

The Growing Threat of the Alt-Right: Who Are They, How They Recruit, and How to Prevent Further Growth

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Abstract: This paper attempts to analyze the new international threat of the Alt-Right. It describes the difficulties surrounding defining the Alt-Right, the spread of ideology to European countries, the rhetoric and recruitment methods used by the Alt-Right and provides potential solutions to prevent recruitment in the future. This paper attempts to define the Alt-Right and provide clarity about what it entails within the ideology. It also describes the current problems associated with the lack of a formal definition. The paper then analyzes the spread of the ideology in Europe and describes the differences and similarities between the ideologies within the U.S. and Europe. Additionally, the paper provides insight into the recruitment methods, targets, and rhetoric of the Alt-Right as well as gives possible strategies to help deter young people from being recruited.

Keywords: Extremism, Alt-Right, Neo-Nazi, Terrorism

Introduction

The Alternative Right (Alt-Right) is an extremist political ideology that is growing worldwide. The name for the ideology originated from a journalist in the United States, however the extreme white-supremacy rhetoric has gained popularity worldwide, especially in Europe. The Alt-Right mainly recruits from the internet and has adopted many elements of popular culture to attract young men into their ranks. This article seeks to analyze what the movement is and offers solutions in combatting the further

proliferation of the ideology. Initiatives such as increasing mental health resources, the creation of educational programs for children and adults, and the encouragement of better parental supervision of children's online activities could prove helpful in preventing more young people from being recruited by extremists.

Defining the Alt-Right is Difficult

The term "Alt-Right" is difficult to define because it has never been given a firm and formal definition. In addition, the term is used in a derogatory manner by those who view themselves in stark contrast and in opposition to those who fall under the ideology. For the purpose of this article, the working definition that will be used is the one provided by the Conservative American news outlet: *The Daily Wire*. According to *The Daily Wire*, "The Alt-Right is a fringe far-right ideological movement that espouses ethnonationalism, particularly European nationalism, viewing countries and cultures as being inherently a matter of "blood and soil" — a concept embraced by Nazi Germany tied to the notion of ethnic purity and anti-Semitism"²⁷⁹. *The Daily Wire* continues its definition of the term by providing characteristics of the ideology, specifically stating, "The Alt-Right has heavily used social media to promote its ideology, with Alt-Right activists and trolls often waging online campaigns against enemies and spreading memes via Twitter, 4chan, and Reddit, among other platforms"²⁸⁰.

The first use of the term "Alt-Right" was coined by Richard Spencer, a notorious political extremist. Spencer began working for *The American Conservative*, a political publication, but was later fired due to his extremist beliefs. "In 2010, Spencer founded AlternativeRight, a supremacy-themed webzine aimed at the 'intellectual right wing', " where he continued to promote his ideology until he joined the National Policy Institute²⁸¹. Ac-

²⁷⁹ "Alt-Right," *The Daily Wire*. Accessed July 22, 2019. <https://www.dailywire.com/tags/alt-right>.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ "Richard Bertrand Spencer," Southern Poverty Law Center. Accessed July 30, 2019. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/richard-bertrand-spencer-0>.

cording to leading Civil Rights group the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Richard Spencer supports the idea of white-supremacy and the bulk of his rhetoric focuses on white-nationalism²⁸². It is entirely possible that Spencer realized that white-supremacy is not a minority belief in the U.S. Though, it is also quite possible that Spencer realized the negative connotations of the term “white-supremacist” and opted to change the label, as prescribed by sociologists George Mead, Frank Tannenbaum, and Howard Becker²⁸³. As Hawley explains, “white supremacist is not usually the preferred term within the radical right. It instead relies on terms like ‘white nationalist’, ‘white separatist’, and ‘identarian’”²⁸⁴. With this in mind, Richard Spencer most likely rebranded the ideology as “Alternative Right” in order to appeal to a larger population.

The *Home Office Counter-Extremism Strategy Plan of 2015* definition of extremism is “the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. [The calling] for the death of members of our armed forces [is also regarded] as extremist”²⁸⁵. These groups justify and advocate for violence, promote hate and division, encourage isolation, and reject the democratic system⁶ These groups strive to disassemble the societies in which they live and cause harm, or in some cases kill, citizens. Within this framework, the “Alt-Right” completely fits, which likens Alt-Right groups with terrorists and should be addressed and combatted as such.

Another issue is when there is a blurring of lines and terminology becomes confused. The Alt-Right is not Far-Right, nor should it be considered to be attached in any way to Conservatism but should rather be perceived as, “not conservative; its leaders vociferously reject prominent

²⁸² “The Alt-Right On Campus: What Students Need To Know,” Southern Poverty Law Center. Accessed July 22, 2019. <https://www.splcenter.org/20170810/alt-right-campus-what-students-need-know>.

²⁸³ Sherry Lynn Skaggs, “Labeling Theory,” Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed July 30, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/labeling-theory>.

²⁸⁴ George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Rights*, S. I.: Columbia University Press, 2017. Accessed July 24, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/haw/18512.5>.

²⁸⁵ *Counter-Extremism Strategy* (London: Home Office, 2015).

conservative thinkers, ideas of human equality, core Judeo-Christian values, and the concept of America as a nation built on ideas, rather than racial or ethnic identity”²⁸⁶.

Current attempts to combat the growing threat of the Alt-Right are hindered by the obstacle of confusion regarding the terminology and actual groups that fit within this framework. For instance, the SPLC published a guide to combating the Alt-Right on college campuses²⁸⁷. They recommended a variety of options, such as an aversion to violence and speaking with groups hosting Alt-Right speakers. After listing names of several well-known Alt-Right men, the guide ends. The problem with such a guide is that this open-endedness leaves much to be interpreted. Who else is considered as Alt-Right? This open-endedness and lack of a cohesive and comprehensive definition of the “Alt-Right” may lead to many on college campuses labeling every Conservative or Right-Wing Speaker as Alt-Right, and inadvertently lead to the censorship of opposing views and create a toxic culture of censorship. For instance, Ben Shapiro, a Jewish Conservative Political Commentator, has been labeled Alt-Right, even though he has spoken out against the ideology²⁸⁸. Like Shapiro, many other conservative political commentators are regularly labeled as Alt-Right as well, without any evidence to substantiate the claim. The only crime of the speakers has simply to be on the opposing side of the political spectrum.

While many conservatives are labeled Alt-Right, the Alt-Right movement rejects conservatism. They disagree with much of what conservatives stand for. However, there are elements of Alt-Right ideology that have roots in conservatism. It should be noted that the conservative moment and those involved are not necessarily subscribers to Alt-Right ideology. Neither of the major political parties in the United States are radical in

²⁸⁶ “Alt-Right,” Daily Wire, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.dailywire.com/tags/alt-right>.

²⁸⁷ “SPLC releases campus guide to countering alt-right”. August 10, 2017. Accessed November 20, 2019. <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2017/08/10/splc-releases-campus-guide-countering-%E2%80%98alt-right%E2%80%9999>.

²⁸⁸ “Inside the Mind of Ben Shapiro, a Radical Conservative”, The Economist, March 28, 2019. Accessed July 22, 2019. <https://www.economist.com/open-future/2019/03/28/inside-the-mind-of-ben-shapiro-a-radical-conservative>.

and of themselves. The Alt-Right differs in their views of how the government should work, which is different from the ideas of the modern conservatives²⁸⁹.

A prominent example of the American Left distorting the definition of Alt-Right ideology is the discourse surrounding President Donald Trump's campaign slogan: "Make America Great Again". This is regarded by some on the Left to be Alt-Right sentiment²⁹⁰. The misunderstanding of the term has driven a further divide between the Right and the Left, who have been growing increasingly further apart since the days of the Clinton administration. Clarity must be given attention to this issue, or else the political divides between the major political parties in the United States will only further partisanship and nothing of national importance will be accomplished within the confines of the U.S. federal government.

The Alt-Right in Europe and in the United States of America

The Alt-Right is not an ideology restricted to the United States but is growing worldwide. The 2019 E.U. Terrorism and Situation Trend Report has noted that "The number of arrests linked to right-wing terrorism remained relatively low but increased for the third year in a row"²⁹¹. In Europe the Alt-Right has the same aims of the Alt-Right groups in the United States. However, there are differences in the types of ideologies that are common in the United States versus in Europe. For instance, Neo-Nazi parties are less common in Europe, most likely because of the deeply personal and horrific history many Europeans have with the actions committed by the

²⁸⁹ George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Rights*, S.I.: Columbia University Press 2017. Accessed July 24, 2019. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/hawl18512.5>.

²⁹⁰ Issac Bailey, "Why Trump's MAGA Hats Have Become a Potent Symbol of Racism", CNN, March 12, 2019. Accessed July 30, 2019. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/01/21/opinions/maga-hat-has-become-a-potent-racist-symbol-bailey/index.html>.

²⁹¹ *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019*, EUROPOL, 2019. Accessed November 25, 2019. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2019-te-sat>.

Nazis in World War II. In Europe, there is a growth in Ethno-Nationalist groups but likening themselves with Nazis is less frequently observed.

In the United States the majority of groups that can be labeled Alt-Right are independent groups, as in not typically associated with mainstream political parties. The Alt-Right “can scarcely be called an organized movement. It has no formal institutions or a leadership caste issuing orders to loyal followers”²⁹². The two largest political parties are not considered, as a whole, to be extremist parties. There may be smaller parties whose opinions are more on the extreme side, but they are certainly a political minority. Some of these groups include the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, the Neo-Confederates, among others²⁹³. However, in Europe Alt-Right extremists or Right-Wing Nationalists finds themselves represented more by parties than by independent groups. Such parties include: the Italian League, Alternative for Germany, Spain’s Vox, France’s National Front, and more²⁹⁴.

One of the reasons such parties in Europe have seen growth, can possibly be attributed to the 2015 Immigration Crisis. Some political parties in Europe “have been able to generate substantial popular support by promising to defend their respective countries against the cultural attacks of immigrants and foreign influences and have consequently made gains in domestic parliamentary elections”²⁹⁵.

Recruitment

The recruitment processes for all extremists is similar. The majority of groups use the internet as their main tool, they recruit new members

²⁹² George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Rights*, S.I.: Columbia University Press, 2017. Accessed July 24, 2019. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/hawl18512.5>.

²⁹³ “Groups”, Southern Poverty Law Center. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/groups>.

²⁹⁴ “Europe and Right-wing Nationalism: A Country-by-country Guide”, BBC News, May 24, 2019. Accessed July 22, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006>.

²⁹⁵ 2019 Press Release – July 11, 2019 Press Release – July 9, and 2019 Press Release – July 8, “European Ethno-Nationalist and White Supremacy Groups,” Counter Extremism Project, April 04, 2019. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.counterextremism.com/european-white-supremacy-groups>.

through chat forums and distribution of propaganda on social media sites²⁹⁶. The Alt-Right's main target are young white men that feel isolated by society²⁹⁷. They manipulate them by provoking typically right leaning arguments that are commonly accepted and then move on to more extreme views. Once such individuals subscribe to the views of the group, they are encouraged to do activities in the group's name.

There are certain characteristics that make some men more vulnerable than others. Edelstein explains, "[R]ight-wing extremism represents moral waywardness in thinking and in action. The concept of moral deprivation or waywardness points to the psychosocial and moral implications of a syndrome that combines economic, familial, educational, and cultural factors in variable ways"²⁹⁸. In many instances it was also found that those who subscribe to right-wing extremist ideology also grew up in financially unstable homes. Men whose lives are scarred by insecurity and changing social environments are also more prone to be partial to extreme right ideologies.

This can be illustrated in the case of post-Versailles Germany, where many men left the war angry, unemployed and distraught, raising their children in grief. As Edelstein discusses:

"These children ... develop[ed] corresponding mechanisms of compensation, character traits, and motives of spite and revenge that take them, first, into the ranks of the storm trooper thugs, later into the SS, and finally, during the war in Eastern Europe, to their well-known involvements in concentration camps, firing squads, and mass murder in Polish and Russian villages and ghettos"²⁹⁹.

²⁹⁶ Anya Kamenetz, "Right-Wing Hate Groups Are Recruiting Video Gamers", NPR, November 05, 2018. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/05/660642531/right-wing-hate-groups-are-recruiting-video-gamers>.

²⁹⁷ Eleanor Boatman, *The Kids Are Alt-Right: How Media and the Law Enable White Supremacist Groups to Recruit and Radicalize Emotionally Vulnerable Individuals*, 2018.

²⁹⁸ Wolfgang Edelstein, "A Culture of Threat: Right-wing Extremism and Negative Identity Formation in German Youth", *New Directions for Youth Development* 2003, no. 98 (2003). Accessed July 25, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/10570365_A_culture_of_threat_Right-wing_extremism_and_negative_identity_formation_in_German_youth. doi: 10.1002/yd.45.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

These children became targets for right-wing extremist thought because the youth camps and military gave them a sense of belonging and cohesiveness they did not have in their lives at home.

When Germany was reunited in 1990, there was a resurgence of Alt-Right groups. This stemmed from the shock of change in life in East Germany (where the right extremism had the strongest presence). Research has shown:

“Traditional society had been organized through intergenerationally stable rules of “mechanical solidarity”, with little room for individual variation and for individual influence on the social order. Whereas traditional loyalties and duties had once persisted against the onslaught of individual needs, goals, and desires, the latter came to be decisive influences in the market-dominated world of competitive capitalism that succeeded the traditional world of personal bonds, inherited skills, and natural exchange”³⁰⁰.

This change inspired a new generation of young men to feel isolated from the new society being pressed upon them. It is possible that they felt inferior to West Germans, who had been living in a modern world and felt unable to adjust. And rather than face their problems, they used the outgroup (foreigners) as a scapegoat, beginning anew the cycle of their parents and grandparents under National Socialism.

When applied to the current political climate, this may also explain the recent growth in Alt-Right participation. Today’s young men have experienced the hardships associated with the United States financial recession in 2008 and witnessed a change in society as dictated to them by their parents and grandparents. There also appears to be a renewed focus on social justice in the traditional media as well as social media. Men who disagree with the rhetoric emanating from mainstream thought are also often cast out or censored by the public. The feeling of being an outcast is what establishes these individuals as targets for radical and extremist thought. Instead of adjusting to the new societal norms, they opt to rebel and blame others for perverting their society, which means changing

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

their society from one where they fit it in and are accustomed to into one that has no place for them.

The target populations for extreme ideology has remained the same: young men who have never felt as if they belonged. Alt-Right group members provide a supportive environment that bolsters the men's self-esteem and also allows recruiters to progress the extreme political ideology. Once these men have become closed off into the group, dismissing the outgroup becomes easy and often supported by their peers. One explanation that may address this is change, or the fear of change to the status quo, as demonstrated with the end of communism and the reunification of Germany.

Language is a key factor into being socialized into groups, and analyzing the rhetoric surrounding Alt-Right ideology is key in understanding it. The internet is the most popular recruitment tool for extremists worldwide, because social media is a main place of socialization among the younger populations. According to Julia Decook, "these platforms and the subcultures they support are pieces in the construction of ideological sensemaking and as larger learning spaces for civic engagement"³⁰¹.

The way in which the Alt-Right is able to spread their message is by "normalizing and mainstreaming extremist views"³⁰². This can be done through the use of programs that create "digitally enhanced image of the far right that coopts and mobilizes historical meanings, forges ideological connections across geographical boundaries, and reinvigorates a narrative about a threatened national identity inflected with a persecution complex". Other techniques that are unique to the Alt-Right is the use of "meme-culture", comedy, and satire into their recruitment techniques. For the new far-right movement, "irony has a strategic function. It allows people to disclaim a real commitment to far-right ideas while still

³⁰¹ Julia R. Decook, "Memes and Symbolic Violence: #proudboys and the Use of Memes for Propaganda and the Construction of Collective Identity", *Learning, Media and Technology* 43, no. 4 (2018). Accessed July 28, 2019, doi: 10.1080/17439884.2018.1544149.

³⁰² Patricia Anne Simpson, "Mobilizing Meanings: Translocal Identities of the Far Right Web," *German Politics and Society* 34, no. 4 (2016). Accessed July 25, 2019, doi: 10.3167/gps.2016.340403.

espousing them”³⁰³. Using irony, humor and satire also allows these people to hide their true opinions, if they were to be charged with a crime whose cause could be linked to the online presence of the individual, they could hide under the false pretense of comedy. “Fascism is more or less a social taboo. It’s unacceptable in modern society, ... humour or irony is one of the ways that they can put forward their *affective* positions without having to fall back on any affirmative *ideological* positions”³⁰⁴. While the Internet has proven useful in spreading these ideologies, it is important to note that these forms of propaganda are no different than earlier Alt-Right movements with similar messages.

The Alt-Right also profits from attacking the social psyche by creating panic to spread fear. For example, in Germany, Alt-Right groups are using the 2015 refugee crisis and the news stories surrounding it to bolster xenophobia and Islamophobia. Once fear has reached the masses, they then will look for ways to solve the artificial threat, by looking toward Alt-Right groups or political parties. One instance would be the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida), a German political group that started in 2014 and who, despite problems within the organization, “has spawned a series of transnational and translocal identitarian and nativist movements that rely on global discourses equating Islam with terrorism while sounding the alarm for local activism to address imminent threats”³⁰⁵.

The Pegida had many localized groups in different cities around Germany. The creation of localized chapters “underscores the importance of “branding” an ideology and both virtual and face-to-face networking.”²⁰ Groups like these have given people opportunities to meet up with other believers of the ideology, in a safe space that they might not have been otherwise able to speak and express their opinions. It is quite probable that these

³⁰³ Jason Wilson, “Hiding in Plain Sight: How the ‘alt-right’ Is Weaponizing Irony to Spread Fascism,” *The Guardian*, May 23, 2017. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/23/alt-right-online-humor-as-a-weapon-facism>.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Patricia Anne Simpson, “Mobilizing Meanings: Translocal Identities of the Far Right Web,” *German Politics and Society* 34, no. 4 (2016). Accessed July 25, 2019. doi: 10.3167/gps.2016.340403.

groups contributed to the “us versus them” mentality, which is found in many extremist groups.

The result of this rhetoric is the ability to create a collective identity. The Collective Identity Formation, is a phase in the recruitment process “marked by the reciprocal aggravation of internal conflict and of social disorganization”³⁰⁶. In order to create a collective identity, there has to be something to separate one group from the other. Creating a target group and an outgroup is an effective way to do that³⁰⁷.

Solutions

The number of violent attacks attributed to Alt-Right groups is steadily increasing in both the United States and in Europe. For this reason, it is imperative that steps are taken to deter the addition of new members. There are three areas of improvement that may assist this objective. The first is the creation of new programs that could substantially decrease the amount of people recruited to Alt-Right groups and extremist groups in general. This could be in a variety of different sectors but may be used as an outlet to create a sense of community for those who are being attracted by the communities normally associated with the target group of recruits for Alt-Right groups. This idea of programs and/or clubs would not be limited to children, but also open to the community at large so that adults may take advantage of them, as it is most frequently adults who are joining the Alt-Right groups. The second area of improvement would be mental health reform. Eleanor Boatman states:

“These groups are growing by targeting individuals, primarily young-adult white males, with psychosocial issues that leave them vulnerable to exploitation and control. White supremacists are actively searching online, baiting individuals suffering from emotional and social issues, including

³⁰⁶ Wolfgang Edelstein, “A Culture of Threat: Right-wing Extremism and Negative Identity Formation in German Youth,” *New Directions for Youth Development* 2003, no. 98 (2003). Accessed July 25, 2019, doi: 10.1002/yd.45.

³⁰⁷ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1951), p. 65.

difficulties in finding a relationship, having friends, and low self-confidence. The alt-right then manipulates these individuals' weaknesses by contributing and reinforcing their externalization of feelings (i.e. it is everyone else's fault for feeling rejected, emasculated, angry, and lonely)"³⁰⁸.

One study showed that "depression, dysthymia and symptoms of anxiety and post-traumatic stress are associated with extremist sympathies"³⁰⁹. However, there is still a cultural stigma with going and seeking treatment for mental health issues that seems to deter individuals from receiving the treatment they need. The final area of improvement would be the encouragement of monitoring children's use of internet chat forums through a public outreach or public awareness campaign, similar to those used to deter adolescents from smoking.

The largest issue to tackle would be that pertaining to mental health. According to a study done by The British Journal of Psychiatry, it was shown that young adults are the most vulnerable to sympathize with extremist ideology³¹⁰. The aforementioned mental illnesses also have an average onset ages ranging from 13 to 21^{311, 312}. Therefore, efforts should be focused to provide mental health support in order to minimize the chances of extremist influence on young adults.

Creating greater ease of access to mental health resources could also prove beneficial in minimizing the chances of extremist influence on young adults, particularly if efforts were made on college campuses. Increased access to low-cost psychological and psychiatric appointments, the creation of free

³⁰⁸ Eleanor Boatman, *The Kids Are Alt-Right: How Media and the Law Enable White Supremacist Groups to Recruit and Radicalize Emotionally Vulnerable Individuals*, 2018.

³⁰⁹ Kamaldeep Bhui et al., "Extremism and Common Mental Illness: Cross-sectional Community Survey of White British and Pakistani Men and Women Living in England", *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2019. Accessed July 28, 2019. doi: 10.1192/bjp.2019.14.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Randy A. Sansone and Lori A. Sansone, "Early-versus Late-Onset Dysthymia: A Meaningful Clinical Distinction?" *Psychiatry* (Edmont (Pa.: Township), November 2009. Accessed July 28, 2019. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2801480>.

³¹² Jasmijn M De Lijster et al., "The Age of Onset of Anxiety Disorders," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. Revue Canadienne De Psychiatrie*, April 2017. Accessed July 28, 2019. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5407545>.

group therapy, and offering low cost alternatives for psychiatric medication could assist those afflicted with mental illness. This may also assist in the control of these illnesses before they can worsen. Such resources should be provided to young adults. Perhaps the best implementation of such ideas would be at a local level, through local governments or offered through charity services, where the guidance and assistance could help prevent these individuals from falling prey to online extremist recruiting. However, further research would be needed to ascertain as to the cost and how to publicly fund such efforts.

The 2014 Isla Vista Massacre shooter experience demonstrates that those on the Autism Spectrum are likely to be targets as well. This is likely due to their mental illness creating difficulty in interacting with other people. However, there is more time to observe those afflicted as the average diagnosis age for Autism Spectrum Disorder is two years and the symptoms are typically visible³¹³. The issue here is not identification or treatment but increasing social interactions to prevent the social isolation that extremist groups prey on.

People who have not learned to thoroughly analyze new stories to locate bias and propaganda tactics may be likely to fall victim to extremist recruitment strategies. The creation of nonpartisan political education courses could help prevent this. The creation of a program that instructs adults in analytical thinking skills and research would also be very beneficial. This is because it teaches the public to analyze events deeper and to find factual data regarding hot news topics, which could help them better discern propaganda online and on news shows. The largest obstacle is finding ways of encouraging attendance in these programs. However, further research needs to be done before an effective method can be created.

Children may also benefit from the creation of new educational programs targeted towards decreasing social isolation. There is a fear that technology is detrimental to children developing social skills and emotional maturity. One psychotherapist has noted that technology dependencies

³¹³ "What Is Autism?", Autism Speaks. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>.

undermine self-awareness, weaken self-regulation, diminish social skills, undermines empathy, and stunts motivation³¹⁴. These qualities can lead to a higher frequency of isolation in children, and this isolation in turn makes children and young adults more susceptible to targeting by extremists. While there has been very little scientific research to reinforce these claims, one study found in “Five Days at Outdoor Education Camp without Screens Improves Preteen Skills with Nonverbal Emotion Cues”, and it was suggested that “skills in reading human emotion may be diminished when children’s face-to-face interaction is displaced by technologically mediated communication”³¹⁵. Perhaps the creation of a program or a class that promotes face-to-face interaction and limits technology access could prove helpful in preventing social isolation among students.

Many technology professionals in California choose to send their children to technology free schools, such as the Waldorf Method School, because of the fear of social isolation³¹⁶. Schools that use the Waldorf Method are dedicated to creating well-rounded students, which is exactly what should be emulated. With this in mind, perhaps encouraging more schools to have tech-free policies could prove beneficial.

Encouraging parents to become more active in their children’s online presence could assist the children as well. Encouraging parents to be engaged in their children’s online usage possibly would prevent the recruitment of children into political extremist groups or being targeted for others malicious reasons. Some advisable ideas include: monitoring their social media platforms, discouragement or banning of chat room participation if under 13 years of age, or even promoting more extreme measures such as restriction to applications and programs for mobile phones and computers.

³¹⁴ “How Technology Lowers Emotional Intelligence in Kids”, Psychology Today. Accessed July 28, 2019. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/when-kids-call-the-shots/201707/how-technology-lowers-emotional-intelligence-in-kids>.

³¹⁵ Yalda T. Uhls et al., “Five Days at Outdoor Education Camp without Screens Improves Preteen Skills with Nonverbal Emotion Cues”, *Computers in Human Behavior* 39 (2014). doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2014.05.036.

³¹⁶ CNBC, “Inside A Tech-Free School Where Tech Executives Send Their Kids,” YouTube, June 08, 2019. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAZ-fuWdz8M>.

Another idea is to implement education for children regarding political extremism. For instance, the inclusion in history courses of lectures dedicated to teaching about the reasons of hate surrounding acts of genocide or ethnic cleansing: such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide. In government classes, instructors may also show videos informing students about the dangers of political extremism, such as lesson plans regarding terrorism and radical related violence (for older students). As recommended by “Teaching Tolerance”, education in digital literacy has proven helpful in combatting recruitment and sympathy with Alt-Right ideology. One source argues:

“Fostering digital literacy could, ..., help students understand how the alt-right takes advantage of a 24-hour thirst for headlines and garner mainstream media coverage for memes, conspiracy theories and misinformation campaigns. It could also inform students of how online and media climates can be so influential in shaping consumers’ worldviews”³¹⁷.

The creation and establishment of better access to mental health resources, the creation of educational programs for adults and children, and the encouragement of parental responsibility regarding the online presence and activities of children should all be implemented to prevent the proliferation of Alt-Right sentiment. This would also possibly decrease the number of young people who are already members of Alt-Right groups or political parties as well.

Conclusion

The Alt-Right ideology is a steadily growing movement around the world, with high concentrations in the United States and within Europe. The ideology is a rebranding of well-known extremist ideas such as racial and gender superiority. The Alt-Right’s main recruitment methods are the internet and propaganda inspired by popular culture. Such means are used to recruit young, white men who are isolated by society and those who suffer

³¹⁷ “Toolkit for “What Is the ‘Alt-Right’?”, Teaching Tolerance. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/toolkit-for-what-is-the-alt-right>.

from mental illness. Initiatives such as increasing mental health resources, the creation of educational programs for children and adults, and the encouragement of better parental supervision of children's online activities could prove helpful in preventing more young people from being recruited by extremists.

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