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INTRODUCTION

In search of the missing link: gender, education and the radical right

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Introduction

There is to date no systematic examination of how scholarship on gender and education intersects with studies of the radical right. While there is considerable practical and scholarly work attending to educational interventions and initiatives related to radical and far right movements, little of this work directly addresses gender or gender differences in far right engagement. Similarly, the significant body of scholarship addressing gender and the far right has not typically engaged the issue of educational implications directly – whether through discussions about how radical and extreme right groups try to educate their own constituents and broader public or by identifying strategies for educational interventions, which more directly address gender as a factor in extremist or radical right engagement. This special issue steps into this space. It brings together seven articles and an afterword that we believe assist in rethinking gender and the radical right through the exploration of how and why participation in far right and radical right movements remains gendered, and what links they might have with education. In particular, we hope this special issue provides a starting point for future dialogue and research across, and integration of, previously disparate subfields, with education as one space where such an integration may be seen as a fruitful avenue for further exploration.

Situating the radical right on the spectrum

Given that our primary objective was to spark discussion of the intersection of three categories – gender, education and the radical right – we maximized the scope for contributions by deploying each of those categories broadly. In mapping this spectrum of scholarly interest and engagement, we used the term ‘radical right,’ on the one hand, as a shorthand for a range of ideological positions associated with classic political movements and parties of the far right, through the new family of ‘populist radical right’ (Mudde 2007, 25) parties that have enjoyed significant electoral success and public visibility in recent years. We also focused on looser single-issue (anti-Jihadi, anti-Islamist) movements, subcultural groups or scenes. This broad approach recognizes that there is variation both across disciplines and across countries in how the adjectives ‘radical,’ ‘extreme’ or ‘far’ are used in relation to the right of the political spectrum. There is also ideological contestation:
for example, while the term ‘hate group’ is often used to refer to groups within and beyond the radical right spectrum, far right-wing groups may position others as the ‘haters’ (Shafer 2002, 84).

On the other hand, to avoid using conceptual terminology loosely, we start from the position of recognizing that the radical right has certain distinguishing characteristics. We use Rydgren’s (forthcoming) definition of the radical right as a subset of right-wing extremism, which is hostile to democratic governance or constitutions but not necessarily actively opposed to democracy per se (also see Mudde 2000, 2005; Miller-Idriss forthcoming-a). When radical right movements and activities fall within legal bounds, they typically are subject to the protections of free speech and are generally regarded as a contested, but legitimate, part of the democratic spectrum. However, such groups and movements also merit broader societal attention, monitoring, and educational intervention when they are associated with xenophobic, anti-democratic, authoritarian, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, anti-government, fascist, homophobic, ethno-nationalist, Islamophobic or racist values, beliefs, actions and goals (Rydgren, forthcoming). This is particularly the case when such attitudes and actions lead to violence. In a 2016 Washington Post interview (Itkowitz 2016) about her research on Donald Trump’s campaign rhetoric, for example, legal scholar Susan Benesch argued that Trump’s tone and messages increase the risk of inter-group violence. Invoking his supporters’ potential use of the Second Amendment against Hillary Clinton was a barely veiled call to arms against a presidential candidate, while his repeated statement that President Obama and Hillary Clinton were founders of the Islamic State is what Benesch calls a ‘hallmark of dangerous speech to describe an in-group member as the enemy.’ Such language can inflame angry supporters to create unrest or commit violent acts (Itkowitz 2016). Rhetoric espoused by some populist and radical right movements has been clearly linked in recent years to hate crimes and violence against migrants and religious, ethnic, and racial minorities. Hate crimes in the UK increased 41 per cent post-Brexit (Weaver 2016), for example, while the number of hate groups in the US increased by 14 per cent from 2014 to 2015; the number of anti-Muslim groups alone in the US has increased by 42 per cent during that period. These figures are part of longer-term trends – the overall number of hate groups in the US has doubled since 19991 while anti-Muslim or anti-Islam sentiment in the general population of the UK is rising2 – but are also clearly affected by populist and far right rhetoric. Elsewhere, direct violence against immigrants has also risen. In Germany, for example, there were 740 right-wing extremist attacks on refugee homes from January to mid-October, in 2016. This represents a four-fold increase over 2014, dozens of which involved arson, and 10 cases involved explosives.3

In adopting the term ‘radical right’ as a shorthand, we start from two important premises. First, we are confronting a broad spectrum of opinion and activism; however, most radical right movement activists are not directly engaged in violence. Second, radical right and populist ideas are increasingly found not at the pathological margins but among increasingly broad swaths of society. This, we suggest, makes the study of the intersection of the radical right with both gender and education of particular importance. In relation to gender, as these ideas and their political vehicles extend their reach into the population, we should anticipate that the constituency of their support is also likely to expand, so that being a woman, or being LGBT may diminish as a ‘protective’ factor – that is, a factor that would make individuals less likely to support or engage in
radical right movements. In relation to education, if the terrain of engagement is ideas, not violence, then the opportunity for educational intervention seems particularly significant.

**Gender and the radical right**

There is a substantive research literature attending to the gendered dimensions of right-wing radicalism, generally creating a consensus amongst scholars that gender acts as a protective factor (in the case of women) and a risk factor (in the case of men). Summarizing the field, Kitschelt (2007, 1199) suggests that one of only two incontrovertible facts about the ‘radical right’ is that such parties attract more men than women while Mudde (2014, 10) contends that women are significantly underrepresented across the extreme right spectrum. However, it has been argued recently that right-wing women are not so much absent as ‘overlooked’ by scholarship in the field (Blee and Deutsch 2012, 1). This argument for revisiting what we know about gender and the radical right is strengthened by empirical trends that lead us to suppose that the relationship between the two is undergoing change. There is evidence, for example, that the gender gap in support for the growing array of populist radical right parties and movements across Europe is narrowing (Spierings and Zaslove 2015, 139–140) while the incorporation of gender equality and gay rights platforms (often as part of broader anti-Islam or anti-multiculturalist ideologies) extends the potential appeal of the radical right to women and LGBT communities (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007, 199). Moreover, we are likely to see a rise not only in electoral support for the radical right among women but also increasing activism in such movements. As their ideas are increasingly ‘mainstreamed,’ any associated stigmatization typically discouraging women’s participation in the radical right decreases and we are already witnessing women’s increasing visibility in these movements, including in leadership positions.

To date, however, these changes are not fully reflected in the literature. Close-up studies of the far right and populist radical right movements suggest that women represent only a small minority of activists and primarily hold traditional supportive roles (Ezekiel 2002, 54; Kimmel 2007, 207; Blee and Linden 2012, 107). While there are both psychological and social reasons why gender propensities may be apparent (Rippl and Seipel 1999; Ferber and Kimmel 2008), most work has focused on single-country case studies and explained women’s relative absence through references to exclusively masculinist or homosocial spaces where women and sexual minorities feel uncomfortable (Ezekiel 2002, 57; Kimmel 2007, 207; Pilkington, Omel'chenko, and Garifzianova 2010, 158; Blee and Linden 2012, 103–105). In this special issue, we seek to capture emergent changes in this picture through contributions which address the question of the extension of support for far right and radical right parties and movements to new female and LGBT constituencies (Pilkington 2017; Spierings, Zaslove, and Lubbers, 2017), and which challenge, or paint in more nuanced colors, the purely masculine worlds of these movements.

**Education and the radical right**

The term education refers not only to formal schooling but also education across the life course, in formal and non-formal settings, such as popular culture. We therefore refer not only to educational interventions intended to combat physical and symbolic violence
associated with the radical and far right, but also the educational implications of radical right discourse for the broader public and the role that institutions (such as the media) play in amplifying the rhetoric and ideas of the radical right in shaping how people think and act. The radical right, in other words, also have educational goals (Meyer, this issue). On the intervention side, educational work includes both school- and university-based interventions – such as anti-racist curricula in the UK or ‘teaching tolerance’ and ‘courageous conversations’ programs in the US – as well as formal and informal programs designed for out-of-school youth and adults in settings such as soccer retreats, summer camps, after-school clubs, youth clubs, theater troupes, or other kinds of activities organized by non-profit organizations, local and state agencies or community groups. Although there has been substantial work related to educational interventions and extremism (Prevent), there have been strikingly few syntheses tracing trends across what are ultimately distinct subfields: anti-racist education, countering violent extremism (CVE) work, work on prevention, research on inter-group relations and prejudice, research on gangs and youth violence and research on de-radicalization.

Assessing the state of the research on education and the radical right is further complicated by the fact that much of the work in this area is not specific to far or radical right populations per se, but rather targets related areas such prejudice reduction or the promotion of tolerance (e.g. Beelmann and Heinemann 2014). This is particularly the case for formal, school-based initiatives, which tend to focus on broad areas deemed critical for civic engagement and democratic participation, such as teaching tolerance of diverse viewpoints through required courses like citizenship education in the UK or government and civics classes in the US rather than on interventions specific to a radical right population. When such initiatives take place in formal school settings with high populations of young people who are engaged in, or at risk for, radical right participation, they fall within the purview of interventions for the radical right. But in many other settings, the same initiatives are not thought of as work engaging the far right but as educational initiatives for the general population. This makes tracking the impact of such programs for particular groups somewhat challenging. A related example is in official, formal school, university and stadium policies, which seek to ban particular ideological symbols or clothing through the enforcement of dress codes. Such policies often have a target population in mind (e.g. the extreme right-wing), but frame the policies more broadly, and are not typically understood as educational interventions for the radical or far right per se.

Informal interventions are more likely to specifically target far-, radical- and extreme right-wing youth and adults for their programing. EXIT-Germany, for example, does educational work with drop-outs from the far right scene, and has reached out to far right populations in unconventional ways; for example, in 2011, the group’s ‘Trojan T-shirt’ project gave away free souvenir t-shirts designed with far right iconography and messaging that – once washed – revealed a message and telephone number to help people exit right-wing extremism.4 Elsewhere in Germany, the federal government has promoted volunteer firefighting brigades as a site for civic engagement for youth at risk for extremist engagement.5 Such interventions – which fall well outside the boundaries of traditional schooling – are educational initiatives specifically designed for young people or adults who are at-risk for extremist engagement or are already involved in radical and extreme groups.
Part of the challenge with developing effective interventions to engage right-wing radical young people is that well-intended initiatives can backfire, sometimes fueling the very attitudes and behavior that educators seek to change (Johansson 2013). Tom Cockburn’s work with far right young people in the North of England showed, for example, that anti-racist education programs failed because they were premised upon a naïve assumption that contact among diverse groups would create greater tolerance. However, because far right young people felt ostracized and blamed, the programs drove them further away rather than building trust and empathy (2007). The young men Cockburn studied felt ‘nobody was interested in listening to them, or realistically engaging in their ideas, or challenging their beliefs in a way that showed respect’ (554). Cockburn argues that such approaches led to the suppression of racism at school, moving beyond the school corridors into public space. As an alternative, he advocates for interventions that allow for more personal reflection, a strengthening of all identities, and building trust and empathy rather than (simply) challenging and confronting discrimination and prejudice (558).

It is also clear that top-down interventions cannot address the specific needs of young people and adults who are at-risk for extremist engagement in every local setting. On the one hand, this is because local cultural variations shape the appeal of radical groups in different ways; while young people in one place may be motivated by the anti-migrant rhetoric of radical right movements, in other places, the appeal may be more substantially grounded in anti-government or Euro-skeptic sentiment or economic arguments about the labor market. There are even opposing variations on the same themes: some far right groups draw movement support by arguing against same-sex marriage in favor of ‘traditional’ or ‘Christian’ values, while other groups argue that protections for same-sex relationships must be safeguarded against the potential imposition of Sharia law from Muslim immigrants. Far right positions on gendered issues are not as clear as previous scholars have assumed (Pilkington, this issue). Interventions seeking to limit the engagement of young people in violent radical right actions cannot therefore create universal curricula but need to understand the concerns, fears and motivations of particular youth populations. This is also true on the implementation side; centrally organized policy and curricular initiatives are subject to varied interpretation and differences in implementation which make it hard to compare their effectiveness. For example, Carrington and Bonnett (1997) show that there are significant geographical and regional differences in how particular states or provinces within a nation interpret and implement anti-racist or multicultural educational initiatives.

**Interventions specifically addressing gender-based issues**

There is little known about educational intervention work that specifically targets gender-based issues in studies of far right movements, despite consistent findings about the role that issues such as traditional masculinities play in the appeal of the radical and extreme right. One persistent challenge is that most educational interventions target youth populations, in part because of consistent evidence about the persistence of political attitudes formed during adolescence and early adulthood (Siedler 2011, 175), but also because of a lengthy history of youth support for far right parties and engagement in far right youth subcultures (Mudde 2014). Young people are more likely to support far right-wing
parties when compared with adults (Arzheimer 2009; Mierina and Koroļeva, 2015) and to engage in extreme and radical far right subcultures (Mudde 2014, 5), which are predominantly responsible for far right youth violence. While not all far right young people engage in violence, they are more likely than adults to engage in far right violence and are the disproportionate perpetrators of far right-wing attacks on immigrants, migrants and ethnic or racial minorities. While it therefore makes sense that interventions are heavily slanted toward work with youth populations, the fluid nature of young people’s attachments to subcultures and identities adds another challenge to any associated educational interventions. Miller-Idriss’ (forthcoming-b) research with German young people, for example, calls for more research focusing not only on clearly bounded ‘far right youth,’ but rather on youth who are ‘in and around the far right scene,’ thereby acknowledging the ways that young people experiment through participation with various subcultural groups, shifting from the core to the periphery of particular groups over time. This fluid nature of subcultural scenes has implications, she argues, both for the ways in which scholars understand the porous nature of young people’s identities and their complex and contradictory nature. However, there are educational implications as well, as she notes, particularly when such identities are embedded in scenes where violence is valorized: ‘Acknowledging that young people in the far right have flexible engagements in far right scenes does not therefore imply that those engagements are any less consequential or worthy of intervention’ (Miller-Idriss, forthcoming-a).

It is not just subcultures in general that generate flexible engagements; younger generations are also increasingly experiencing more fluidity around gender identities as well (Pascoe 2007; Pascoe and Bridges 2015). Educators therefore need to be aware of the shifting dynamics and realities around gender and sexuality as well as changing social norms around traditional notions of masculinity, and potential backlashes from conservative social movements, including the far right, to such developments. While there has been some work within research on gender, education and extremism suggesting the need to combat the ‘reproduction of dominant masculinities in schools and the collusion in male violence as “normal,”’ (Davies 2008, 613) there is less attention focused upon how far right groups are navigating changing legal policies and social norms related to gender and sexuality. Davies (2008) argues that both formal educational work in schools and non-formal educational work in out-of-school settings such as youth groups and sports clubs needs to help promote a ‘range of differing ideals of manhood and femalehood’ and challenge authoritarianism, encourage female political engagement, educate both sexes towards emotional literacy, productive economic activity, democratic engagement and equal rights and participation in public life (616). We need significantly more scholarship tracing whether and how such interventions and educational work are effective, as we discuss in further detail below.

The missing link: introducing the contributions through the lens of education

For the reasons we have noted, the educational implications of how gender and the radical right are rethought in contributions to this special issue may seem at times implicit rather than explicit. We now move towards a summary of each of the articles with a focus
on identifying some of the potential educational implications of each author’s claims and findings.

Two of the articles in this special issue draw directly on formal educational settings or curricula. Jennifer Meyer’s historical analysis of early twentieth-century völkisch feminism in Germany demonstrates a clear need to reconsider history curricula around how women’s engagement in the Third Reich has been narrated. Meyer focuses on the völkisch movement’s writer Sophie Rogge-Börner, who developed a theory that rejected patriarchy because of its ‘Jewish’ character and argued that gender equality was intrinsic to a true ‘Nordic-Germanic’ nature. Meyer closely analyzes Rogge-Börner’s writings on gender and education within and beyond formal schooling, including her arguments about how best to educate a racially superior Nordic-Germanic race through both girls’ and boys’ schooling, co-education and girls’ access to equal higher education and professional opportunities. The Rogge-Börner writings are particularly important for this special issue because they are one of the few cases where radical and extreme right-wing ideologues have directly addressed the relationship between gender relations and nationalist movements. In terms of educational strategy, Meyer’s article highlights a key case where formal schooling is targeted as a tool for both racial separation and gender equality within a white nationalist framework.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss’ article on masculinity and the body in far right youth culture in Germany draws on interviews with vocational school students and image analyses of symbols and commercial clothing brands to identify the ways in which youth subcultures reflect aspects of Connell’s hegemonic masculinity. First, commercial iconography actively promotes idealized notions of male body image and traditional notions about masculinity as representing strength, power, heroism, loyalty, integrity, belonging and togetherness. Second, symbols and iconography market rebellion to young people and position the far right as a place to express aggression, violence and resistance to mainstream and adult authority. Miller-Idriss’ analysis suggests that educational interventions which fail to acknowledge the role that masculinities play in the appeal of far right ideologies and subcultures are unlikely to succeed. While educational interventions aimed at preventing extremist engagement or de-radicalizing young people already on a path toward violence have often focused on rational argumentation – for example, providing accurate information about immigrants’ employment or civic engagement – Miller-Idriss argues that the appeal of far right and extremist movements is often more emotional in nature. It would seem that far right youth culture is closely connected to male fantasies about a romantic, pure and untroubled national past, and young men’s potential to restore a lost civilization or era. Such fantasies provide a landscape for navigating uncertain labor markets and transitions into adulthood, yet have been largely ignored by policymakers and educators seeking to prevent violence or extremist engagement. Educators need to confront the emotional appeal of extremist groups for young men, particularly if they are to create alternative spaces for them to express the twin desires for male comradeship and rebellion against the mainstream.

While formal schooling has historically played an important role in how the public understands radical right movements and parties, education also happens outside of formal settings. One mechanism through which the public is educated about radical right movements is through the linguistic choices that scholars and the media make in analyses of the far right. This has been evidenced most recently in debates about journalists’ ready adoption of white supremacist groups’ self-definition as ‘alt-right,’ for example,
which critics argue has the effect of softening or legitimizing racist or radical right ideologies and platforms. George Severs’ article extends this tradition with an analysis of a historical case from the UK. Severs’ analysis of three episodes through which the British National Party (BNP) established clear anti-gay activism during the 1980s and 1990s highlights the critical importance of using conceptual terms that accurately reflect social attitudes and phenomena. Severs carefully differentiates what scholars have typically described as homophobic policies and attitudes on the part of the BNP from what he argues should more accurately be labeled homohysteria. While the former term refers to attitudes toward homosexuals grounded in fear and abjection, Severs shows that BNP policies and engagements were not only attitudinal, but also served as active opposition to homosexuality. Severs draws on three historical examples to illustrate the nature and extent of the BNP’s homohysteria in general and the centrality of the party’s opposition to gay men in particular. Severs’ work highlights the ways in which particular linguistic choices can shape the public’s – or scholars’ – perceptions of nationalist political platforms, revealing one of many ways in which publics are educated about the radical right.

The potential for public discourse to shape voter behavior and civic understanding is also a key finding in Anita Stasulane’s work on Latvia. Stasulane analyzes the role of women in the radical right Latvian National Front (LNF) – a case which is intriguing both because there is little English-language work on Latvian radical right movements and because of the unique role that women play in LNF leadership and party politics. The LNF blends esotericism with political goals and glorifies the feminine in its esoteric emphases. Women are highlighted as spiritually superior to men, tasked with leadership and positioned as pioneers who safeguard the nation. The prominent position given to women is correlated with higher female participation in the LNF compared to other radical right movements: approximately half of LNF members are estimated to be female. The LNF case illustrates how particular ideological frames can work to actively recruit women – and as Stasulane suggests, there are implications for how radical right groups will, and are trying to mobilize, female voters with anti-migrant and Islamophobic rhetoric that is specifically tied to women’s rights, sexuality or assaults on women – such as the case of the 2016 New Year’s Eve attacks in Cologne. While there has been significant attention to the role of masculinity in attracting men to far right groups, we have paid less attention to the potential for (re)framings of femininity, women’s role in the nation, or discussions of women’s rights to be used for recruitment or radicalization by far right political parties and movements. This could be important for interventions which may have overlooked the appeal of discourses which position women as strong leaders in national politics, or imply that their rights will be threatened through migration or expanded understandings of multiculturalism and diversity.

Like George Severs’ work, Niels Spierings, Andrej Zaslove, and Marcel Lubbers also address the issue of attitudes toward sexuality by utilizing a quantitative analysis of voter data from 29 elections across 10 European countries to explain whether and how support for gay and lesbian rights is related to anti-migration attitudes. The term ‘sexually modern nativism’ refers to populist platforms which have shifted away from promoting ‘traditional’ family values and practices and instead proclaim that Western democratic traditions and values include a wider range of sexualities and tolerance toward the LGBTQ community. This platform is then positioned in contrast to a perceived Islamic threat as increased migration is said to weaken gay and lesbian rights, tolerance for sexual difference and
secular modernity. Among other educational implications of Spierings et. al.’s work, their findings about the context-dependent nature of voting behaviors (with clear effects evident in some countries but not in others) show that national context matters; while comparative data is important for understanding trends and variations across national and cultural contexts, specific voter or activist behaviors may not correspond to similar ideological claims across contexts.

Hilary Pilkington’s ethnographic study of the English Defence League (EDL) challenges a number of prevailing assumptions in research on gender, sexuality and the extreme right. Pilkington argues that while support for, and activism in, the extreme right remains numerically dominated by men, it is no longer a closed or ideologically inhospitable environment for women or LGBT activists. In the EDL, while women remain a minority, they mostly join on their own initiative, play an active role, and share in the camaraderie of activism. The study shows a degree of instrumentality in the movement’s adoption of gender equality and LGBT rights platforms to ‘expose’ what is envisaged as an oppressive and intolerant Islamist ideology. However, the analysis reveals a contradictory picture. It exposes the limits to progressive views on gender and sexuality within the movement whilst also providing observational evidence that declarations of greater openness to women and LGBT supporters constitute more than lip-service to the top-down imposition of a strategically beneficial ideology. In practice, attitudes and behaviors among activists are diverse, ambivalent and conflicted; as such they arguably constitute a more radical variant of mainstream population attitudes rather than a highly ideologised, pathological fringe. These findings have important implications for educational interventions. While EDL supporters might be targeted through anti-racist interventions aimed at preventing extremist violence, activists view themselves as distant from, and indeed opposed to, the traditional far right. No simple, linear relationship can be assumed, therefore, between movement activists and ideological positions, including around issues of gender and sexuality. Educational interventions that fail to recognize these differentiations simply reinforce activists’ suspicions that educational institutions are complicit in the wider agenda of government and liberal ‘do-gooders’ who label all those who ‘tell it like it is’ as violent, racist thugs. In this context, formal educational settings such as school or college often appear as sites of exclusion, expulsion or persecution, while the EDL is experienced by young members as the place they learned not to be racist (Pilkington 2016, 99).

Finally, Sakellariou and Koronaiou’s article on the Golden Dawn’s ideological platform in Greece – and discourses about women within it – points to the ways in which radical right political discourse can have an educative effect on their own constituents and the broader populace. Like other European far right parties, the Golden Dawn positions women as reproductive engines of the nation, focusing in particular on mothering boys who will be future Greek soldiers. But in contrast to similar parties, which have maintained traditional fascist and far right ideologies about women yet simultaneously elected women into leadership roles (such as France’s Marine Le Pen), Sakellariou and Koronaiou show that the Golden Dawn calls for women to embrace their primary role as wives and mothers, only entering the workforce or more public roles in areas aligned with women’s purportedly natural, feminine roles as nurturers in the private sphere. Through these efforts, the Golden Dawn aims to change women’s behavior in ways that align with the protection and reproduction of the nation and its (white) populace, while far right cultural values are physically embodied through biological and natural roles.
It is this latter point that makes the Golden Dawn case such a compelling contribution to this issue, because Sakellariou and Koronaiou identify the ways in which radical right discourses can work to shape the ideas and beliefs of the broader public. Discussions of education and the radical right are not only about interventions to prevent far right violence. We must also examine the ways in which radical right groups aim to educate their own membership and shift broader public discourse about their key ideological beliefs in relation to women’s rights and public roles in the labor market. To the extent that such positions take hold within the broader populace, it seems important to incorporate how a national(ist) habitus might take shape in any intervention aimed at disrupting radical and extreme right movements.

Finally, Kathleen Blee’s insightful Afterword re-asserts the role of gender and of education to the historical and contemporary strategies and agendas of the radical right. Blee shows how the contributions to this issue help tease out the gendered processes through which people accept radical right ideologies and identify key educational implications of the gendered aspects of radical right politics and movements. As she points out, this issue goes to press just as these issues have been thrown into particular relief by the election of a new US president on a wave of support from ‘white supremacists, xenophobes and anti-feminists’ and ‘aided by torrents of fake news items meant to undermine Trump’s female opponent.’ The gendered and educational implications of this historical moment will be investigated for years to come, but it is clear, as Blee points out, that this is a particularly critical time to attend more carefully to the relationship between gender, education and the radical right.

Implications and future directions: gender, education and the radical right

‘If education alone cannot counter extremism, what it can do is not make things worse,’ Lynn Davies (2008, 620) writes. Davies’ point is that pedagogical approaches which aim to ‘teach’ people the ‘right’ attitudes and beliefs may not only be ineffective but can also backfire, leading individuals to retreat even further into narrow worldviews. Beyond ‘not making things worse,’ though, what do we know about what works in educational programs with radical right populations? What do the articles in this special issue teach us, collectively, about education, gender, and the radical right?

First, the scholarship makes clear that educational initiatives aimed at reaching far right and radical right populations need to start from a standpoint of empathy for the uncertainty and precarity of young people’s lives, the contexts in which they live, as well as the appeal of the clarity which clear dualisms (good/evil, enemy/friend, etc.) provide to some far right communities (Davies 2008, 620–621; also see Davies 2009). Engagement with far and radical right movements is not only driven by rational decisions but also by affective responses (Miller-Idriss 2017). Interventions which seek to shut down individual concerns – including expressions of fear and hatred – without acknowledging the affective registers of young lives are unlikely to succeed. As many articles in this issue suggest, this includes grappling with traditional notions of masculinity, femininity, fatherhood and motherhood. Davies suggests that school-based interventions, for example, focus on breaking down ‘otherness’ and addressing issues of free speech while acknowledging and addressing misconceptions (2008, 621–623).
Second, educators need to develop initiatives that can account for the fluid and contradictory aspects of identity within far right movements, particularly for young people. Individuals do not always express personal beliefs that align with party platforms (Pilkington, this issue). Adolescence and early adulthood are key phases of identity formation, and educational work with this population must account for potential differences between what people do in public and what they say in private, as well as the contradictions individuals must necessarily negotiate. Gender identities are also complex; women activists who themselves mock, and transgress, traditional notions of femininity may fail to challenge (or even recognize) a largely unreconstructed masculinity that governs everyday interactions and communications (Pilkington, this issue).

Finally, these contributions clearly suggest that national context matters and further comparative research across countries and regions is necessary. There is no universal intervention; regional differences in the appeal of various populist and radical right platforms and rhetoric abound (Spierings, Zaslove, and Lubbers, 2017). Radical right groups’ educational platforms and programs related to gender need further investigation, whether through the study of radical right groups’ formal curricular objectives for girls’ and boys’ schooling, as Meyer (this issue) analyzes, or through the role of radical right-wing populist discourse intended to mold a national(ist) habitus about gender roles, as Sakellariou and Koronaíou (this issue) detail.

We would also call for more research on the intersection of formal and informal schooling. There is some evidence suggesting that pedagogical interventions around right-wing extremism, anti-semitism and xenophobia are most effective when formal and non-formal educational partners work collaboratively in more intensive engagements with smaller numbers of schools and communities (Johansson 2013). While non-formal partners can develop intervention strategies that are more specific to the at-risk group, Johansson points out that school-based educators, who spend more time with young people overall, often have important contextual and family background information about young people which may increase the success of interventions. But there is little data available that helps trace how such collaborations work in general or whether and how gender might play a role in their relative impact.

The choices that journalists, scholars and educators make about what kinds of language to use to describe particular groups of people can have a major impact on social attitudes in general and on the appeal of the radical right specifically. As the outcomes of the referendum on EU membership in the UK (June 2016) and the American presidential elections (November 2016) demonstrate, anti-immigration, anti-Muslim and racist rhetoric can quickly move from the periphery to the center of political debate. These events reveal, moreover, that simple strategies of condemnation or the silencing of distasteful views are often counterproductive; to those who already feel unheard, they confirm the disdain they experience, not only from politicians but also from the wider ‘liberal’ elite. If as scholars and educators we want to retain some authority in shaping public opinion, therefore, we need to recognize and respond to growing popular and critical scrutiny of our right to do so. In this special issue, we take a step in that direction as we attempt to rethink, more complexly, some of our assumptions about the relationship between the radical right, its gender constituency and the implications for education in its broadest and most strategic sense.
Notes

2. A meta-analysis of the findings of 64 opinion polls (2007–2010) on attitudes toward Muslims suggests that Islamophobia is higher than it was in 2001–2006 (Field 2012, 158). According to Field (Field 2012, 158), depending on the specific question asked, between one fifth and three quarters of the UK population hold anti-Muslim or anti-Islam attitudes.
3. Statistics on Germany come from the Bundeskriminalamt and were reported by Die Zeit (2016).

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