was very generous, particularly for single mothers. But there was one rule that ruined it all. The man in the house rule, which essentially said that if you have a working or able-bodied man living in your house, we cannot help you. They even went as far as to send federal agents to these households to make sure that no man was living there.”</p>
<p>Sanctity/Degradation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feminism is responsible for the degradation of the American nuclear family • Marriage is the ultimate bedrock of strong families, there is no other way to create a stable family unit that does not revolve around marriage • Feminism is responsible for the degradation of the identity of men 	<p>“As of 2020, there were 14.84 million families with a single mother in the United States. And you might be thinking, well, sometimes marriages don't work out. And as a result, moms are left to take care of their children. And that statement would've been true in, say, the 1960s where 4% of single mothers had never been married. Flash forward to today, and that has jumped to over 52%, a 13 fold increase, meaning my mother's story of divorce. And single motherhood now represents a minority. In today's day and age, women are getting pregnant out of wedlock and raising the children alone. This goes to show that marriage is not really just a piece of paper. Marriage is often the barrier between a single parent household and a two-parent household. Not only that, it can be the barrier between poverty and success and the numbers are stark. If you grow up with a single unwed mother, you are four times more likely to experience poverty than somebody who lived with married parents.”</p> <p>“It seems as though feminism values single motherhood over married parenting. Couple our cultural problems with our political ones, and you have a recipe for disaster.”</p> <p>“Speaking of things that don't bode well, culturally, radical feminism in Hollywood is completely destroyed the view of not only the American man but the American dad, it is now a commonly held belief that men are toxic in nature and oppressive forces of patriarchy that must be overcome.”</p>

Video Title: How I Stopped Hating the Police: An Unapologetic Special

Video Description: Amala Ekpunobi grew up believing that policing in America was systemically racist. An outspoken activist, she marched for Black Lives Matter and advocated to defund the police. A chance encounter with a kind police officer made Amala begin to question her assumptions. Eager to validate her long-held beliefs, she investigated the facts behind the “racist police” narrative. The deeper she dug, the more her doubt grew, ultimately leading to a confrontation with the truth that transformed her entire worldview.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqPAy9burPQ>

Moral Foundation	Description	Example/Quote
Loyalty/Betrayal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing a distinction between those who are “true” victims of police brutality and those who are not. • Those who are protesting police aren’t *really* affected, just people who are “upstarts” who have not really thought about the issue at hand. 	<p>“I wonder why, and you’ll find that most of the people who shout the defund, the police narrative will never feel the true weight and the true reality of the situation once that actually happens. Don’t get me wrong, the outrage around police brutality in some of these videos is so understandable. I felt it. I saw it for myself, and I thought that there was nothing better to do than to go out and protest. But before you start making signs and screaming, no justice, no peace like I had done in the past, you have to think about whether or not what you’re saying is actually true.”</p>
Authority/Subversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is more important to be deferential to police officers as an authority, rather than hold them accountable for their actions • The result of police brutality encounters are the result of individuals not observing and obeying authority, not the police officers themselves, as they are the ultimate authority in the situation • Lack of respect for authority leads to lawlessness -> consequence of their own actions 	<p>“Now, if you go and read into these encounters, which I did, you’ll find that most black people fatally shot by police officers are armed, and those who aren’t are often shot while evading arrest or posing some other threat to the officer.”</p> <p>“On top of that, the outright intolerance and disrespect that is being thrown towards good police officers is making it so that good men and women no longer want to do the job.”</p> <p>“Look at Minneapolis. Look at San Francisco. Two cities who led with the charge of defunding the police, but could not handle the spike in crime that came with it. Now, both of them are rolling back and stopping with a defund rhetoric.”</p>

Video Title: What’s Wrong with Being a Trad Wife?

Video Description: A woman proudly showing off her “Trad Wife” lifestyle on TikTok has gone viral, angering many feminists who think she’s playing right into the hands of the patriarchy. But is the trad wife life really so bad, and should women be able to choose it without shame? Let’s get into it.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqrw7eVve4o>

Moral Foundation	Description	Example/Quote
<p>Sanctity/Degradation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specified gender roles are actually *equal* rather than unequal, and are the • Using the phrase “separate but equal” here is actually insane • Traditional gender roles perpetuate happiness -> reinforcing the idea that there are purposeful ways gender can be exerted in a relationship, and that the ultimate goal is to have a strong family unit 	<p>“Rather than that, they are filling two equal roles of different natures, and that's what I'm seeing here. Her husband is seemingly going to work, providing for the family, and while that's being done, he's away from the household, a household that he can't take care of, that he can't keep in check, maybe kids that he can't rear while he's out at work and she's taking on that separate but equal role in the household and making sure that everything runs smoothly for the both of them.”</p> <p>“And there's quite a bit of evidence to prove that women taking on this role and this position are really happy and we'll continue to be happy and will have built something that is fulfilling for their entire lifetime. Now, the same can be said in part to women who have lots of money and work in their career, but at the end of the day when that's all over what's there, hopefully a strong family unit that you've built in whatever way you want to build, either traditionally or non traditionally, but it's nothing to fuss over.’</p>

Video Title: Where Do You Want to Live: Red State or Blue State?

Video Description:

We're supposed to be the United States of America. But in many ways, we're now divided into two very different nations: red states and blue states. Which ones are succeeding? Which ones are failing? And why? To answer these questions, economist Stephen Moore compares them side-by-side.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTD_kyZRvio

Moral Foundation	Description/Notes	Example/Quote
Care/Harm	<p>Liberal policies are harmful to individuals living in the “liberal states” - as opposed to the idea of caring for weak, oppressed, underprivileged, etc.</p> <p>Working class people cannot depend on blue state policies, Democrats do not actually care for those they speak about</p>	<p>“How about keeping us healthy and safe? Surely the progressive states, with their strict lockdowns, did a better job saving lives from the coronavirus.</p> <p>Nope.</p> <p>Adjusted for population, as a resident of New York, New Jersey or Illinois, you were three, four or even five times more likely to die of the virus than if you lived in a red state like Florida, Texas, Georgia, Utah or Arizona.”</p> <p>“Progressives and liberal Democrats may mean well. They certainly talk a lot about how much they care about the poor, minorities and the working class.</p> <p>Yet somehow, it's always the poor, minorities, and the working class who pay the price for their bad policies. That's why those who can move, move. Those who can't get stuck with the short end of the stick.”</p>
Fairness/Cheating	<p>Blue states cheat their residents out of hard earned money, high taxes are codified cheating, and force individuals to move to where it is more “fair (lower taxes)</p>	<p>“Start with taxes. The two most populous blue states — California and New York — have the highest tax rates in America, while the two most populous red states — Texas and Florida — have no income tax at all.</p> <p>When taxes get too high, people move to where taxes are lower. The problem for the high-tax states is that these people take their money, their</p>

		ambition, and their employees with them.”
Loyalty/Betrayal	There is “real America” (red states) and “bad America” or rather “socialist/leftist America” (blue states) - one of these subsets actually stands for American values	<p>“There is red state America.</p> <p>And there is blue state America.</p> <p>The red states favor conservative, small government, free market policies: low taxes, light regulation, tough-on-crime policing, and worker freedom. Think Florida, Texas, Tennessee, Arizona, and Utah.</p> <p>The blue states favor a liberal/left, big government approach: high taxes, heavy regulations, high minimum wages, and mandatory union membership. Think New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Illinois, Oregon, and, of course, California”</p>
Authority/Subversion	Tolerance for liberal policies and ideas leads to chaos - liberals and left leaning cities subvert the lawful authority of those places creating ‘autonomous zones’ - and they are high crime high risk hell holes	<p>“The answer, of course, is no. Of the twenty cities with the highest murder rates, 18 are run by left-leaning Democrats — and for the most part, have been for decades. And these cities aren't getting safer; they're getting more dangerous.</p> <p>A good chunk of Minneapolis was burned to the ground as a result of riots, following the death of George Floyd.</p> <p>Portland had over 90 consecutive nights of rioting — not peaceful protests, rioting.</p> <p>Seattle allowed an entire section of the city to declare itself an autonomous zone — a first in American history!</p> <p>Progressive governors, progressive mayors, progressive police chiefs run all these cities and states.”</p>

Video Title: Make Men Masculine Again

Video Description:

Rape, murder, war – all have one thing in common: Men. The solution seems simple: make men less toxic – make men less masculine. In this video, Allie Stuckey, Host of "Allie" on CRTV & "Relatable" podcast, explains why demonizing masculinity is not the solution, but the problem.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-kxdyJs6y8>

Moral Foundation	Description	Example/Quote
Care/Harm	Passivity and the feminization of men leads to harm - men *protect*from harm, particularly women, and protect from evil, rather than contributing to it.	“The devaluation of masculinity won’t end well because feminine, passive men don’t stop evil. Passive men don’t defend, protect or provide. Passive men don’t lead. Passive men don’t do the things we have always needed men to do for society to thrive.”
Sanctity/Degradation	Modern values and society degrade masculinity and therefore, degrade society. Without traditional masculinity, society falls apart and contributes to a downfall in moral, a rise in violence, aggression, etc. Many things Americans value (patriotism, chivalry, sacrifice) stem from masculine traits The “negative” parts of masculinity are inherent to men, and there is no use in trying to get rid of them because they are simply a part of men.	“The growing problem in today’s society isn’t that men are too masculine; it’s that they’re not masculine enough. When men embrace their masculinity in a way that is healthy and productive, they are leaders, warriors and heroes. When they deny their masculinity, they run away from responsibilities, leaving destruction and despair in their wake.” “When you try to make men more like women, you don’t get less “toxic masculinity,” you get more. Why? Because bad men don’t become good when they stop being men; they become good when they stop being bad. Aggression, violence, and unbridled ambition can’t be eliminated from the male psyche; they can only be harnessed. And when they are harnessed, they are tools for good, not for harm. The same masculine traits that bring destruction also defeat tyranny. The traits that foster greed also build economies. The traits that drive men to take foolish risks also drive men to take heroic risks.

		<p>The answer to toxic masculinity isn't less masculinity; it's better masculinity. And we know what that looks like.</p> <p>It's a young man opening the door for a girl on their first date. It's a father working long hours to provide for his family. It's a soldier risking his life to defend his country."</p>
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Video Title: Left or Liberal?

Video Description:

Tell the average American you're a liberal and they'll assume you're on the political left. Yet, leftists and liberals hold very different positions on key issues. In this video, Dennis Prager explains how the tenets of liberalism like a belief in capitalism and free speech have more in common with conservatism than with the identity politics and racial resentment preached by the left.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIjMJBSnRE>

Moral Foundation	Description/Notes	Example/Quote
<p>Fairness/Cheating</p>	<p>The left's approach to race is unfair because it is actually "racist" to acknowledge race - they cheat non-white individuals out of opportunity by this acknowledge - this, in their view, is supporting segregation</p> <p>Anything that is not capitalism is ultimately cheating, because capitalism perpetuates fairness in the market, and socialism cheats individuals from escaping poverty OR their own money</p>	<p>"The liberal position on race has always been a) the color of a person's skin is insignificant and b) those who believe race is significant are racists. Meanwhile, the left believes the very opposite. To the left, it's the liberal attitude toward race—it's unimportant—that is racist. That's why the University of California officially lists the statement, "There is only one race, the human race" as racist."</p> <p>"And liberals have always been passionately committed to racial integration, while the left is increasingly committed to racial segregation—such as all-black dormitories and separate black graduations at universities."</p> <p>"Liberals have always been pro-capitalism, because liberals are committed to free enterprise and because they know capitalism is the only way to lift great numbers of people out of poverty."</p>
<p>Loyalty/Betrayal</p>	<p>No true scotsman fallacy (ultimately) - leftists are an "other" rather than an extension of liberals</p> <p>Leftists are an anti-American force at their core, deny all American values, does not believe in any sort of patriotism. Leftists, not just liberals, are the real "enemy" of conservatives and American politics</p>	<p>"While liberals have always wanted to protect American sovereignty and borders, the left is for open borders"</p> <p>"The left has contempt for nationalism, seeing it as the road to fascism. Better that we should all be "citizens of the world" in a world without borders."</p> <p>"Liberals have always venerated America. Watch American films</p>

		<p>from the 1930s through the 1950s and you will be watching overtly patriotic, America-celebrating films—virtually all produced, directed and acted by liberals”</p> <p>“The left, however, believes the left is the last, best hope of earth and regards America as racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, violent, and imperialistic.”</p>
Sanctity/Degradation	<p>Leftists “degrade” the sanctity of Western civilization - one of the biggest right wing, nationalist dog whistles</p> <p>The emphasis on western civ places countries in the West as “superior” and “above” to other cultures, hence the criticism of white supremacy. From the conservative point, this is the highest point of culture and the root of identity, and therefore, criticism is direct and overt opposition to America</p>	<p>“Liberals have always championed and sought to protect Western civilization. Liberals celebrate the West’s unique moral, philosophical, artistic, musical and literary achievements, and have taught them at virtually every university. The most revered liberal in American political history, President Franklin Roosevelt, often cited the need to protect Western civilization and even “Christian civilization.” Yet, when President Donald Trump spoke of the need to protect Western civilization in a speech in Warsaw, the left-wing media, also known as the mainstream media, denounced him. They argued that Western civilization is no better than any other and that “Western civilization” is just a euphemism for “white supremacy.””</p>
Liberty/Oppression	<p>Leftism exists to <i>oppress</i> people via “socialism” or “communism,” rather than give people individual liberty through the power of the market economy and capitalism</p> <p>Drawing equivalency between opposition to hate speech and limitations/oppression of free speech</p>	<p>“Opposition to capitalism and advocacy of socialism are left-wing values”</p> <p>“The left is leading the first widespread suppression of free speech in modern American history—from the universities to the tech companies that govern the internet to almost every other institution and place of work. Of course, the left claims to only oppose “hate speech.” But putting aside the fact that the left deems “hate speech” anything it differs with, protecting what you or I might consider hate</p>

		speech is the entire point of free speech.”
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Video Title: How's Socialism Doing in Venezuela?

Video Description: Venezuela is falling apart. Its economy? Ruined. Its people? Hungry. Its government? Corrupt. What happened? In a word, socialism. Debbie D'Souza, a native Venezuelan and political activist, explains.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCIdm3cM6zQ>

Moral Foundation	Description	Example/Quote
Care/Harm	Under the guise of caring for all, socialism is actually harmful for its populace and their health and wellbeing. The idea that leftist policies are “caring” = untrue.	“People stand in lines for hours just to get food. Sometimes they walk away empty-handed. A recent survey found that 75 percent of Venezuelan adults lost weight in 2016 – an average of 19 pounds. This national weight-loss program is known cynically as “the Maduro diet.”
Fairness/Cheating	Chavez and socialist leaders discuss things like “unfairness” and capitalism as cheating individuals from what is rightfully theirs, but actually, it is a way for leftists to cheat *you*	““Venezuela is a nation of great wealth,” Chavez said, “but it’s being stolen from its citizens by the evil capitalists and the evil corporations.” This wrong would be righted, he assured the voters, if they elected him. And they did. To their everlasting regret. “
Sanctity/Degradation	Socialism, leftism, and liberal ideals are akin to “drugs” that degrade an individual and ruin society. A simple metaphor that implies that ideas from the left are bound to destroy a nation and its society.	“If you don’t think it can happen here, whether “here” is the United States or Europe or anywhere else, you’re fooling yourself. When people get used to depending on the government – no matter how poor they remain – that dependency is hard to break. That’s why you should never buy the socialist lie. Socialism is a drug. And like a drug, it feels great – at first. But eventually it will ruin your country.”
Liberty/Oppression	Socialism results in an oppressed populace that is poor, left with no individual rights or freedom of the press, and creates a crime ridden, dictatorship hell hole	“But now all that promise is gone. The country is a failed state, a hollowed-out shell of its former self. Services like power and water are sporadic. The most basic consumer goods, from bread to toilet paper, are in chronically short supply. Crime has skyrocketed.

		Freedom of the press is almost non-existent. Democracy has been replaced by a virtual dictatorship.”
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Video Title: The Inconvenient Truth About the Democratic Party

Video Description:

Did you know that the Democratic Party defended slavery, started the Civil War, founded the KKK, and fought against every major civil rights act in U.S. history? Watch as Carol Swain, professor of political science at Vanderbilt University, shares the inconvenient history of the Democratic Party.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_a7dQXilCo

Moral Foundation	Description/Notes	Example/Quote
Loyalty/Betrayal	Slavery was perpetuated by Democrats and 'defeated' by Republicans -> the assassination of Lincoln being a Democratic crime that led to Andrew Johnson opposing Lincoln's plans for improved lives for freed slaves	"The slavery question was, of course, ultimately resolved by a bloody civil war. The commander-in-chief during that war was the first Republican President, Abraham Lincoln – the man who freed the slaves." "Six days after the Confederate army surrendered, John Wilkes Booth, a Democrat, assassinated President Lincoln. Lincoln's vice president, a Democrat named Andrew Johnson, assumed the presidency. But Johnson adamantly opposed Lincoln's plan to integrate the newly freed slaves into the South's economic and social order."
Fairness/Cheating	Democratic policies are a continuation of historical oppression rooted all the way in slavery	"Democrats falsely claim that the Republican Party is the villain, when in reality it's the failed policies of the Democratic Party that have kept blacks down. Massive government welfare has decimated the black family. Opposition to school choice has kept them trapped in failing schools. Politically correct policing has left black neighborhoods defenseless against violent crime."

Video Title: Fireside Chat Ep. 18: Why Millennials Support Communism

Video Description: More than a third of millennials now approve of communism. Dennis Prager discusses why this disturbing fact is a result of the poor education system. Students today are not taught to understand the evils of communism and why it is a dangerous ideology.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5pi4r_qpms

Moral Foundation	Description	Example/Quote
Fairness/Cheating	In the context of college doesn't matter - success is a result of your actions and behavior - ultimate fairness	"You earn your bonafides. You, in other words, you get legitimacy in life by how you act, talk, think, et cetera. How you behave, not where you went to college. So it's all part of the success issue. It's all by knowing all of that."
Loyalty/Betrayal	Leftist ideas like climate change that are taught in college undermine students' thinking about America - there are not important compared to learning about the evils of communism	<p>"You know, I, I, again, I, I wonder, which I, well often wonder, what do you learn in high school and college? And I, and I guess the answer is leftism.</p> <p>How bad America is, how racist America is, and all the related things I learned a tremendous amount about climate change, I'm sure. But the really important stuff, the good and evil stuff, which that's, to me, that and history are the most important things you could ever study."</p>
Sanctity/Degradation	<p>Knowing about LGBTQ issues detracts from knowing about the evils of communism</p> <p>"Enforced ignorance" on college campuses, implying that a lack of knowledge about communist history is by design</p> <p>Because gender doesn't matter, issues affecting LGBT people like orgs. donating to anti-LGBT groups - because if it *did* matter then there wouldn't be such an idea of fluid gender identity</p>	<p>"And she, everybody would've said she, this is not an issue. It's the people who want to destroy male female distinction that have come up with the preferred pronoun thing. If you look like a woman, then you are a she. Okay, that's important. That's really important. How do you, how could you, how could you not know this? This pure evil known as communism? Well that's this, it's been an enforced ignorance."</p> <p>"And in my heart, I'm not certain, that's why I say in my heart, I suspect that they suspect there may be some validity to it. If they were secure in the notion that their line gender doesn't matter, which I think is not true, gender is extremely significant, then what would they care what people think? Why, why would the L G B T Q groups care what the Salvation Army or Chick-Fil-A thinks, right?"</p>

		<p>Thinks if they don't act on it? What do I care if you, if you think that I am wrong in my religion, let's say just totally wrong, but you treat me respectfully, what do I care?"</p>
<p>Liberty/Oppression</p>	<p>Communism, and therefore leftism, is ultimately totalitarian - there is no distinction between American leftist movements and communist regimes of the past</p> <p>Leftism suppresses free speech and oppresses conservative thought, control how people think (thought crimes?)</p> <p>Freedom of body is not anything without freedom of mind, which is what leftism prevents</p>	<p>“Every leftist movement is totalitarian.”</p> <p>“That's why the left is so scary. It wants to control how you think and how you speak. There is no exception to that. And the entire world of the left liberals don't think that way. Conservatives don't think that way. But the left does, always, did, always will. It's a distinguishing feature of leftism controlling how people think.”</p> <p>“When you can't speak freely, that's when you are rendered a that is, that is worse. I do believe that is worse than a physical bondage. If, if you said to me, I could live free, I could live in my home and have my meals and so on, but I could not say whatever was on my mind, or I could say what is on my mind, but I would be in bondage to, to some master. I I would take the latter. That, by the way, is, is the famous American phrase.”</p> <p>“That's why that was my field of study, because it was so obvious to me that anything that deprives billions of people of the elementary right, to speech, to expression, to religion, which, and which engaged in the greatest genocides in, in human history, it's pretty important to learn about that. I mean, I'm looking at you and I'm a math. Do you at any age, whether you're a millennial or not, do you, do you have any idea how many people Mao killed in China?”</p>

Video Title: Fireside Chat Ep. 174 — A Dialogue About God and Ayn Rand

Video Description: What is the source of morality? Atheist and founder of The Objective Standard Institute Craig Biddle joins Dennis this week to discuss Objectivism, Ayn Rand, God, and where they disagree. Enjoy!

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vReb-quiAsY>

Note: This video involves an interview with Dennis Prager and libertarian activist Craig Biddle. Quotes from each are labeled as either DP or CB.

Moral Foundation	Description	Example/Quote
Care/Harm	<p>Is harm (eugenics) a form of care?</p> <p>CB goes on to say that people are right to live, but they don't have a right to be taken care of. Implying that true care is self-motivated, and that harm is actually making people care if they must and becomes oppression when it is state mandated</p>	<p>"I can't think what, what is your argument since we - you want us to use reason correct for, and for a better life. Why not put, why not engage in eugenics and get rid of - I mean, I can't be delicate. Get rid of those who, what, what is the Nazi statement? Life unworthy of life. The you know, children or, or even adults just literally out of their minds and, and the like, why not painlessly put them to sleep? (DP)"</p>
Fairness/Cheating	<p>There are people who will be punished accordingly based on their actions on earth in the afterlife</p>	<p>"That to me is, is as important as anything I want the evil judged, the, the thought that there are people who have done such horrible things to human beings and they, and there is no consequence that that would bother me. (DP)"</p>
Loyalty/Betrayal	<p>The left is a destructive force in the country, and the education that individuals receive in universities are contributing to the destruction/undermining of America - they don't "like" it - therefore betrayal</p>	<p>"I think much of the left really wants to destroy America and they're adamant about this. They don't like this country, they don't like the freedom that it represents and that it's supposed to protect. And they're, they're really trying to, to destroy this country. And there's no surprise after a hundred years of progressive education in, in the, in the grade schools and 50 years of post-modernist education in, in, in the colleges, we shouldn't be surprised that the leaders today want to destroy the country. And that much of America doesn't, doesn't like America. (CB)"</p>

<p>Authority/Subversion</p>	<p>Prager appeals ultimate authority comes from religion, God, Ten Commandments - that honoring authority above all is the key to a moral person</p>	<p>“I believed God commanded me to honor my father and mother. I think that's very powerful. And if you don't have that, I think you're less likely to do that. I think you're more likely to follow your emotions or worse your therapist and say, oh, you, you're having a hard time with your parents. You know, look at how they mistreated you. So what is your answer to that? That's, that's, we're getting into the moral issue just on pragmatic grounds. Who's more likely to unless you don't believe honoring parents is important, but if you do, who's more likely to do so? (DP)”</p>
<p>Sanctity/Degradation</p>	<p>In this case, regarding abortion - things that still degrade the sanctity of life are within an individual's rights despite them being immoral. Prager disagrees, but he does not say that CB is wrong</p>	<p>“CB: And it can be morally very wrong to wait a long time for an abortion when you have good reason not to have waited. But I don't think the concept of rights applies to fetuses. That's the difference here. It's not that I think abortions -</p> <p>DP: Wait, so wait, but you said she is morally wrong in the eighth month.</p> <p>CB: You can, you can do things that are morally wrong but that don't violate rights. And this would be it.</p> <p>DP: I don't care whether violates rights, you're prepared to say it's morally wrong because in the beginning you only spoke about her right to abort at any time.</p> <p>CB: Yes. And that I was, I was speaking about rights in that context. I can't think of an instance</p>

		<p>DP: So you have the right to be immoral.</p> <p>CB: Yeah. You have a right. I mean people do all sorts of immoral things.“</p>
<p>Liberty/Oppression</p>	<p>Individualism and liberty are the only thing that stops oppressive movements such as socialism</p> <p>Believing in a soul and higher power is the key to free will, otherwise we are all living in a predetermined world with no room for individuals actions (liberty)</p> <p>Individuals have the inherent right to live a life that prioritized freedom (liberty) and any perceived attempt to infringe on this inherent right is again</p>	<p>“So if I am, if I, Dennis, am solely the product, which is what I think an atheist would have to hold, I am the product and everything I do is the product of genes, the physical and environment. Only if you believe in, in something non material in the human, which we call a soul, can you believe that there's any free will? Because everything is ultimately determined. Everything I do by my physical makeup, my neurons, my genetics, and by my environment, where am I in this equation if there's no soul? (DP)”</p> <p>“I don't think that parental - you mentioned earlier that you thought that parental respect is the great bulwark against socialism. I think individualism is the great bull work against socialism. (CB)”</p> <p>“Why is freedom objectively good? Because the animal that we're talking about who needs freedom, human beings in order to live, in order to live and prosper, must be free to act on his judgment, to produce goods, to trade them voluntarily, to mutual advantage and so on. If he can't do that, he can't live as a human being. You could put him in a cage, he can live in a cage. But that's not a human life. To live as a human being the way that you and I want to live, we must be free. This is not an opinion, it's a fact. It's an observable fact that we can demonstrate Rand's entire moral code is based on this</p>

		<p>same kind of reasoning. Where do rights come from? A right is simply a recognition of the fact that in order to live a human being has to act in this way. Ergo he must be free. He must be left free to act in that way. Whether it's right to life, liberty, property, pursuit of happiness, whatever. (CB)”</p>
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