Hilary Mikkola

"FOR THE SAKE OF MY CHILDREN"
Exploring the centrality of motherhood within QAmom accounts in social media spaces.

ABSTRACT

Hilary Mikkola: "For the Sake of My Children": Exploring the Centrality of Motherhood within QAmom Accounts in Social Media Spaces.
Master's Thesis
Tampere University
Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research
April 2023

The QAnon conspiracy theory erupted into the mainstream during the Summer of 2020, spreading throughout social media, entering political discourse, and providing a platform for mobilization on the January 6th storming of the capitol. This increased relevance to US political life has resulted in an increasing body of research on the QAnon conspiracy theory. Although some research has begun to acknowledge and explore the central role women played in bringing QAnon to the mainstream, one group is rendered invisible: mothers. The research surrounding motherhood has been restricted by notions of apolitical female agency, the politics of white motherhood and maternal thinking. In summary, mothers who promote the QAnon conspiracy theory have been essentialized to their function as mothers—the rationale for their engagement being their inherent maternal desire to protect their children.

This thesis locates mothers as agentic and intentional in their employment of motherhood as a rationale for the creation of and spreading of conspiracy theories. Further, it recognizes that white motherhood is a particularity valuable identity for analysis. It does not suggest that the experiences of white motherhood are monolithic, but instead utilizes the image of the white mother within white supremacist logics and the historical and contemporary use of this imagery as a means with which to understand the politics of white motherhood.

This thesis explores three separate QAnon mom, or QAmom influencers, to investigate the centrality of motherhood within their posts. Throughout this investigation of the influencers, it seeks to understand if the centrality of motherhood, the softening of messaging, and the presumed apolitical nature of mothers can partly explain QAnons entrance into the mainstream and its popularity amongst women. Passive netnography or online ethnography was used to collect data from various platforms including Instagram, TikTok, Telegram and Parler. A hermeneutic approach was used for the analysis, weaving a story of these women and situating the story within the larger literature on the politics of white motherhood within the United States. Ultimately, this research concludes that motherhood was a central feature of these accounts and was often used as a justification for the spread of misinformation, hate and conspiracy theories. Interestingly, motherhood was often employed to reach out to other women, using a language which spoke to mothers at large, invoking a sense of motherly duty. This research also argues the need for greater exploration into online communities such as mommy-blogs and Tradwife spaces to understand the unique ways in which conspiracy theories and hate are disseminated.

Keywords: QAnon, conspiracy theories, netnography, online ethnography, QAmom, Motherhood.

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

Thank You—Kiitos Paljon!

List of Tables

List of Figures

Table of Contents

1. The Rise of QAnon

QAnon, a conspiracy theory once relegated to the dark web, erupted into the mainstream after March 2020 (Breland, 2020). As the movement grew, so did its influence. In the summer of 2020, after the viral hashtag #savethechildren spread across social media, people, particularly women, mobilized globally, organizing protests and demanding the truth of an underground satanic child abuse ring be revealed (Rothschild, 2021). Support for the movement translated to political capital in the US, with 97 candidates in the 2020 election being tied to QAnon, and two officially winning and still holding seats in the congress (Crawford & Argentino, 2021). Potential dangers of this movement were realized when, on January 6th, 2021, QAnon followers, amongst others, stormed the capital, adorned with the letter Q, with the famous 'QAnon Shaman' making news headlines around the world (Garry et al., 2021). This was no longer considered just a fringe movement relegated to the corners of the dark web. This was a massive, mobile, and politically influential movement that could not be ignored.

The increasing interest in and relevance of QAnon has heightened the need for qualitative research. More specifically, knowledge of women's role within QAnon is paramount when considering their centrality to QAnons growth (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). The relationship between female wellness and lifestyle influencers and QAnon has been investigated by Marc-Andre Argentino, who coined the term 'pastel QAnon,' referring to the pastel, feminine aesthetic utilized by influencers to spread QAnon conspiracy theories (Dickinson, 2020). Although some research has been devoted to understanding women within QAnon, one group has been largely invisible within the literature: mothers. Interestingly, researchers have identified the centrality of lifestyle and wellness spaces, including so-called mommy blogs to the growth of QAnon (Bracewell, 2020).

The term "mommy-blogs" emerged in the 1990's with the increasing presence of online communities for mothers to share and provide others with advice about raising children. These communities can be social spaces for mothers, exposing the often-private realities of motherhood with one another, creating a sense of solidarity and support (Abetz & Moore, 2018) Conversely,

mommy blogs can also be spaces for shaming, labelling and judgement, a platform for negotiating what constitutes a good or bad mother (Orton-Johnson, 2016). Within these spaces, mothers explore a variety of topics, engaging with trends, popular culture or politics (including conspiracy theories), and constructing these within their own world as a mother (Orten-Johnson, 2016). Exploring these spaces is essential for understanding mothers within QAnon and challenging their invisibility within QAnon research.

The invisibility of mothers within the research is shocking, considering their significant following of QAnon accounts and amassed followers, numbering 3.9 million in 2020 (Petersen, 2020). Additionally, the centrality of mommy-blogs and wellness communities to QAnons growth is not proportionally reflected in the literature (Bracewell, 2020). Some researchers have focused on the maternal appeal of QAnon, suggesting that the bids to save the children captivated women and mothers more than any other group (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). The assumptions underpinning their participation in QAnon reify gendered notions surrounding motherhood, and can partly explain their invisibility in the literature as their interest in QAnon is understood within the confines of their identity as a mother. However, mothers are active, political and agentic and have been historically successful in softening extremist rhetoric and broadening the appeal for the general population (Darby, 2020). The embrace of the role of mother should not be understood as a neutral or inherent act, but a political and calculated one (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). The aim of this investigation is to explore how mothers utilized motherhood as promoters and creators of QAnon content. This thesis locates mothers as agentic, political actors with the capacity to utilize their position as mothers for political means. Henceforth, these women will be referred to as QAmoms, the mothers who actively engage with the QAnon conspiracy theories. First appearing in an article by the *Rolling Stone*, QAmom as a term is useful for this paper as it accurately describes the research subjects, mothers who promote QAnon conspiracy theories (Dickinson, 2020). This terminology is not intended to be reductive, but instead to carve out a specific term acknowledging the relevance of motherhood to QAnon. By using the term QAmom, I hope to add to a growing literature and terminology surrounding mothers within QAnon. The primary focus of this paper is to explore three different QAmom influencers, identifying and analysing the centrality of motherhood to their content, weaving together a story of their beliefs within the existing literature on the politics of white, American motherhood.

Analyzing the QAnon movement is important for peace and conflict research as the spread of misinformation can destabilize and polarize societies. Members within the movement have mobilized from offline to online spaces, with government bodies within the United States officially recognizing the movement as a threat to democracy. The Global Risks Report from 2017 identified risks of polarization with social media use, specifically that social media companies are incentivized to provide and promote content to individuals with whom they will engage, increasing the likelihood of echo chambers, spaces which reflect an individual's narrative and reinforce their worldviews (World Economic Forum, 2017). In the context of QAnon, the risk refers to the increasing online presence of people, proliferation of extremist narratives, and mobilization of online communities to offline spaces. Garry el al. (2021) have found that "QAnon and its followers have become one of the largest spreaders of disinformation online, worsening an already polarized American public" (p.153). Further, the propensity and risk of violence has been recognized by the FBI's Phoenix field office, naming QAnon as a "fringe political movement" that "tacitly supports or legitimizes violent actions" and that attracts, "conspiracy theory-driven domestic extremists" who are motivated to act on their beliefs (Rothschild, 2022, p.118). Moreover, many followers of QAnon circulated election conspiracy theories, attending 'stop the steal' rallies and participating in the capitol riots on January 6th (Rothschild, 2022). QAnon as a movement has the propensity to sew discord within online communities, mobilizing individuals to protest in the name of the cause and/or commit violence on both a small and large scale (Butler, 2020 ; Rothschild, 2022; Bloom & Moskalenko 2021). QAnon has spread throughout social media, impacting families, communities and governments and contributing to an already polarized American society. QAnon has found its way into mainstream political life, with political entrepreneurs aligning themselves with the movement and successfully being elected into positions in government. QAnons influence and risks make it an ideal analytical subject for peace and conflict research.

Exploring the role of QAmoms serves as an important addition to a growing body of feminist peace research which emphasizes the position of women as agentic, violent and political. Women's role within QAnon has been vastly understudied, especially when juxtaposed with their centrality to its growth. Further, women within QAnon hold leadership positions, are active disseminators of misinformation, and are violent (Mattheis, 2018). This intentional glossing over

of women stems from assumptions surrounding women's capacity for violence (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). Further, women who perform their traditional gender roles, emphasizing their position as a mother, can soften and depoliticise their actions, locating themselves as mothers acting on behalf of innocent children (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). As mentioned above, whilst women are understudied and overlooked within the QAnon conspiracy theory, mothers are invisible. Their engagement with QAnon is essentialized within gendered notions of motherhood, reifying assumptions surrounding the non-violent and apolitical nature of mothers which will be discussed in chapter 3.

This thesis fits within the recent feminist peace scholarship which denounces notions that "feminist peace research thinks of women as naturally peaceful" (Väyrynen et al., 2021, p.4). It challenges generalizations about women and mothers, positioning them as agentic and political. It highlights the importance of intersectionality for analysis, emphasizing the unique location of white, American motherhood. It also recognizes motherhood as not a natural, inevitable state, recognizing that many women exist outside of visions of ideal motherhood, women who cannot or do not want to rear children, women of colour, or queer women (Pettersen, 2021). This thesis engages with cyberfeminist scholarship, exploring "the relationship between gender and digital culture"(Daniels, 2009, p.102), by conducting netnographic research, immersing fully into the online and recognizing the fully online as an important site (no pun intended) for the construction of meaning. Further, it explores the way in which mothers utilize the internet to "transform their material, corporeal lives in a number of complex ways that both resist and reinforce hierarchies of gender and race" (Daniels, 2009, p.101). This thesis seeks to explore the centrality of motherhood to QAmom posts. The foundational belief when writing this thesis is that motherhood is political, and that disconnecting motherhood from politics is founded in archaic narratives about the 'natural' nexus of women and motherhood.

This paper includes a hermeneutic analysis of three separate QAmom Instagram accounts. All three women had to have over 50k followers, a public account, and a notable and consistent mentioning of motherhood and QAnon. Although there are other accounts which fulfil this criteria, these women were selected consequently and organically. By this I mean that each influencer led me to the other by sharing posts, tags and content. The selection of only three accounts was

informed by my resource limitations, namely time. Therefore, this research should be understood as a piece of a larger puzzle, one which warrants further investigation. For the purposes of anonymity, they are designated as influencer one, influencer two, and influencer three. The research of each influencers account was exhaustive, with the final data collection date on 20.02.23. Included in the data collection was an exploration of alternative accounts on Telegram and TikTok. In total, over 1645 posts were analyzed, not including Instagram highlights, stories, or telegram posts. The data was compiled into a word document. Instagram highlights, stories which are posted at the top of the user's page, can include permanent posts and non-permanent posts. Instagram stories are stories which last only 24 hours, but can also advertise a permanent post. Further, Telegram posts can also include posts from Instagram, highlights or stories. This overlap makes it challenging to determine the total number of posts analyzed. Therefore, the officially published post number is utilized, but should be understood as an estimate.

In order to analyze such a large data set and begin the process of constructing a story, I followed seven steps from Kozinets (2015), flirting with the data from Kim (2019) and the emplotment of a storyline from Polkinghorne (1995). All three of these authors assisted in creating a coherent story which I could situate within the larger literature covering the politics of white, American motherhood. Once assembled into a coherent story, the data was categorized into 5 different themes, although the larger story is woven throughout. All of the themes sought to answer the research question which is as follows:

How central is motherhood, or notions of mothering to QAmom's social media posts?

1. Do notions of mothering fit within the larger literature on the politics of "white"[1], American motherhood?
2. What is the role that QAmoms and motherhood play in the wider QAnon movement?

---

[1] The term "white" is in quotations as it refers to the figure of the white American mother as imagined in white supremacist maternal logics. It is intended to emphasis the specific and unique location of QAmoms within these logics. It does not cast the experience of whiteness as monolithic or universal, but instead, attempts to increase the salience of the research question by locating QAmoms within a specific context. These concepts are illustrated further in section 3.2 and 3.3. Henceforth, the term white should be understood within this context and will not be subject to quotations.

3. Can the emergence of motherhood explain the entrance of QAnon into the mainstream and its popularity amongst women?

The structure of the thesis unfolds in the following way: chapter 2 will discuss the background of the QAnon movement, highlighting its movement from the dark web to the mainstream, and emphasizing the centrality of women in bringing it into the mainstream. A brief discussion on women in QAnon, including the phenomenon 'Pastel QAnon' will be followed by an important contextual note, the importance of the COVID-19 pandemic to the proliferation of the QAnon conspiracy theories. The third chapter will explore the politics of white American motherhood, maternal thinking and apolitical female agency, justifying the utilization of white motherhood and intersectionality within this thesis. This chapter will also cover the research on conspiracy theories, as understanding what a conspiracy theory is in general will help illuminate characteristics of QAnon conspiracy theories in particular. Methodology will then be introduced in chapter 4, highlighting the usefulness of netnographic research within social media spaces, whilst also recognizing the limitations of netnographic research for this project in particular, namely time. It will also outline the analytical choices, namely a hermeneutic approach, and discuss the process of organizing and analyzing the large data set. The research subjects will then be introduced in detail, followed by a discussion and analysis of the findings in chapter 5, situating the thick descriptions within the literature discussed in chapter 3.

The findings show that motherhood is a central and defining feature for the QAmoms, with notions of mothering, family and traditional gender roles emphasized throughout the posts. Importantly, the QAmom's posts often use a language which speaks out to other mothers, a plea for them to join in the fight and utilize their natural role as mothers. These findings, coupled with the centrality of women to the growth of QAnon and its prominence within online and offline communities highlight the need for further research about these women and their role in bringing QAnon to the mainstream. Further, the findings contribute to the already existing body of literature on the politics of white, American motherhood. Fitting within this literature, I stress that QAmoms must be recognized as agentic beings and not essentialized as mothers. Their current invisibility in the literature must be remedied by an intentional and critical analysis of their creation and dissemination of QAnon conspiracy theories within online spaces. I am hoping that using the word

QAmom brings a new terminology to light, one which recognizes the centrality of mothers within the QAnon spaces.

2. The Women of QAnon

QAnon emerged in 2017 when a user, Q, began posting on the /pol/, Politically Incorrect Board, on 4chan (Papasavva et al., 2022).[2] The pseudonym Q, the letter assigned to the highest letter of security clearance in the department of energy, claimed to have access to the inner most circles in the US Military, leaking information (also known as QDrops) in the form of riddles (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021; Rothschild, 2022). The dominant assertion by Q is that a deep state, evil cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles, made up of liberals, democrats and Hollywood elites controls the world (Rothschild, 2022). Correspondingly, these elites traffic and torture children to harvest adrenochrome, a substance extracted from the blood of a living person who experiences extreme stress or torture, for the purposes of maintaining youth or getting high (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). Notably, the only saviour fighting a war against the cabal is former-president Donald Trump (Wendling, 2021). However, QAnon is not limited to this belief, and often includes many different conspiracy theories.

The QAnon conspiracy theory can be understood as a 'super conspiracy theory' meaning that under the wider umbrella of the theory diverse sets of belief systems can fit (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). Super conspiracy theories incorporate, or blend, other different conspiracy theories into one (Butter & Knight, 2020). For example, QAnon's growth coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and the eruption of anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, many of which were incorporated within QAnon (Butler, 2020). Many followers incorporated their distrust of COVID-19 policies, including the rollout of vaccines and lockdown, weaving them into the QAnon conspiracy theory. For example, some QAnon followers suggested that the pandemic was an intentional distraction created by the elite, to move the attention away from their child trafficking rings (Bracewell, 2020). This makes it difficult to delineate the borders of the QAnon conspiracy theory.

---

[2] 4chan is a forum with a collection of different boards where anyone can post anonymously. The boards often lack moderation seen on other sites such as Reddit. 4chan is a board for unlimited free speech without moderation. As a result, it well-known as a home for neo-Nazis, conspiracy theories and child pornography. (Wendling, 2018).

The wide scope of a super conspiracy theory has its benefits and drawbacks. A flexibility of meaning allows for many different theories to fit underneath the QAnon umbrella. However, if all beliefs are QAnon beliefs, then the QAnon belief system as a whole does not really mean anything. It is important to delineate the borders of the QAnon space while also acknowledging its flexibility of meaning. Consequently, this thesis has defined core QAnon beliefs, beliefs which are primarily associated with QAnon and Q-adjacent beliefs, beliefs which were incorporated into QAnon. QAnon-adjacent beliefs, for example anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, will be incorporated into the larger QAnon umbrella, as anti-vaccine communities were an essential entry point into QAnon and helped bring it into the mainstream (Rothschild, 2022).

2.1 Where are the Women?

Exploring the role of women within QAnon should be of particular interest to researchers as women were primarily responsible for bringing QAnon into the mainstream (Crawford and Argentino, 2021; Matfess & Margolin, 2022). Although initially beginning on the 'dark web,' male dominated spaces like 4chan or 8chan (now 8kun), women entered into and grew the QAnon movement through mommy blogs and as lifestyle influencers on Instagram (Bracewell, 2020).[3] The growth of women's involvement coincided with the growth of the movement, which saw an increase on Facebook of 600% from March to June 2020 (Bracewell, 2020). Women hold high ranking positions within QAnon, and have committed acts of violence in the name of the movement, with the starkest example being the January 6th Capital Riots (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). Women actively participated in the January 6th Capital Riots, with many followers of QAnon currently being sentenced for their roles in the protest, and one follower in particular, Ashli Babbitt, being shot by a capital police officer (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). Stories of her death circulated amongst alt-right communities, with her entrance to martyrdom being marked by the creation of an Ashli Babbitt flag, an image of her in front of a burning Capitol building adorned with the star of David labelled "vengeance" (Jeppesen et al., 2022, p.182). Furthermore, women have leveraged their conspiracy beliefs for actual political power, for example the emergence of

---

[3] The Dark Web is an illegal online space which provides anonymity for criminal acts including the selling of illegal drugs, hacking or stealing information for sale to the highest bidder (Retzkin, 2018). In the context of QAnon, the delineations between the Dark Web and the mainstream web serves the purpose of distinguishing the movements different iterations. For example, the QAnon conspiracy theory spread on unmoderated platforms before moving to Facebook or Instagram.

QAnon-aligned political candidates like Lauren Boebert and Marjorie Taylor Greene (Argentino & Blythe, 2021). Despite women in extremist movements often being understood in relation to men, women in QAnon are leaders, creators, violent actors and politically active (Mattheis, 2018). The visibility of women in QAnon is not mirrored in the literature. The participation of women in the QAnon movement is often reduced to the maternal appeals of #savethechildren (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). Emphasizing these maternal appeals of #savethechildren to explain women's involvement reduces women to their biological or gendered function, essentializing them as mothers whose 'natural' state would be to protect their children, reifying assumptions that have cast women as by-standers or victims instead of active and political individuals with the capacity for violence. As discussed, women in QAnon hold leadership positions, stormed the capital, and hold political positions within the congress. Their influence within the QAnon movement warrants further investigation. One researcher, Marc Andre-Argentino, has identified a specific niche occupied by women, naming the phenomenon 'pastel QAnon,' which will be discussed next.

2.1.1 Pastel QAnon

Researcher Marc Andre Argentino, a PhD candidate and researcher from Concordia University has identified a unique subset of QAnon, named 'Pastel QAnon,' referring to the feminine, pastel aesthetic utilized by lifestyle and wellness influencers to spread QAnon conspiracy theories (Dickinson, 2020). An example of this aesthetic can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1: *Example of QANON Aesthetic on Instagram (Gillespie, 2020, Para.1)*

Figure 1 demonstrates how soft, feminine colours are used in association with the QAnon movement (Gillespie, 2020). This aesthetic serves two main purposes. First, the use of soft colours and the apolitical space of a lifestyle and wellness influencer softens QAnon rhetoric, bringing more women under the umbrella of QAnon (Dickinson, 2020). Concerningly, this aesthetic allows the spread of misinformation masked by a feminine aesthetic traditionally utilized by lifestyle and wellness influences (Gillespie, 2020). Further, the innocuous nature of this aesthetic resulted in a proliferation of QAnon hashtags and content in 2020. Notably, between March and September 2020, membership in anti-child trafficking Facebook groups grew 3000% (Haubursin, 2020). Furthermore, Argentino tracked 109 QAnon mom (QAmom) accounts, noting a combined follower count of 3.9 million (Petersen, 2020). Thus, the softening of the QAnon conspiracy theory has helped with recruitment efforts for other women (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). Second, in an attempt to avoid de-platforming or censorship, women utilize specific languages and aesthetics to circumvent community guidelines, utilizing family, faith and pinkish/purple hues. By using this aesthetic, female influencers can promote conspiracy theories and white supremacy (Ye et al., 2022). This suggests that the use of this aesthetic is intentional, with promoters understanding both the effectiveness of this aesthetic and how to circumvent restrictions. This thesis will focus on

intention, exploring how motherhood is used, identifying similarities between three different QAmom influencers.

2.2 QAnon, Women, and Motherhood

Women's participation in QAnon and the pipeline for participation has been understood in relation to motherhood and the assumptions underpinning motherhood. For example, Nigro (2022) suggests that QAnon was successful in the recruitment of women as it highlights issues central to motherhood, the protection of children from trafficking, exploitation and death. Bloom and Moskalenko (2021) identified child protection as a salient reason for mothers being attracted to QAnon. On the contrary, it is safe to say that the desire to protect children from pedophiles or Satan, especially the torture and harvesting of blood, are universal. Issues concerning the safety of children are potent for the society at large, not just mothers, as ideas that children should not be harmed is universal, a concept which is easy for people to support, and an emotional one which people feel very strongly about (Breland, 2020). The stereotyping of mothers as peaceful, and of maternal instincts as natural has limited critical engagement with QAmoms.

2.3 QAnon, Women, and COVID

Researchers have identified the centrality of the pandemic to the growth of QAnon (Rothschild, 2022; Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). In general, the pandemic saw a "30-50 % increase in the use of social media" (Valaskivi, 2020, p.165). Additionally, of 179 QAnon Facebook Groups tracked, membership spiked from "213,000 in early March to 1.4 Million in July of 2020" (Breland, 2020 para. 15). As people moved indoors, their online presence increased (Fitzgerald, 2022). This, coupled with the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic allowed for the proliferation of fringe movements and propagation of extremist ideas (Bloom &Moskalenko, 2021). This uncertainty amplified concerns women had for the safety of their families. That, coupled with anti-vaccine and pandemic denialism, allowed the concerns around child safety to be centered around a satanic cabal or child trafficking ring as the 'real concern,' positioning the pandemic as an intentional distraction by the elite (Bracewell, 2020). Women who moderated parenting groups on Facebook noticed an extreme uptick in misinformation, with increasingly radical conspiracy theories, usually

related to vaccines or child trafficking (Butler, 2020). As the COVID-19 virus spread within communities, so did QAnon. The pandemic is an essential, if not central contextual factor when discussing the growth of the QAnon movement.

3. Apolitical Female Agency and White Motherhood

In this section I will review all of the relevant literature for this thesis project, starting with the literature surrounding motherhood and politics within the United States, including alt-right mothers within extremist movements, concluding that white motherhood is a valuable identity for analysis. Next, I will examine the literature surrounding conspiracy theories including conspiracy theories in relation to social media. The intention of this chapter is to outline and engage with the current literature, carving out a research niche.

3.1 Women as Mothers and the Politics of Motherhood

Motherhood is a historically contingent and culturally constructed identity predicated on notions of gender. Hegemonic cultural beliefs inform these notions, delineating what is the domain of each gender (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Women have been explicitly connected to motherhood though their reproductive function, as bearers of children (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Women as mothers face more rigid stereotyping, with evidence suggesting that stereotypes of mothers are extreme versions of stereotypes of women, placing mothers as more agreeable and communal than their "instrumentally agentic" male counterparts (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p.526). Cultural assumptions and stereotypes inform how the politics of mothers is understood and framed. For example, political actions by mothers are usually framed as apolitical, as a natural extension of their purpose to protect their children (Nigro, 2022). Furthermore, women as mothers are often understood to be inherently nonviolent. In particular, people often underestimate and deny the fact that women have the capacity to be violent, cruel and horrible (Darby, 2020). On the other hand, when women do commit acts of terrorism they are seen as "failed mothers" and "unnatural" (Campion, 2020, p.3). Moreover, women who are extremists or commit violent acts are often framed as outsiders "atypical, abnormal, unnatural and deviant" (Kisyova et al., 2022, p.37). Accordingly, cultural notions of women as mothers position them as agreeable, non-violent and apolitical, with any deviation being framed as unnatural or deviant. Therefore, I would suggest that the proximity to motherhood is an essential tool in neutralizing, softening and making one's rhetoric appear apolitical. Motherhood as an identity is particularly valuable for women to utilize

as it stands in opposition to violence, hatred or extremism (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). As discussed by Campion (2020), women are motivated by their own belief systems to commit violent activities and are not necessarily restricted to the role of mother or to be influenced or commanded by men. With this in mind, QAmoms should be understood as political and agentic actors, whose utilization of motherhood should not be understood as a natural extension of their identity, but instead a calculated and intentional tool. The utilization of motherhood, particularly white motherhood for political purposes, is historically contingent.

Women have historically carved out specific political spaces by engaging with assumptions about motherhood and the positionality of women within society. Common understanding of the nation of political contracts often position women within the private sphere, rendering them politically irrelevant (Yuval-Davis, 1997). To address this dichotomy, mothers have rhetorically expanded the definition of the home to encompass the society, emphasizing their roles as mothers, caretakers and housekeepers to justify and soften their engagement with societal issues, framing their engagement as concerns of a mother (Deckman, 2016). This is not to say that they were not concerned as mothers, but that their engagement of politics under the guise of motherhood was intentional and calculated. Feminist scholarship suggests that motherhood is "historically constructed and continuously reimagined" (Schreiber, 2016, p.2). This means that the utilization of motherhood in politics must be understood within its historical context. During the Red Scare, a period of anti-communist hysteria in which many Americans were put on trial, white mothers were able to enter the political sphere by framing their political activities as a necessary part of their roles as mothers, with the aim of protecting their children, particularly their children's future, against communism (Brennan, 2008). Mothers were able to enter the political sphere by carefully expanding the purview of their politics to include the community or society, framing these spaces as an extension of the home and emphasizing issues which pertained to the safety and wellbeing of children or the family (Brennan, 2008). Additionally, white women utilized motherhood as a primary reason for opposing desegregation, suggesting that their rights as mothers and the role as mothers superseded the need for racial integration. To accomplish this, they rhetorically expanded the home to encompass the school and all of its teachings, suggesting that integration in school undermines their teachings as mothers (Gillespie, 2018). Motherhood is a political foundation for women, a tool for claiming their needs (Killen, 2019). By engaging with logics surrounding

motherhood, women can claim needs as mothers. Matfess (2022) suggests that the embrace of the role of mother is not a neutral or inherent act, but a political and calculated one. A central foundation for this research process is viewing motherhood as a political act, a calculated approach, acknowledging the legitimacy afforded to women who utilize motherhood in their politics. Using motherhood as a political tool also provides women with a legitimate arena for entering traditionally masculine spaces, such as politics.

Rhetorically positioning politics under the guide of motherhood provides a legitimate and palatable space for women to enter more traditionally masculine spaces, such as politics. For example, conservative women, embracing notions of gender complementarity which suggests women's unique position in society is that of a mother, have often framed their entrance into politics as mothers, stating their positionality as mothers provides a unique, ethical perspective (Schreiber, 2016). This is what Dietz (1985) describes as 'maternal thinking,' suggesting that mother's political capital resides in her positionality as a mother, as uniquely capable of promoting more ethical politics. Framing her entrance into politics as a maternal concern, Sarah Palin called upon 'mama grizzlies'[4] to save future generations from the evils of big government, abortion and taxation (Deckman, 2016). Her invocation of the mama grizzly served two purposes. Firstly, it allowed Sarah Palin to position herself as tough and masculine, characteristics seen as essential for political success, while also centralizing her role as a mother (Schreiber, 2016). The invocation of toughness in the context of motherhood legitimizes female anger, allowing Palin to navigate aggression and anger within her performance of gender (Deckman, 2016). Secondly, the 'motherhood' frame was key to galvanizing women into the Tea Party (Bracewell, 2020). Within the Tea Party, women hold the majority of leadership and organizational positions at both the state and national level (Holloway, 2015). The political utilization of motherhood allowed conservative women to participate within conservative politics, while also being situated within the confines of conservative values (Deckman, 2016). The invocation of the mama grizzlies was successful for Palin in her run for governor, and also for the Tea Party at large. This highlights the strategic use of motherhood in politics, how women carve out a niche in traditionally masculine spaces while still occupying traditional gendered roles. Invoking their position as mothers somehow neutralizes their politics. However, this invocation is not always successful.

---

[4] Mama Grizzlies was first articulated by Sarah Palin during a 2010 fundraiser for an anti-abortion group.

The delineation of motherhood and politics is limiting, as was seen with Sarah Palin and her mama grizzlies campaign. The motherhood frame was utilized by the Sarah Palin and the Tea Party movement, positioning mothers as grizzlies protecting their young from liberals and taxation (Bracewell, 2020). Sarah Palin utilized motherhood to tap into the concerns of mothers, specifically framing the future of their children as a paramount concern, placing taxation and big government as the enemy to children's future (Mezey & Pillard, 2012). While utilizing motherhood to justify her stance on social issues like abortion or taxes, she was also being criticized as a working mother, with five children (McCarver, 2011). This is what Johnson and Swanson (2003) call a maternal double blind, which posits being a professional woman or a good mother as being mutually exclusive. Palin's positionality as a mother both legitimized and delegitimized her politics, carving space to frame issues on behalf of her children while also exposing her to criticisms often aimed at working mothers. This shows the limits of the political usage of motherhood for political power and framing issues as mother's issues. Motherhood is understood as inherently apolitical, as a natural biological response of women to protect their children, and therefore actions in the name of motherhood are apolitical. Motherhood depoliticizes messaging, which makes it a potent tool for the promotion of extremist rhetoric and the recruitment of individuals who may be originally skeptical of extremism.

3.2 Maternal Logics in Alt-Right Movements

Notions of motherhood, specifically white motherhood, are embedded within alt-right and white supremacist logics. As discussed by Yuval-Davis (1997), women bear the responsibility of propagating the population, including the responsibility to prevent the propagation of certain populations. Ideas of motherhood are embedded within alt-right ideology, positioning white women as protectors of the white race, essentializing motherhood as a protective mechanism against white genocide (Mattheis, 2018). For example, David Lane, one of the most notorious white supremacists in the United States, utilized these notions of women as the protectors in his fourteen words: "we must secure the existence of our people and our future for white children"(Campion, 2020, p. 66). This slogan highlights the centrality of procreation within alt-right movements, with the responsibility of the future being placed upon mothers. Within the

United States, motherhood, specifically good motherhood, has historically been related to the reproducing of the nation and the preservation of whiteness. Consequently, good motherhood and white supremacy are intrinsically linked (Killen, 2019). This will be addressed in the following section. Motherhood has been utilized as a tool for upholding white supremacy, and as a legitimate space for women to occupy within stringent gender roles often found within alt-right movements.

Gender complementarity, the notion that women and men have distinct roles within society as determined by nature, delineates the acceptable spaces women can occupy within alt-right movements. Women participate within their supposed capacity and specified roles determined by nature, usually purported to be determined by God (Mattheis, 2018). This often positions them as mothers of movements, ensuring their participation within the movement exists within the confines of womanhood. For example, women as mothers of movements has historical roots within the KKK, as mothers and nurses in the Norwegian Right-Wing Underground, and as mothers of the nation within Greece's Golden Dawn party (Campion, 2020). However, just because women are positioned as mothers of the movement does not mean that their actions or participation is influenced by their natural role as mothers. The positioning of mothers within alt-right movements reflects gendered notions of women's roles within the society, and the carving out of palatable spaces for women within movements. If gender complementary underpins the division of roles within movements, then mothers utilize these presuppositions in their politics, framing their actions from the position of mothers. It is not that motherhood informs their actions, but that motherhood is a legitimate avenue for action within the constraints within alt-right movements which emphasize stringent gender roles. The supposition that motherhood is natural and apolitical has undermined the agentic capacity of mothers to be active, deliberate and intentional participants in alt-right movements. Consequently, research of women within alt-right movements has failed to identify women as agentic and capable actors.

The role of women within alt-right movements has been scrutinized in recent academic literature, with a growing understanding that women participate actively, and willingly within alt-right movements, and must be understood on their own terms, not in relation to men. Women's involvement in alt-right movements is often under examined and not acknowledged (Nigro, 2022). Notably, the agency of women within alt-right movements has been traditionally understood in

relation to men, either as passive participants within movements or under the influence of men (Mattheis, 2018). They have been defined as mothers, sisters, and wives (to men) and lacking organizational or leadership capacity within these movements. In addition, popular portrayals of women often posit them as bearers of children or caretakers, or, if more involved in the movement, as innocents who have been coerced into the movement (Mattheis, 2018). Often, women's participation is attributed to internalized misogyny, or they are framed as "victims of male-instigated violence," therefore painting them as incapable, or very unlikely to be instigators or perpetrators (Kisyova et al., 2022, p.36).

Importantly, women within alt-right movements women are often understood to be subservient to men (Campion 2020). The notions of gender complementarity expressed above are often emphasized within alt-right movements, with many women advocating for stringent gender divisions founded on mythical biological roles (Skjelsbæk, 2020). However, women's engagement with and promotion of strict gender division which positions them as subservient does not remove their agency. In fact, the invisibility of women within the research results from these assumptions. A focus on large-scale actors and politics institutions, usually the domain of men, has excluded women from analysis, with recent scholarship recognizing the community as an important space, illuminating the active roles women play within the creation, dissemination and promotion of white supremacist ideas. However, even with this recognition, white women's participation within communities is often understood in relation to men, positioning them as victims of the patriarchy instead of actors with agency and independent political thought (Gillespie McRae, 2018).

Although men are positioned in more public facing roles, and are considered to have a leadership position within extremist groups, women's participation should not be rendered meaningless or unimportant. Women's participation should be studied to understand the unique positionality of women within extremist movements as well as a holistic understanding of the operation of extremist groups. Emphasizing the role of men and ignoring the role of women allows only partial insight into the systems of support and recruitment within these groups (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). Assumptions about women's participation in alt-right movements are informed by gendered notions of motherhood. These assumptions and attitudes have limited research, rendering women in alt-right movements invisible, or understood only in relation to men. Women's subservient

position within alt-right movements does not mean that women do not actively engage in white supremacist movements as violent actors, spreaders of ideologies or creators of ideology. It just means that their politics are framed within a specific sphere, that of the mother, the wife and the daughter. These women negotiate their positionality, framing their politics as women or as mothers. Furthermore, the promotion of motherhood as identity is intentional and calculated, softening the extremist rhetoric and creating a general appeal. Conclusively, women as mothers participate actively in far-right movements as disseminators of information, recruiters and creators of discourse**.**

Women's participation in alt-right movements lends credence to the movement, softening the messaging and reputation, encouraging a larger appeal to the general population and making extremist movements more mainstream (Matfess & Margolin, 2022; Nigro, 2022; Darby, 2020). Nigro (2022) suggests that this participation helps in recruitment efforts, bringing more women into alt-right movements. An important entry point for recruitment is the framing of white supremacist issues as mothers' issues. Women as mothers is a historically continuous frame within alt-right movements that has been utilized to "normalize racist activity and add a degree of social acceptability to their claims" (Kisyova et al., 2022, p. 50). In other words, the apolitical and natural positioning of motherhood has been used as a tool to soften racist messaging and lend legitimacy to racist movements. For example, Kisyova et al. (2022) identified the protection of children as the most important factor in joining the alt- right. Further, women neutralize the extreme nature of discourse by emphasizing their positionality as women, and role as mothers, parents and families to suggest that the discussions and the spread of right-wing ideology is a discussion about lifestyle, wellbeing and family (Kisyova et al., 2022).

Within white Christian nationalist communities, women are utilized to soften rhetoric, promoting the natural protective nature of the mother over their children as a justification for exclusionary or racist language (Ye et al., 2022). Often, highlighting racialized worldviews within white supremacist movements occur through the framing of family, housekeeping and child rearing with efforts to soften the messaging (Campion, 2020). The use of mothers as disseminators of information and recruiters highlights the power of motherhood as a rhetorical tool as well as its intentional use. I would argue that mothers, specifically white mothers, intentionally utilize their

positionality, understanding the power that framing holds. Kisyova et al. (2022) furthers this by suggesting that mothers "use their gender to spread racist ideology by placing rhetorical emphasis on relationships, motherhood, children, parenting and families to disguise racism, suggesting this is a conversation on lifestyle and wellbeing" (p. 40). Conclusively, women cannot be understood only in relation to men or as "second order" activists, but instead as important, "organic individuals" who creative unique narratives (Kisyova et al., 2022 p.40). Their promotion of stringent gender roles does not render them subservient to men and thus invisible, but instead intentional and calculated, framing their politics as women or as mothers. This intentional framing is exactly what this thesis hopes to uncover, to understand how QAmoms frame their ideology within the realm of motherhood. The successful dissemination and growth of QAnon among women and mothers reflects the power and potency the of the motherhood frame. However, the potency of this frame varies amongst women, and who is afforded legitimacy is enmeshed within racial notions of motherhood.

3.3 The Importance of White Motherhood and an Intersectional Frame

White motherhood and black motherhood within the United States are distinct and separate experiences, historically contingent upon racialized notions of good or bad motherhood. Within the responsibility of the mother, the propagator of the next generation, also falls the duty to prevent the propagation of certain populations (Yuval-Davis, 1997). These racialized notions of desirability and good motherhood find their roots "within white hegemonic logics dating back to the Victorian era" (Banks, 2022, p.451). The reproduction of black bodies is not positioned within the goals of the state, therefore locating black women as bad mothers who corrupt the genes of the nation (Killen, 2019). Conversely, whiteness, and the reproducing of whiteness is not only an essential protective mechanism for the white race but must be carefully controlled. The emergence of the feminist movement and notions of sexual freedom were seen as a threat to white civilization (Kisyova et al., 2022). Notions of racial purity and reproduction inform how white motherhood and black motherhood are understood. For example, black mothers are framed as degenerates, spreading this degeneration through their genetics (Mattheis, 2018). Furthermore, black mothers are positioned as "immoral, careless, domineering," and "devious" (Banks, 2022, p.453). The careful control of white female sexuality and reproduction, and positioning of black mothers as

degenerates highlights the centrality of race within notions of motherhood. Further, these racialized notions of good versus bad, white versus black motherhood are essential to analyzing motherhood as a political tool, as the legitimacy afforded to mothers is entangled within racialized notions.

If motherhood, specifically white motherhood, can be understood within racial hierarchies then what constitutes a good mother and a bad mother also must be understood as such. As discussed by Killen (2019), "Women who are situated out of white visions of motherhood face steeper challenges being seen by the state and society as good mothers" (p. 624). Black women are often characterized and stereotyped, casting negative cultural images onto the black female body (Banks, 2022). For example, black mothers who have invoked their position as mothers when expressing their concerns over racial violence, specifically the murder of their black sons by police, are often framed as a hate group who are anti-police (Killen, 2019). Instead of being understood as mothers whose desire is to protect their children, the natural assumption afforded to white motherhood, black mothers are seen as trouble makers. This important distinction informed the research selection for this thesis, namely the focus on white motherhood.

The salience of identities such as race, age, gender and class are contextually dependant. This highlights the fluidity of identity and the importance of context when highlighting specific aspects of identity (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Motherhood is a particularly gendered space, where notions of womanhood can be understood as a primary feature underpinning cultural notions of motherhood (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Utilizing an intersectional framework, motherhood can be understood as existing within a variety of different identifiers. Although one can attempt to categorize individuals into age, race, gender or class it is important to note that "multiple differences are inherently entwined with one another" and the "cultural meaning people attach to them can never be entirely independent" (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p.522). This means that although gender is a salient feature of motherhood, race, age, class or other identifiers cannot be separated from the analytical frame.

Class is a particularly interesting category of analysis, as a primary feature of the QAnon ideology posits the people versus the elite. Specifically, *who* these elite are can be understood as "empty

signifiers," contextually contingent and fluid (Singh & Féron, 2021). For example, it is often posited that George Soros and the Rothschilds are located at the center of the group of sinister elites. However, this group has come to include politicians such as Hilary Clinton or John Podesta, celebrities like Kim Kardashian, Tom Hanks and Krissy Teagan, and even corporations like Balenciaga and Wayfair (Zuckerman, 2019; Rothschild, 2022; Kuzelewska, E & Tomaszuk, M, 2022; Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). Glossing over class as a salient identifier is prevalent when discussing intersections of race and gender (McCall & Shola Orloff, 2017). The invisibility of class discussions within the analysis is not intended to add to this phenomenon. Instead, an emphasis on race and gender is intended to highlight two intersections of identity as they exist within a specific historical context. The emphasis on intersectionality as an analytical tool hopes to emphasize the complexity and multiplicity of identities and acknowledge that additional identity-axes exist within the context of QAmoms. Importantly, an emphasis on white motherhood is not to suggest that women of colour are not involved in the QAnon movement.

In fact, QAnon membership spans across political ideologies, race, and age (Rothschild, 2022). The emphasis on white motherhood serves a dual purpose. Firstly, this emphasis highlights the historical continuity of white motherhood as a political act within the United States. Secondly, this emphasis recognizes the privileged construction afforded to white motherhood within the United States (Banks, 2022). Additionally, discussing motherhood across race would decrease the salience of the research question, as motherhood as a political act is experienced differently among women of different races. By excluding race as an analytical concept, the results of the thesis research would run the risk of diluting the role white motherhood plays within activism. Additionally, the invocation of white motherhood has afforded women real political power and leverage, with the most recent example being the election of Sarah Palin, who famously utilized the mama grizzly's rhetoric and her position as a mother of 5 children to successfully be elected as Governor of Alaska and take on a leadership role in the Tea Party (Deckman, 2016). To examine the activism of mothers it is important to recognize and identify the systems in which this activism exists. The aforementioned challenges faced by black mothers to be seen as 'good mothers,' the historical relevance of white motherhood, and the political power achieved by white mothers highlight the importance of race as an analytical tool. The thesis does not take their 'whiteness' at face value (the very fact that they are white is not a tool of analysis) but the legitimacy afforded to their

rhetoric, as well as the historical context, is emphasised and utilized. Importantly, this thesis also does not suggest that the experiences of white motherhood are monolithic, but instead utilizes the image of the white mother within white supremacist logics and the historical and contemporary use of this imagery as a means with which to understand the politics of white motherhood.

3.4 Conspiracy Theories

Research on conspiracy theories has presented a variety of definitions which encompass three central principles: everything that happens is intentional and calculated, the world can be divided between good and evil, and whatever is said by the mainstream or the elite is not to be trusted. More specifically, Oliver and Wood (2017) identified three characteristics: background forces conspire evil plots which influence politics and social life, a black and white or Manichean worldview, and that what is presented to us in the mainstream is just a ruse to distract people from the real truth. Additionally, Hendricks and Vestergaard (2019) suggest three principal characteristics of conspiracy theories: nothing happens by chance, everything is always connected, and official stories are always a lie. Barkun (2013) identified three rules of conspiracy theories: everything is connected, nothing happens by chance and things are not what they seem. She suggests that a central tenet of a conspiracy theory is that everything fits perfectly and everything is connected. Within her research she seeks to provide a value-free position in which her readers can decide and judge for themselves about conspiracy theories (Salim-Nefes & Romero-Reche 2020). Another definition is "the view that an explanation of social phenomenon consists in the discovery of the men or groups who are interested in the occurrence of this phenomenon and who have planned and conspired to bring it about" (Giry & Tika, 2020, p.108). In other words, conspiracy theories promote an intentional, planned action which furthers the interest of specific persons or groups which can be secretive in nature or intentionally secretive until the revelation is useful to further the intentions of the group.

Fitting within these definitions, conspiracy theories provide a palatable, easy to understand explanation of phenomena which rejects and neglects the complexities of the world. Moreover, if everything is connected, facts become more convoluted as they are molded to fit the conspiracy theory. Nothing happens by chance so creating explanations for things to 'fit' is not predicated on

truth or fact, but necessity to make sense of the theory. Conspiracy theories are a coping strategy to make sense of the world during a crisis. Providing an explanation for everything, they create meaning in a world where deriving meaning can be challenging or chaotic (Garry, et al., 2021; Salim-Nefes & Romero-Reche 2020). This partly explains the popularity of the QAnon conspiracy theory after March 2020, as people tried to make sense of the pandemic. The eruption of conspiracy theories and misinformation online after the pandemic coincided with eruption of another phenomenon: super conspiracy theories.

Super conspiracy theories encompass a variety of ideas from separate conspiracy theories under the umbrella of a larger conspiracy theory (Butter & Knight, 2020). QAnon is a super conspiracy, which has underneath its umbrella everything from birtherism (the belief that Barack Obama was born in Africa), that the COVID vaccine is part of a larger plot to exterminate the population, to the sovereign citizens movement which asserts that there has been no legitimate president since Ulysses S. Grant, and that the saviour, Donald Trump would have been inaugurated as the 19th president of the United States on March 4th 2021 (Garry et al., 2021). For research purposes, this flexibility can somewhat dilute the QAnon movement as a whole, as defining what is or is not QAnon is challenging with so many movements co-opting the belief systems or joining forces. The subjects for the research had to not only engage with multiple QAnon beliefs, but also with the core beliefs. Notably, another challenge with researching a super conspiracy theory or conspiracy theories in general was how to engage with the content without giving a voice to the misinformation. This is a challenge facing many academics who research conspiracy theories, and is one of the reasons conspiracy theories are under researched.

The prerogative connotations of engaging with conspiracy theories have caused a lack of research on the topic, with researchers balancing a fine line between approaching the subject matter with an open mind, while also dismissing it as false. Todor et al. (2020) summarizes it beautifully, stating that research of conspiracy theories "requires us, for example, to approach conspiracy theories in a spirit of open-minded neutrality, just as other researchers approach their objects of study while insisting at the same time that conspiracy theories are not to be taken seriously or seen as legitimate alternatives to our own explanations" (p.12). Within research it is important to not immediately disqualify 'conspirational' thinking or theories. We must simultaneously approach

this way of thinking with an open mind while also disqualifying it in order to preserve the sanctity and legitimacy of research and knowledge (Giry & Tika, 2020). Focusing on the rhetorical frames utilized by the research subjects is a fruitful way to engage with conspiracy theories as the emphasis is on the meaning they create, not a fact checking exercise. Whether what they say is true or not is of course important, and many of the posts were rife with misinformation. However, the main focus of the research is instead on the rhetorical tools they use, an exploration of meaning, rendering the specific content of what they post (e.g., whether vaccines actually contain microchips) (they don't), secondary. This allows a distance between the researcher and misinformation, not lending a voice to the misinformation, but situating it within specific frames to understand an individual more.

3.5 The Conspiracy Theorist

Much of the research on conspiracy theories has been of a quantitative nature, attempting to determine which group or set of identifiers are associated with conspiracy theory beliefs. The desire to identify the 'who' within conspiracy theories has a long history, with little success in actually conceptualizing the 'conspiracy theory believer' (Smallpage et al., 2020). Within qualitative research, conspiracy theories have been largely understood as male and white dominated (Ward & Voas, 2011). However, this is contested, with alternative explanations suggesting that it is not necessarily gender that predisposes someone to believe in conspiracy theories in general, but conspiracy theories in particular. For example, a study conducted in Poland and Germany found that conspiracy theories which challenge traditional family structures and family roles were more likely to be believed by men. Therefore, men are not more likely to believe conspiracy theories than women, but instead are more likely to believe specific types of conspiracy theories (Thiem, 2020). Furthermore, conspiracy theories surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine and vaccine hesitancy were more popular amongst women with children (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). This illustrates the limitations of quantitative analysis, as the conditions for believing a conspiracy theory are so individual. Additionally, defining what a conspiracy theory is, or the threshold for conspiracy belief presents many challenges.

Defining what a conspiracy theory is and identifying the threshold for what constitutes a conspiracy theorist (how many conspiracy theories they believe in or how extreme the belief system is) has presented many challenges. The chapter above presented various definitions for what constitutes a conspiracy theory. If that is the starting point, then the next step is to determine the threshold that makes a person a conspiracy theorist. In the context of the United States, a quantitative study by Oliver and Wood (cited in Smallpage et al., 2020) "found that every second American believes in at least one conspiracy theory" (p.657). Conversely, the number of conspiracy theories may not be as relevant as the content of the belief (Smallpage et al., 2020). For example, data shows that almost all sectors of societies around the world believe in some kind of conspiracy theory, challenging the conjured image of the deranged conspiracy theorist and replacing it with a complicated and diverse set of individuals (Harambam, 2020). Further, researchers have had a difficult time finding connections or correlations between determiners of conspirational belief, for example education or socio-economic status (Smallpage et al., 2020). Although data has struggled to find individual indicators for believing in conspiracy theories, it has successfully identified regional or national indicators.

As previously mentioned, Americans are particularly prone to believing in conspiracy theories, with over half of the American populace supporting some type of conspiracy theory (Oliver & Wood, 2014). For example, a study conducted in the year 2000 found that a majority of respondents believed that there were government attempts to cover up the JFK assassination, and that the government was hiding information about extra-terrestrial life (Fitzgerald, 2022). Culturally, movies like *The Matrix*, reflect a conspiracy mind-set that people are asleep to the reality, that they need to wake up and can find the answers if they just know where to look (Fitzgerald, 2022). The phenomenon of *red pilling* is popular within right wing conspiracy theories, inspired by *The Matrix*, when Neo, the main character, has to choose between living in ignorance (the blue pill) or waking up to the reality (the red pill). The taking of the red pill is the first step of a sort in a political awakening, in a world divided between good and evil (Chapelan, 2021). Suggesting that Americans are more prone to believe conspiracy theories is not to engage with a more quantitative method, as determining how many Americans believe in QAnon compared with another country provides very little substance. Instead, the purpose was to highlight the historical context in which this research will be conducted. It is important to note that, as all of

this research is conducted online, the locational boundaries of the research are impossible to establish, as accessing information such as IP address is not only not possible with my knowledge system and a massive privacy violation. Instead, the research subjects selected engage with American politics, present themselves as American, and share that they live in America. As the QAnon movement specifically refers to a leader connected with the US military, Donald Trump and a sinister elite from Hollywood (think Tom Hanks), the connection between QAnon and American politics and history is essential to establish.

As discussed in the previous chapter, QAnon membership spans across race, age, gender and ideology (Rothschild, 2022). The QAnon conspiracy theory presents a black and white view of the world, a division between good and evil, the awake and the asleep, and, most importantly, the masses versus the elite. Perhaps what makes QAnon such a popular conspiracy theory is that it taps into "feelings of powerlessness," validating feelings that the world is controlled by a select few (Thiem, 2020, p.293). This feeling of powerlessness was likely amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the spread of QAnon under conditions of insecurity, offering predictability and understanding (Thórisdóttir et al., 2020). Further, conspiracy theories provide an exit in situations, a way to "save face," for example when someone loses an election (Thórisdóttir et al., 2020, p. 305). This could explain the presence of QAnon followers at the January 6th storming of the capital (Garry et al., 2021). Additionally, it could explain the popularity of the "great awakening" amongst Trump supporters, the belief that Trump would stop the inauguration of Joe Biden, institute martial law and publicly hang the enemies, namely democrats (Wong, 2021). Identifying who believes in conspiracy theories has been largely unsuccessful. Instead, identifying why some people believe in conspiracy theories, although providing a more fragmented picture, can illuminate the complex social reality of conspiracy theory belief.

3.6 Conspiracy Theories and Social Media

Social media has become a central platform for the proliferation of ideas and engagement between people. The rise of social media has shifted the direction of influence, which was previously from the top (news agencies or the government) to the bottom to now being engagement between users (Valaskivi, 2022; Cho et al., 2022). With the advent of the smartphone, now almost all people have

the ability to produce images, videos, or soundbites that would previously have required specialized video equipment and knowledge (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019). As discussed by Cho et al. (2022) "Social media are flipping the traditional ecology, allowing users to have roles and influence in agenda settings and framing processes" (p. 10). There are a multiplicity of realities which exist on social media. Before social media our reality was portrayed by mass media institutions, which housed necessary equipment, resources and expertise rooted in traditional systems of power and hierarchy. Stories existed within a shared reality, one rooted in systems of power. These stories have been decentralised by the multiplicity of realities available on social media which are malleable and fluid, changing with times (think virality, hashtags).

Social media allows for a curated feed of people with similar beliefs, wherein opposing views are rarely promoted (Cho et al., 2022). Emotionally provocative content is more likely to interest users, and be promoted and circulated on social media channels (Valaskivi, 2022). The perception of the story and its emotional response determine its truth, not its proximity to the actual truth (Cho et al., 2022). Concerningly, misinformation and disinformation spread more quickly online than verified information. This is further complicated by the fact that the main outlet people receive their news from is social media (Garry et al., 2021). Further, there is a financial incentive to promote inflammatory or controversial content as that will get attention from more followers (Flora, 2020). The algorithm is more likely to promote extremist content, therefore providing influencers with more followers and engagement and therefore more money. Consequently, influencers are incentivized to promote hateful content (Ye et al., 2022). Stories are often framed intentionally, with the selection of elements which will grab the attention of viewers, often at the cost of context and nuance (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019). The issue is not that any person has access to the equipment and can now promote their own agendas or messaging, but that the structures incentivize a specific type of messaging and rhetoric.

Although social media allows for the unprecedented spread of information, it also allows unprecedented political and social participation. The question of whether social media is beneficial or harmful to democracy has researchers divided. Notably, the spread of disinformation and misinformation has been established as a global risk to democracies all around the world (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019). However, Garry et al. (2021) suggest that access to social media can improve democratic participation. Any individual with a camera or internet access can join an

online conversation, presenting their opinion. For some with low trust in institutions or media, the internet may appear to be a more reliable place to get information (Adrian Bangerter et al., 2020). However, access to a smartphone or social media account does not necessarily provide factual information or allow individual voices to be heard. The same freedom to tweet for the individual is awarded to the politicians or 'the elite' whose influence and reach is greater than that of the average person. Therefore, access to these platforms does not necessarily translate to participation or control over narratives. Consequently, the access awarded to the individual resembles the existing power balance (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019). Further, having access to the technology to create content does not guarantee democratic participation online, as individuals with better equipment, training, and internet connection will be more successful participants (Lange, 2017). Although social media and the advent of the internet has moved political conversations online, allowing a greater reach and participation for individuals, the internet still exists within current power structures, affording some people a louder voice than others.

4. Netnography: Moving Online

In this section, I will define netnography and its uses, and articulate its suitability for this research project. After defining netnography, I will distinguish between two separate forms: passive and active, arguing that passive netnography is more suitable for this research project. The research design will then be outlined, concluding with the limitations and ethical considerations for this project.

4.1 Netnography Defined

Netnography, also known as digital ethnography, developed in response to the increasing relevance of social media within our daily lives. The pandemic furthered this fusion of the public and private self, increasing the relevance and need for netnographic research (Kozinets, 2020). Costello et al. (2017) define netnography as a qualitative research method developed as a response to growing online communities and the shortcomings of other research methodologies to adapt. According to Dixon (2022), the number of Instagram users worldwide has consistently grown within the last 5 years, with a projected 1.44 billion users by the year 2025. These staggering numbers illustrate the relevance of the platform to daily life. The pervasiveness of Instagram usage makes netnographic research in the space particularly valuable (Lathifah et al., 2017). A platform with such reach and usage in daily life warrants investigation, and the changing social and cultural landscape and spaces for the creation of meaning necessitates a research catered to the online, one that recognizes the pervasiveness of online life in the everyday.

There have been many different interpretations and suggested methods when it comes to research within social communities on the internet, from cyber-ethnography, virtual ethnography to investigative research on the internet (IRI) (Costello et al., 2017). Netnography is the iteration most suitable for this project, as it is, by Kozinet's definition, conducted fully online (Costello et al., 2017). Some researchers combine passive netnographic and ethnographic research, utilizing the offline interviews to confirm what they discovered online (Costello et al., 2017; Hine, 2017). Within this research project, the research subjects are understood within the terms of their online

personas, as influencers. Comparing or confirming their online and offline rhetoric is outside the scope of this project, as the primary focus is on the framing of politics within an online space. Whether they continue this political behaviour offline is not only difficult to uncover, but irrelevant to the project. Further, the distinction between what can be online and offline becomes increasingly more difficult as many people spend hours of their day on social media, documenting daily life. What they present to us is their life, even if the medium for viewing it is through a phone or computer. Lastly, the resources required to combine netnography and ethnography, time and money, especially when the research subjects are located (presumably) in the United States, is not feasible for this research project. Conducting research fully online is relevant to both the content of the research question and the feasibility of this project.

The distinction between the online or offline is becoming increasingly irrelevant as social media permeates our daily lives in unprecedented ways. As Lathifah et al. (2021) suggest, netnography is "a qualitative research method with an ethnographic approach seeing the world of social media as the same culture as the real world" (p.3). Furthermore, social media can be understood as legitimate sites of culture and meaning, which are embedded in the everyday and increasingly relevant (Lathifah et al., 2021). Positioning these technologies "as products of social construction" is essential for netnographic research (Hine, 2017, p.23). Moreover, recognizing the importance of social media to daily life, the researcher can obtain a cultural understanding through a fully online experience (Kozinet, 2015). Distinguishing between the real and virtual world is no longer relevant, as cultural change and meaning occur online (Caliandro, 2018). For example, the research subjects documented their daily lives, showing their morning coffees, playing with their children or the products they use on a daily basis. Although there are certainly distinctions between their 'real' and 'online' selves, the centrality of social media within their daily lives, in daily posts, or engagement with followers, render making this distinction more challenging. Generally speaking, the popularity of social media and ubiquity of social media use make sites such as Instagram central spaces for socializing. In conclusion, social media is neither a lived reality or a completely separate sphere, and the divisions between social media and real life have become increasingly more complicated to define as its centrality to social life increases. Research conducted completely online recognizes and utilizes this centrality, deciphering meaning from the online and recognizing

the online as a legitimate site of meaning construction. This does not render the offline irrelevant, but situates the online as central to the everyday.

4.2 Passive or Active Netnography?

One area of contention between netnographic researchers is whether netnography should be conducted 'passively' or 'actively'. As discussed by Costello et al. (2017) the researcher should actively engage in conversation with the communities as the research approaches of netnography can be watered down if the researchers only passively engage with the audiences. The pros and cons can be summarized in Table 1.

Passive	Active
+ Not influence discussions	+Become a member of the community, not just a researcher
+ Recognition of outsider status	+Better understanding of how community functions
	+ Ethical as subjects know they are being researched
-More archival then ethnographic	-Individuals may change behaviour if they know they are being researched
-Glorified lurker	-Can a researcher really become a member of a community?

Table 1: *Passive or Active Netnography? Chart Inspired by Costello et al., 2017.*

As shown in Table 1, passive netnographic research allows the researcher to act as a glorified lurker, not influencing the discussion as the research subjects are unaware of the presence. Further, the researcher recognizes their positionality as an outsider. However, passive netnography restricts the researcher as an archivist, a glorified lurker who does not engage with the community they research or let their presence be known (Costello et al., 2017).

The purpose of netnographic research, as discussed by Kozinets (2015) is to move from the outside inward, and once returned to the outside, to have a deeper understanding and capacity to explain the inside. A passive netnographic approach allows for an understanding of the inside, without running the risk of influencing the research subject's behaviour (Costello et al., 2017). The motion from outside to inside does not have to be active as the most important characteristic of netnographic research is detailed field notes and reflexivity (Kozinets, 2015). Further, the time limits of this research project inform the research design. Meaningful engagement with the communities and becoming a community member would require active and sustained engagement. Active engagement would cast too wide a net and run the risk of taking in too much information without having the time for reflexivity. Instead, this research provides a glimpse into a specific context situated within a specific time frame. The data set will be "small, but thick" allowing for detailed descriptions within a specific context (Villegas, 2020, p.101). Situating this research within a specific context and naming that as a limitation is suitable for this methodology as netnographic research can always be understood as a smaller part of a whole (Hsu, 2017). As long as the limitations and scope are named, the smaller data sample and passive research approach can be justified.

4.3 Flexibility, Reflexivity and Netnography

Netnographic research in practice is a flexible methodology with some core characteristics: prolonged engagement with online communities, detailed notes and reflexivity. This flexibility allows for an emphasis on substance over strict methodological practices or what Kozinets (2021) calls "methodolatry", an emphasis on methodology which can limit both flexibility and examination of substance (p.21). Netnographic methodology encourages the researcher to follow leads, with one space sparking an interest into other spaces, not restricted to a pre-defined criteria or method, but growing as the immersion and understanding grows (Hine, 2017). Throughout the process, the researcher develops the method in conjunction with their growing understanding of the subject matter. As discussed by Hallet & Barber (2014), netnographic researchers should be encouraged to go beyond established parameters, engaging with multiple different spaces and following different paths as they see fit. For example, through the exploration of influencers, I found that telegram chats were a space where they would often post content which violates the

community guidelines on Instagram. Engagement with multiple sites not only allows for more detailed or thick descriptions, but also reflects the reality of how people engage with online spaces, often managing multiple different social network and communication networks (Hallet & Barber, 2014).

Lastly, netnography emphasizes reflexivity which "involves examining choices and assumptions and reflecting on modes of experience and movements within the field"(Hine, 2017, p. 26). A flexible research methodology allows for reflexivity, providing the researcher with the space to explore different areas, follow leads and take detailed and reflective notes about different subjects and communities. Reflexivity informs the detailed notes or thick descriptions, as the researcher weaves themselves into the research, placing themselves within the narrative, noting their positionality and relation to the research question as well as the subject and context (Hsu, 2017). As mentioned in the earlier section, this will produce a thick set of descriptions which are positioned within a specific context, and should not be understood in generalizable terms, but as a smaller piece of a larger puzzle. Netnographic research is ideally suited for this research process as it is conducted fully online, allows for a deep engagement with research subjects, and is not restricted to strict methodological structures instead allowing for a complex and multifaceted approach to the research questions.

4.4 Netnographic Research Design

The research approach was modeled and inspired by Burrel (2017) who suggests four tips for netnographic research. The first tip is to "seek entry points rather than sites", to start somewhere and go other places that feel relevant (Burrell, 2017, p. 56). For the purposes of this thesis, this meant to explore the research subject's other social media accounts, eventually stumbling upon their Telegram, Tiktok, or Parler. Secondly, Burrell (2017) suggests to find connections between multiple points and analyze these connections. This analysis is made possible by deep immersion into all the posts by the research subject as well as their alternative social media networks, comments or responses to people and daily stories. This allowed for a full immersion into their digital life. This immersion sparked connections, as every time I reviewed content and went onto their account, I discovered new connections and ideas. Third, Burrell (2017) suggests the

researcher imagine spaces, constructions of spaces or realities and constructions of meaning. This suggestion inspired me to identify rhetorical meaning and constructing meaning from implicit and explicit constructions. For example, by exploring how the QAmoms engage with QAnon conspiracy theories and how they frame their engagement. One influencer did not distance themselves from QAnon, whereas the other explicitly stated they do not believe in the QAnon conspiracy theory, while posting from QAnon boards and promoting QAnon conspiracy theories. These constructions exist within a specific context, and can highlight the multifaceted and complex nature of social meaning. This can provide nuance to an often-linear understanding of human history, challenging narratives and allowing for the emergence of a new way of thinking and understanding (Hsu, 2017).

Lastly, Burrell (2017) suggests the researcher know when and where to stop, suggesting that "the potentially infinite size of the network and lack of a natural stopping point present problems for researchers" (p. 57). The open-ended nature of netnographic research is a double-edged sword, allowing for endless possibilities of exploration, rabbit holes to wander into, but a difficult delineation of start to finish. There are two remedies to this challenge. First, it is important for the researcher to take ownership over their own expertise, while recognizing their own limitations, including time. If they weave themselves into the research, the stopping point is more natural and less abrupt, as the justifications for a stopping point are established by the researcher (Burrell, 2017). Second, the researcher should note that netnography provides results which exist within a specific context, time and location as well as research process and methodology, and cannot be generalizable (Hsu, 2017). Each account was studied in its entirety and therefore only limited to when the influencer began posting and stopped posting. However, their accounts will continue to grow once this thesis has been published, making the establishment of specific boundaries essential for the reading of the analysis. It is important to read this thesis within the specific time in which it exists. The final day of data collection, as noted below was 20.02.23.

The most important part of my research will be taking detailed field notes. As discussed by Patterson and Ashman (2020), taking detailed notes is important for reflexivity as engaging with the content over time will allow for reflection, with the researcher noting changes in their perception and knowledge and their relationship with the research subject. Screen shots,

transcriptions and descriptions were primary features of my field notes, ensuring to time stamp content. A challenge when researching influencers on Instagram is the ephemerality of content. Stories last only 24 hours, posts and comments can be deleted, and entire accounts can be disabled. The latter becomes even more likely when the account in question posts inflammatory content which may violate community guidelines. This requires an intense and sustained surveillance and documentation of the accounts. All notes are housed in a Microsoft word document, including screenshots of posts, transcriptions of video audio and descriptive notes. Screenshots are necessary, as the risk of content disappearing is high. Additionally, many stories only exist for 24 hours, requiring a screen shot. These detailed notes informed my analysis.

4.5 Analytical Process and the Construction of Meaning

The steps for interpretating the data were informed by the "seven interpretating intellectual implements" (Figure 2) defined by Kozinets (2015, p.409). These seven steps provided me with the necessary tools to configure my large data set into a coherent story. This chapter will first define the process of configuration, or the "emplotment" of data into something coherent (Polkinghorne, 1995). Subsequently, I will discuss the analytical processing of the data, specifically the weaving of a story and the considerations throughout the process.
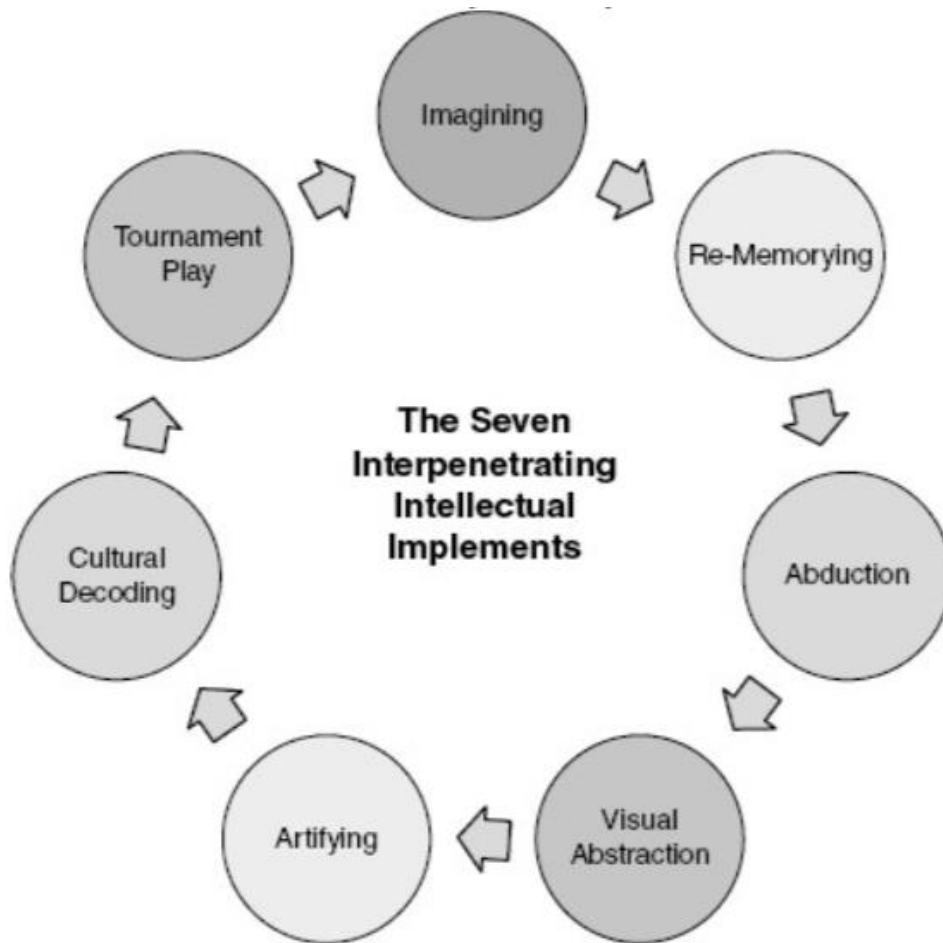
Figure 2: *Seven Interpreting Intellectual Implements from Kozinets (2015, p.409).*

The initial step was Imagining, where I identified concepts and ideas within my field notes which stood out, situating this within my own feelings, positionality and identity. Kozinets suggested this initial process should be free, a space for creative reflection. I identified similarities between the influencers, grouping quotes and notes together underneath categories. Second, I tried to remember elements of my data by writing them down without referring to my data set. This act of Re-Memorying can provide a new perspective on the data, as the act of remembering actively shows what is important in the data set, something that could be glossed over or lost in such a large collection of data. This act of Re-Memorying was especially important as my data set spans 80 pages, with hundreds of posts being analyzed between the influencers. Taking distance from the notes and trying to remember without reference allowed me to understand what was most

important from the data set. The next step was Abduction, the act of connecting points and testing these connections, with the ultimate goal of identifying patterns within the data. The testing process involved grouping ideas together and identifying the similarities between the influencers and situating them within the literature. Visual Abstraction was the following step, a challenging process of moving pieces within the data and extrapolating larger ideas from smaller data points. Kozinets posited that this can cause a researcher to lose themselves, but that this is not a problem, as it will ultimately bring the researcher back to where they need to be. This step was challenging as I often cast too wide a net, expanding the picture to encompass too much, and with that losing nuance (Kozinets, 2015).

As QAnon is a super conspiracy theory, many different conspiracy theories can fit underneath its umbrella, making the connection between QAnon, motherhood and a variety of conspiracy theories a massive undertaking, one which risks the dilution of the research question. In order to address this challenge, I visualized the data, through the act of Artifying. Artifying was the act of visualizing the data, connecting different ideas. A deep thinking of the data which would conjure images and metaphors, all taking place in what Kozinets (2015) calls the "mental movie auditorium" (p. 413). This deep thinking involved reading over my data set and trying to distance myself and take time to think. This step still needs more refinement which can only come with more distance. More time would allow for a deeper reading of the data set. This thesis should be read within the limitation of time. Cultural Decoding was the second last step, the organization, classification and coding of the data. It also included positioning the data within the culture from which it emerged. The purpose of this exercise is to find more meaning from the data. I attempted to situate my findings within the literature review, drawing parallels and contrasts between what has been discovered and what my data set shows. The last step in the analytical process is Tournament Play, which allows the researcher to play with the different ideas, putting them against one another to determine the best explanation (Kozinets, 2015). The ideas presented in my analysis are still a part of this tournament play, and likely the process of play will continue after my research is published. If I had more time to complete this project more ideas would come out of the data set, adding more substance to my research. That is not to say my findings are not the result of all of these steps, but that they are a part of a process which I do not think will ever be fully complete, as competing ideas will always present themselves, especially with more time to analyze.

I liked the suggestion by Kim (2019), the idea of flirting with the data, of reviewing and re-reviewing what I have collected allowing myself to discover and find surprises at every new glance. This kept the process interesting and open, not restricted to a specific set of rules but full of flexibility and excitement (Kim, 2019). The idea of flirting with the data fits well within netnography, which encourages flexibility and reflexivity in the process of data collection and analysis (Hine, 2017; Kozinets, 2015; Kozinets, 2021). The act of "meaning-finding" involved a consistent engagement with the data, a reflexivity with the findings and reframing of my knowledge throughout the process, often situating the knowledge within the literature (Kim, 2019, p.8). In tangible terms, this involved an extensive engagement with the findings, a daily review of the field notes, highlighting like terms and taking notes on potential avenues. It meant interrupting conversations at dinner to run and write down a thought before it was lost. It meant 'aha' moments which upon further considerations led to nothing. The process of meaning-finding was all-encompassing, analogous to the feeling of knowing something 'on the tip of the tongue,' and waiting for that 'aha!' moment.

I chose a hermeneutic approach, the retelling of a story, the spinning of a narrative which has resulted from informed and detailed data collection. This retelling of the story resembles a narrative configuration, a process of assembling stories into something coherent and organized, combining a "succession of incidents into a unified story" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.7). The process of emplotment, the configuration of the story, required the seven steps mentioned above, as the field notes were large and felt overwhelming. This process was essential to derive meaning from the data set (Kim 2019). Kozinets (2015) recommends that the construction of the story should always be contextualized, in order to be comprehensible, relevant and insightful. He suggests that a "good hermeneutic interpretation" includes both the social and historical context of data, which provides a "subtle, specific and nuanced cultural interpretation" (p. 420). The literature informed my hermeneutic interpretation and provided the frame for which I fit my data set.

A primary risk of constructing a story is two-fold: being too descriptive dilutes the analysis, and being too analytical dilutes the descriptions, locating the authors voice as central and losing the unique voice of the research subjects (Kim, 2019). A balance between the two is essential. I attempted to find balance by using quotations, ensuring the voice of the subjects were central, and

then analysing what is said. This may fragment the narrative, but a fragmented narrative allows for both a presentation of the whole and the individual parts. Further, stories of people, of real life, often lack clarity or linearity. The challenge of this research was to coherently and cohesively present this complexity, to not confuse the reader whilst honouring the intricate stories of these women.

More challenging was the translation of meaning from my own knowledge into terms that can be understood by the reader. With deep engagement comes a familiarity which can only be experienced by the researcher. The meaning constructed through the deep engagement is not always concrete or fixed, and cannot be easily ascertained by readers (Kim, 2019). An essential facet of bridging the gap between my research and knowledge for the reader was situating the research within the literature provided in chapter three. Providing a background and context for the story is not only necessary for the reader, but also for honouring the experiences of the research subjects, as locating the story within a specific context provides essential temporal borders. Without borders, or in this case situating the research using previous literature, the thesis would run the risk of lacking clarity and muddling the stories of the research subjects.

Context has always been paramount to this project, ensuring that the results are situated with a specific space: white, American motherhood. This specific context is not only historically continuous, but essential for rendering results, as casting too wide a net will result in generalizable results. The specificity of this research project should also be understood as a limitation.

4.6 Limitations

As previously discussed, netnographic research requires consistent and sustained engagement in order to understand the research subjects. Patterson and Ashamn (2020) argue that "the passage of time allows for the necessary perspective to be garnered" (p. 244). Furthermore, Hine (2017) suggests that netnography requires a close and sustained interaction with the research subjects. For some, it is important to dedicate years to have the most detailed research possible (Patterson & Ashman, 2022). This allows for the "thick descriptions" and freedom from strict methodological structures as the researcher becomes a part of the subject's world, being able to contextualize and

understand and place a human voice within a larger framework, analyzing the meaning of the voice rather than just describing (Kozinets, 2020, p.8). Additionally, the researcher should be intensely involved in the day-to-day life of the online community, similar to the traditions of ethnography (Costello et al., 2017). Although the passage of time would surely allow for a more fruitful analysis, the time allowance for this thesis is restricted by degree structure, a one-year allotment to research, and therefore cannot fulfill these recommended criteria. However, this does not mean that the research does not have value, but a reading of the research should place it as a snapshot in time, operating within a specific context and therefore as a small piece of a larger puzzle.

Although there are limitations on time, I have considered many different avenues which would have been interesting and added more detail to my research. For example, Influencer 2 started a podcast about one month into the data collection process. This would have been an interesting additional piece of data that would add to the overall story of the individual. Also, it would have shown dialogues between her and her guests, giving further insight into how she engages with conspiracy theories and discussions surrounding them. Furthermore, a combined netnography and ethnography would also have been interesting, as I could gain insight even further into the lives of the influencers and illuminate this designation between online and offline.

Lastly, after conducting my data collection I identified two avenues which I would have loved to explore, time allowing. Firstly, is the use of the #mybodymychoice hashtag between the pro-choice and anti-vaccine communities. The dialogues occurring surrounding ideas of bodily autonomy, government intervention and choice within two separate spheres is really interesting to me, especially when the users of the #mybodymychoice hashtag have opposing views (for example being anti-vaccine mandate, but pro-life). All of the influencers I followed were anti-vaccine mandates, but pro-life and engaged with the concept of #mybodymychoice in a similar way that many pro-choice accounts did, emphasizing the importance of bodily autonomy and criticizing the government for its involvement in medical decision making. There is a lot of complexity and nuance to the conversation which I would love to explore. Secondly, when researching different QAnon accounts I was surprised to see the prevalence of religion. Maybe this would be obvious to some, especially considering the centrality of the devil within QAnon rhetoric, but the centrality of religion to these accounts is definitely something to be explored further. This limitations section

is meant to illustrate that I recognize there are many alternative and interesting directions this research could take.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The primary ethical considerations within this research project were the distinction between the private and the public, informed consent, potential for harm, and identification of the researcher's positionality. As mentioned above, the distinction between private and public, or real vs virtual becomes challenging in today's landscape, as the availability of mobile phones, internet and social media means that people exist as much online as they do offline. For the purposes of ethics, the division between the real versus virtual self must be established. An essential element to these ethical questions is privacy, considering what an individual would like to be public. The influencers selected as research subjects had to have a public profile, one which anyone could access, even without creating an Instagram account. Although these individuals lives surely exist in both the private and public domain, and there is private information they would not want to be shared, the information which they present online can be seen as public self, information which they are comfortable sharing on a profile in which any individual with internet can access. The self on Instagram can be understood as a "strategic self-presentation" (Patterson & Ashman, 2020, p.242), meaning a presentation of the self which performs some purpose, be it selling products or increasing a following. Further, the self in the context of social media or digital influencers is a performance, a curated expression of what an individual wants to show to the world, therefore examining the 'self' on Instagram is not necessarily an insight into the personal particularities of an individual life, not so much peeping behind the curtain as watching a performance on stage.

This curation can allow the individual to create whatever distance between themselves and the digital self. With my focus being primarily on the digital self, this allows for a reframing of ethical considerations as the virtual 'person' or subject is different than engaging with a real person or subject. All information relating to their individual identity and unique identifiers, location, real name, occupation, are not relevant to the study and are unknown and unexplored. Further, the locational boundaries become irrelevant when discussing netnographic research as the internet lacks borders, so the delineation of location is referred to by the subject matter, that being

individuals who engage with American politics and particularly the politics in relation to white, American motherhood. The lack of information about identity, things which the individual in question may want to keep private, allow for a more flexible ethical approach as the individual can be divided between their real-life persona and their "digital persona" (Atkinson & Delamont, 2010, p. 5).

All of the research subjects required a public profile and a large social media following (50K+) to identify them as 'public.' However, a large following and a willingness for a profile to be public does not explicitly constitute consent to being a subject of this master's thesis. Informed consent was not essential for this research project as a passive approach to netnography does not require direct interaction with the research subjects, but instead a collection of data from the subject's profile (Legewie and Nassaur, 2018). There were two considerations taken into account when dealing with the issue of consent: potential for harm and research potential. The potential for harm and the research potential needs to justify the absence of informed consent. One consideration was anonymization, which Tilley and Woodthorpe (2011) suggest is a good workaround for informed consent. All screenshots and names are anonymized, although this is far from perfect. A challenge with anonymization is that the main characteristic of netnographic research is thick and detailed descriptions, which are essential for the analysis and discussion, but risk exposure for the anonymity of the research subject. For example, the names of the subjects could be anonymized, but the content could be traceable. The likelihood of harm was then considered. This thesis will be uploaded to Trepo, a platform for university students at Tampere University, though its open access nature would allow anyone to access it. However, the most likely readers of my thesis, other than my supervisors and my mom, will be university students. This limited audience reduces the likelihood of harm for my research subjects. Conversely, even if it did reach a larger audience, the anonymization of the research subjects should be a sufficient protection for them. Lastly, the research potential should be established. The absence of mothers as subjects within the literature on QAnon illustrates the invisibility of motherhood. Assumptions which underpin motherhood, and by extension womanhood, reify stringent gender roles, and carry with them real life consequences. Women who situate themselves within visions of femininity and motherhood are held less accountable for criminal activity, with those positioned outside of these visions receiving harsher sentencing, casted as evil and unnatural (Matfess and Margolin, 2022). Positioning

motherhood as political, and women as mothers as active and intentional with their politics destabilizes assumptions and present a more nuanced view of gender. This thesis will not accomplish that, but hopefully add to a growing body of literature which recognizes the agency of women within alt-right or extremist movements.

The thesis project must be understood in the context of my positionality. Following the directions of Hsu (2017), I must place myself within the narrative, noting my positionality and relation to the research question, subject and context. All of the research conducted, although attempted to be through extensive research and reflection, is still entangled within my own biases and perceptions. As a Canadian studying American political life, I may gloss over some subjects or ideas which I consider to be natural or obvious. Further, my interest in the subject matter and previous knowledge may influence my understanding of the research subjects, casting the opinions of news, books or podcasts into my research. The intersections of my positionality put me in a specific location, one which influences my perception. For example, I believe that the 2020 election was fair and free and that Donald Trump lost. Further, I felt very happy that Donald Trump lost and angry that there was so much election denial surrounding the 2020 election. It has been challenging to research their Instagram feeds which are full of misinformation surrounding the 2020 election as I have personal beliefs around that. Distancing myself from those feelings was challenging, and I think they should be mentioned as it is not possible for me to fully distance myself. Further, as a woman, it was challenging to watch other women define womanhood in such narrow terms, emphasizing the role as mother and wife. I do not view motherhood as a natural extension of a women's life, and believe these assumptions for women are founded within a very strict gender dichotomy which restricts us all. I should mention my general dislike for social media, as it influences my interpretation of online life. I had to create an Instagram account for this project, and found myself asking friends and family what they liked about having social media, in order to challenge my black and white thinking about social media. Overall, the biases and my personal experiences will be woven throughout this research process, and this reality should be recognized.

5. QAmoms and the Centrality of Motherhood

This chapter will start by briefly introducing each influencer, providing a background so that the reader can understand more the digital presence of each influencer. The connection to QAnon will then be established, defining both core and adjacent QAnon beliefs and identifying the belief systems of each influencer in relation to QAnon. After each Influencer's QAnon beliefs are established, a short explanation will follow, contextualizing their quotes within the QAnon conspiracy theory and the literature.

As there is overlap between what each influencer posts, the short explanations as a whole will cover all content, but individually may only cover specific aspects. For example, two influencers often posted about the Balenciaga advertising scandal, but the explanation and context will only fall under the first and not be repeated for the second. This chapter should be read in its entirety so context can be ascertained from every influencer. Once each influencers connection to QAnon has been established, there content will be divided into themes, as similarities have been identified between each of their accounts. These themes will be dissected and contextualized to fit within the literature.

5.1 Meet the Influencers

For this thesis I analyzed the posts of three different Instagram influencers. The criteria for these influencers was as follows: over 50k followers, notable and consistent mentioning of motherhood and of the QAnon conspiracy theory (or related theories), and engagement with American politics or suggestion that they are American. As mentioned in the ethical considerations section, the names will be anonymized and instead labeled influencer one, influencer two, and influencer three. Below (table 2) summarizes their follower and post count as of 20.02.23. It is important to time stamp these numbers as they are consistently changing, although not by much.

Influencer	Total Followers	Total Posts (not including highlights)[5]
1	55.9k	85
2	76.4k	902
3	134k	658

Table 2: *Meet the Influencers*

Each influencers profile was researched in totality, with daily checkups becoming a part of my daily routine. This daily checkup was important, as each influencer often posted stories and they would only be available for 24 hours. This is one of the many challenges of netnographic research, as daily and sustained interaction is necessary to ensure that nothing is missed. The disparity between total posts is not fully reflective of the profile's content. For example, Influencer 1 only has 85 posts, but often posted in her highlights or daily in her stories.

Influencer one has 55 900 followers and 85 posts on Instagram as of 20.02.23. She also has a Telegram channel and a Parler account which she promotes on her Instagram. All of these accounts were researched. She has two children and is married and often posts content with them. She also often posts scripture and identifies herself as a Christian woman. She utilizes a similar 'pastel QAnon' aesthetic discussed by Marc-Andre Argentino (2021), using soft colours and feminine aesthetics when posting conspiracy theories. Most of her content can be found in her story highlights where she focuses on cooking, alternative and natural medicine and many conspiracy theories. She promotes a variety of different conspiracy theories: the earth is flat, 9/11 was an inside job, the titanic was sunk intentionally to kill the rich, chem trails are left by airplanes putting diseases, poisons and vaccinations into the atmosphere, the moon landing was not real, most famous women in Hollywood are men dressed up as women, dinosaurs were not real, Antarctica is not a real place, the stories of Helen Keller are fake, and Donald Trump won the 2020 election. She also promotes anti-vaccine myths that the COVID-19 vaccine causes cancer while promoting an alternative medicine to combat the virus, including vitamins and supplements. She has a shop which sells TRS, a heavy metal detox spray which she suggests cures children of autism. These

---

[5] Highlights are posts situated at the top of the influencers profile usually situated within different themes.

claims have been disputed by the FDA, which warns of these "potentially dangerous products and therapies that claim to treat autism" (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2019).

Influencer two has 76 400 followers and 902 posts on Instagram as of 20.02.2023. She also has a Telegram chat, TikTok and a Truth Social account which she advertises on her Instagram page. All of these accounts were researched. Her TikTok has 143 000 followers and 2.2 million likes. There is overlap between her TikTok content and Instagram content as she often posts videos from TikTok on her Instagram. She has two children, but does not often post content with them. She does not use the same aesthetic as influencer one, instead opting for video content. Her tagline is "Make common sense great again" and "relatable red pill content." She is the founder of the "Power to the Parents California", a parental advocacy group against mandatory masking and vaccination of children. Her Instagram highlights promote anti-abortion, anti-globalist, 9/11 trutherism and anti-vaccine information. She identifies herself as a Christian, often posting scripture or positioning her arguments within her faith. Like influencer one, she promotes a TRS detox spray, along with other alternative medicines.

Influencer three has 136 000 followers and 658 posts on Instagram as of 20.02.2023. She refers to herself as the conspiracy queen. Her tagline in Instagram says she is "your guide through psyops & false flags," "trying to save humanity through truth bombs," and "helping others live life on their own terms." She also describes herself as "a mom with a defiant attitude." She has four children and often posts content with them or in reference to them. She actively engages with her followers, responding to or liking comments. She also actively posted on her stories every day. Like influencer one and two she identifies herself as a Christian, often posting scripture and positioning her arguments within her faith. Her content mostly focuses on the sinister elite, ranging from concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine, the presence of Satan in Hollywood, the fall of the nuclear family and attacks on traditional masculinity. Although her old content was mostly pictures, her recent content is usually video reels which have been transcribed.

5.2 Connection to QAnon?

As this research project is a focus on the QAnon conspiracy theory, a connection to QAnon must be established for each individual. This connection exists on a spectrum, as the explicitness of their connection, for example outright posting QAnon content, and the amount of QAnon or QAnon-adjacent content varies between each influencer. Their connection to QAnon was founded on both an implicit and explicit relationship with the conspiracy theory. This challenge mirrors the challenge in quantitatively defining who believes in conspiracy theories, as the threshold for conspiracy belief can be contingent on a variety of factors, including number of beliefs or how extreme the nature of the belief is (Smallpage et al., 2020). There is also the challenge of establishing *what* QAnon is, as the ever-changing nature of the QAnon belief system, which evolves constantly, enveloping new conspiracy theories or anxieties underneath its umbrella (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2021).

Further, QAnon is a participatory conspiracy theory, with members being encouraged to 'research' Qdrops and 'think for themselves,' causing branches of QAnon to form and the moulding of QAnon for specific belief systems (Zuckerman, 2019). For example, QAnon belief surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic morphed between months, following the lead of then-president Trump by downplaying the virus, framing it as a hoax which is intended to damage Trump's re-election. The virus was later celebrated as borders closed, which were understood to be the beginning of Trump's arrest of elites attempting to flee the country. It was then promoted as a Chinese bioweapon released by the democrats and the Chinese to destroy the economy in an attempt to challenge Trump's re-election (Argentino, 2020). The ephemerality of QAnon beliefs create a challenge in defining, what is QAnon? However, there are some beliefs that are specifically related to QAnon. These beliefs are labelled 'core beliefs' and the QAnon adjacent beliefs can be labeled 'adjacent beliefs.' Both QAnon core and QAnon adjacent beliefs are utilized in data collection and analysis process, but some, if not all core beliefs have to be present in the influencer's profiles. How they engage with core or adjacent beliefs is also essential to establish. For example, simply following a QAnon account is not sufficient enough connection as they could simply be curious about QAnon. However, posting or sharing content from QAnon accounts is sufficient as it shows

an active engagement with the conspiracy theory. Further, sharing links to or recommendations for known QAnon documentaries like the 'fall of the cabal' is a sufficient connection.

Core QAnon Beliefs	QAnon-Adjacent Beliefs
An evil cabal of pedophilic elites (including but not limited to the Hollywood elite, democrats, George Soros and the Rothschild family) want to destroy freedom and control everything and everyone.	COVID-19 was not real and was a lie manufactured by the deep state. It was also manufactured by the elite so that they could become richer.
These pedophilic elites harvest blood from children, also known as adrenochrome, for its supposed health benefits or hallucinogenic effect.	Anti-COVID-19 Vaccine usually involving Bill Gates as the manufacturer of a vaccine which has microchips to track people and causes autism and suffering in children.
A "great awakening" is coming, where the truth of the evils committed by the elite will be revealed. There are many iterations of the Great Awakening. For example, the great awakening or the storm was thought to occur on January 20th, 2021 wherein Donald trump would impose martial law, declare himself president and publicly hang his enemies.	
Donald Trump is the only saviour who can combat the deep state.	

Table 3: *Core and Adjacent QAnon Beliefs. Influenced by Zuckerman, 2019; Rothschild, 2022; Kuzelewska, E & Tomaszuk, M, 2022; Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021.*

Table 3 visually distinguishes QAnon core beliefs from QAnon adjacent beliefs. Core beliefs are beliefs which can be specifically attributed to QAnon. QAnon-Adjacent beliefs are conspiracy theories which have come to be associated with QAnon, but exist also on their own. For example, not all anti-vaxxers connect their concerns around vaccines with QAnon. However, some have combined anti-vaccine concerns with QAnon, illustrating the flexibility of the QAnon conspiracy theory. These beliefs were collected across a variety of articles and books, and identified as the

central beliefs underpinning the QAnon super conspiracy theory. The following sections analyse the three profiles from the perspective of QAnon core beliefs.

5.2.1 Influencer One as a QAmom

Influencer one had a variety of different of different QAnon theories in her posts, mostly relating to the evil cabal and child exploitation. She promotes both core and adjacent QAnon beliefs. Her core beliefs are that there is a satanic cabal of elites who abuse and traffic children. She had specific highlights on her profile dedicated to "Balenciaga", "John Podesta", and "Trafficking". Table 4 is a collection of quotes connecting Influencer one to QAnon. It also includes some keywords specifically related to QAnon. An explanation of the connection can be found below the table.

Quotes	Key Words/Concepts	Context
"if you haven't looked into p!zz@g@te.. Now would be the time to do so. The elite's obsession with child exploitation goes way beyond Balenciaga"	Pizzagate, Balenciaga, Elite, Child Exploitation	This is referring to pizzagate, the precursor to QAnon and the Balenciaga Advertisement scandal.

"Q@non talking points such as: "the elite worship Satan & run a child sex ring" are staying in the headlines as a wild conspiracy theory.. yet.. here's a huge, high-end fashion brand that has been caught publicly showcasing child sexual exploitation. A brand that has endless ties to the elite & celebrities. It's not just Balenciaga. It's not just Kim K. it goes way deeper. Evil has been after the children of the world since the beginning of time. If you're just now waking up-keep digging. The truth is out there."	QAnon, Elite, Worship Satan, Child Sex Ring, Child Sexual Exploitation, Balenciaga	This is referring to the Balenciaga Advertisement scandal.
"a group of Satan-worshiping elites who run a child sex ring are trying to control our politics and media"	Satan-Worshiping Elites, Child Sex Ring	This is referring to the evil cabal.

"we all need to use this situation to wake others up to the rest of the iceberg. This is wayfair 2.0. People who didn't wake up when wayfair happened, are waking up now. So nows the time to wake them up to the rest of the agenda in Hollywood & our world."	Wake Up, Wayfair, Hollywood	This is referring to the Balenciaga Advertisement scandal and the wayfair conspiracy theory connected to QAnon.
"there are people who are calling it out & how Satan is worshipped in Hollywood (which is all true)"	Satan Worship, Hollywood	This is referring to a performance by Sam Smith during the 2023 Grammys. He sang the song 'unholy' while dressed up like the devil and surrounded by flames.
"Y'all know the world is run by elites who are satanic and mock God. Y'all know & see the truth"	Elites, Satanic.	This is referring to a performance by Sam Smith during the 2023 Grammys. He sang the song 'unholy' while dressed up like the devil and surrounded by flames.

Table 4 : Influencer 1

"Pizzagate" was the precursor to QAnon, a conspiracy theory which implicated a secret cabal of democrats, namely Hilary Clinton and John Podesta, in the operation of a child sex abuse ring using the basement of the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria in Washington DC (Bleakley, 2021). This occurred after Wikileaks email release, citing the leaked emails in which Podesta asks to get "cheese pizza" which was suggested to be code for "child pornography" (Miller, 2021). Edgar Maddison Welch entered Comet Ping Pong Pizzeria on December 4th 2016 with an assault rifle,

searching for the basement (Miller, 2021). No one was injured, and Welch was arrested and sentenced to four years in prison, later admitting he was wrong and there was irrefutable proof the Comet pizza not only was not the center of child trafficking, but there was no basement (Bloom and Moskalenko, 2021). However, conspiracy theories surrounding Pizzagate are still flourishing, and the pizza joint was set afire in April 2020 by QAnon follower Ryan Jaselskis (Bloom and Moskalenko, 2021) . Despite irrefutable proof that there is no basement at the Pizzeria, Pizzagate still maintains a popular online conspiracy theory (Bleakley, 2021).

The Balenciaga scandal happened in November 2022 when they released two ad campaigns which "shows children holding teddy bears in bondage gear and others featuring documents about child sexual abuse as a prop" (Cartner-Moreley, 2022). The brand is well known for intentionally stocking controversy as a part of their advertising strategy (Paton et al., 2022). However, the brand received widespread backlash and withdrew their ad campaigns. The brand has connections to Hollywood actors and actresses, Nicole Kidman, Kim Kardashian and Kanye West (Carner-Moreley, 2022). Balenciaga filed a lawsuit against the production company, stating the advertisement campaigns have now "led to false associations between Balenciaga and child pornography" (Paton et al., 2022). The inappropriate use of children in the advertisements and Balenciaga's connection to celebrities is used as a clear proof that a pedophilic cabal exists within Hollywood.

The Wayfair conspiracy theory erupted in June 2020 and is one of the "fastest spreading disinformation campaigns on the internet, ensnaring worried mothers, TikToking teenagers, racial justice advocates and people all along the political spectrum" (Contrera, 2021, para.17). Its popularity grew so quickly, that the human trafficking investigation unit at the department of homeland security launched an investigation into Wayfair, finding no evidence that Wayfair was trafficking children through their online retail site (Contera, 2021). The accusation against Wayfair was that they were selling furniture for exorbitant prices, all of which had children's names (Spring, 2020). The outrage began after the report a missing child, Samara Duplessis, surfaced on the internet around the same time a pillow was being sold named "Duplessis" for $9,999 (Contera, 2021). Although Duplessis had run away from home, she returned home months before the controversy (Contera, 2021). Another child, Samiuah Mumin, who had gone missing in 2019, went

on Facebook live to confirm that she was no longer missing, in an attempt to quell the circulation of conspiracy theories surrounding her case (Bloom and Moskalenko, 2021). The Wayfair conspiracy theory became an essential part of QAnon and prompted the use of the #savethechildren hashtag, hijacking the name of a credible charity (Bloom and Moskalenko, 2021).

Influencer two also promotes the Fall of the Cabal documentary which is described in the glossary of extremism by the Anti-Defamation League as "an antisemitic documentary created by Dutch conspiracy theorist Janet Ossebaard about the downfall of the cabal, a global elite who control the world". (Anti-Defamation League, n.d., Glossary) It is also used as a successful recruitment tool for QAnon.

5.2.2 Influence Two as a QAmom

Influencer two explicitly stated that she does not believe in QAnon conspiracy theories, although the ideas and conspiracy theories she posts and promotes are QAnon talking points. She promotes some core QAnon beliefs surrounding saving the children, positioning Donald trump as the saviour and references the great awakening. A lot of her content focuses on vaccine misinformation, and positioning the vaccine as a tool of the elite, specifically Bill Gates, for more sinister purposes such as population control, tracking with microchips, and causing suffering to children. Table 5 is a collection of quotes connecting Influencer two to QAnon. It also includes some keywords specifically related to QAnon. An explanation of the connection can be found below the table.

Quote	Key words	Context
"I am not on the 17 train one way or another. Hoping for the best. Preparing for the worst. However, this post did pop into my head today and I find it interesting" (referring to a post from Qboards which says that the apparent voter fraud in California was deliberate and will be brought to light).	17 Train	The 17 train refers to the QAnon movement as Q is the seventeenth letter of the

		alphabet. Interestingly, she forwards a lot of content from the account "QTah in her telegram chats."
"Before you mourn ... think critically. Do you get to be worshipped by all the usual suspects in Hollyweird if you're not in the club? Highly doubtful. And before you dismiss this as a "comedy sketch" 1. It's not funny. Like at all. 2. They must tell you what they are doing. They believe it releases them from their Karmic debt because it's in your face and you don't do anything to stop it. Regardless of your personal beliefs. This is what THEY believe."	Adrenochrome, Hollywood Elite	She posted this in reference to a video of Betty White, following her death at the end of 2021. In the video, Betty white is asked how she stays young to which she replied that she stays young by drinking the blood of a virgin every other Sunday.

"When they still don't realize that the elite are getting them to decimate their own populations and bloodlines"	COVID-19, Anti-Vaccine	A reference to the COVID-19 and more sinister plots by the Elite.
"he is dropping redpills about adrenochrome and getting crucified by the MSM for it"	Adrenochrome, Redpilling	From a post of a women at a Save the Children Rally holding up a sign that says "our children are not for sale"
"It's about saving innocent children around the world who are living through literal hell on Earth. #humantraffickingisreal"	#Savethechildren	From a post of a women at a Save the Children Rally holding

		up a sign that says "our children are not for sale"
"how it feels living through the great awakening," "It's an emotional roller coaster □□ Who can relate??"	The Great Awakening	A video on her Instagram referring to the great awakening.
"Is that supposed to be a bad thing?" -DJT You mean Project Lincoln is full of ped0s?? Ya DON'T say. #wakeup	Donald Trump, Evil Cabal, Pedophile.	Here she posted a video of Trump being asked if he is "secretly saving the world from a satanic cult of pedophiles and cannibals does that sound like something" in which he responded "is that supposed to be a bad thing?"

Table 4: Influencer Two

58

This final quote refers to the Lincoln Project, an anti-Trump Super-Pac shrouded in controversy after its co-founder, John Weaver, was accused by many young men of sending sexually explicit messages (Isenstadt, 2021). This has been used as evidence that Donald Trump is at war with pedophiles, and that those at war with Donald Trump are pedophiles. Positioning Trump as the bulwark against sexual predators is fascinating, considering the multiple accusations of sexual assault and harassment levied against the former president (Jeppesen et al., 2022). These accusations are never mentioned by any of the influencers.

The connection between anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and QAnon is essential to establish as anti-vaccine content acted as an essential entry point and pipeline to the QAnon conspiracy theory. Wellness, yoga and natural health communities were particularly vulnerable to QAnon conspiracy theories, as they circulated more anti-vaccine content, especially with the role out of the COVID-19 vaccine (Dickinson, 2020). The growth of QAnon is linked with both the pandemic and the anti-vaccine movement, with QAnon accounts and supporters widely using hashtags such as "#pandemic" and "#stopvaccination" (Kuzelewska, E & Tomaszuk, M, 2022, p. 2377). Although the anti-vax movement is its own movement, and those that promote or believe anti-vaccine conspiracy theories do not necessarily believe QAnon conspiracy theories (and vice versa), there is overlap between the two (Kuzelewska, E & Tomaszuk, M, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic saw the quick integration of anti-vaccination conspiracy theories under the umbrella of QAnon (Himelboim et al., 2023). Concerns surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine often involve Bill Gates, positioning him as creating the virus in order to profit from developing the vaccine (Himelboim et al., 2023). Further, it is suggested that Bill Gates put microchips in the vaccine in order to monitor and kill people for the purpose of population control (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). Influencer 2 promotes content which suggests that Bill Gates wants to use vaccines as a mean of population control, suggesting that the COVID-19 vaccine will kill off the population to maintain it under 500,000,000. This number is taken from the Georgian Guidestones, a granite monument in Georgia at the center of many far-right conspiracy theories as it has inscribed "Maintain humanity under 500,000,000 in perpetual balance with nature" (Arkin, 2022, para.1). She suggests that the vaccine is a tool of population control. The QAnon conspiracy theory has brought underneath its umbrella the anti-vaccine, specifically anti-COVID-19 conspiracy theories, making them an essential part of QAnon research.

Interestingly, Influencer two explicitly distances herself from QAnon, stating she "is not on the 17 train."[6] However, she still posts content from Qboards from QAnon accounts (for example QTah) on her Telegram group. She also posts QAnon content on her Instagram, mentioning adrenochrome, Donald Trump as the saviour, and the great awakening. QAnon content exists all over the web with QDrops, messages directly from Q themselves, posted on 8kun (formerly 8chan), QAnon aggregation sites, which aggregate the QDrops and are debated between Q supporters, and finally QAnon on social media (Papasavva et al., 2022). QAnon on more popular social media platforms is limited, with certain hashtags being banned (for example #savethechildren populates no results on Instagram), and accounts run the risk of being banned. All of the influencers studied have been banned from Instagram at least one, creating multiple backups, Telegram groups or alternative social medias on Truth Social or Parler. It is interesting that Influencer 2 distances herself from QAnon while still posting Q content. The reasons for this cannot be deciphered, but the conditions of Instagram, restricting Q content, and the presence of Qboards, and Q content on her Telegram suggests that the absence of Q content on her Instagram could be partly a result of compliance with Instagram rules. Further, although Qboards are interesting spaces for analysis, they are dedicated Q spaces. Exploring how individuals weave Q content into their daily profiles and into their Instagram aesthetic is more relevant for understanding how Q can be present in daily life, not relegated to the extreme, dark corners of the internet. As Q found itself into the mainstream, and specifically was brought to the mainstream by women, it is extremely important to understand how Q exists within mainstream platforms, explicitly or implicitly. This is a reflection of the daily life of Q content.

The #savethechildren hashtag erupted on social media in summer of 2020, co-opted by the QAnon movement from an already existing charity, Save the Children. The hijacking of this conspiracy theory has had real life implications for this charity and anti-trafficking organizations, with false reporting or tips overwhelming law enforcement, efforts to raise money for legitimate charities being overshadowed by illegitimate charities, and challenges to escape the stain now associated the save the children hashtag (Buntain et al., 2022). The save the children campaign has been the

---

[6] The 17 train is another terminology within QAnon, with Q being the 17th letter of the alphabet. Therefore, being on the 17 train means following QAnon.

most successful recruitment tool for QAnon, especially for recruiting women (Buntain et al., 2022). It ensnared white, upper class and middle-class women who saw photos of battered and abused children, unaware of the connections of QAnon (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). Further, it was seen as credible due to the association with an already credible charity and the real issue of trafficking which exists (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). Interestingly, the portrayal of abused and battered children did not reflect the lived reality of trafficked children, with a massive over representation of white children as victims of child trafficking (Buntain et al., 2022). During the summer of 2020 there were massive #savethechildren protests, with many women taking to the streets, promoting QAnon hashtags, symbolism and waving Q flags without realizing the movement they were promoting (Rothschild, 2022). This is why Influencer two's denial of being a party of Q is actually an interesting point of analysis, as it fits within the research. It is also important to examine both what is said and unsaid, the forwarding of Qdrops, the promotion of Q beliefs without the explicit membership.

Like Influencer one, Influencer two promotes a variety of different conspiracy theories: the big lie, that the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump, 9/11 was an inside job, and chem trails are left by airplanes putting diseases, poisons and vaccinations into the atmosphere. She also promoted the Fall of the Cabal documentary, but the link can no longer be found on her Instagram linktree.

5.2.3 Influencer Three as a QAmom

Influencer three does not name QAnon, but posts content relating to the pedophilic elite, satanic elite, the great awakening and the Balenciaga scandal mentioned above. Table 6 is a collection of quotes connecting Influencer three to QAnon. It also includes some keywords specifically related to QAnon. An explanation of the connection can be found below the table.

Quote	Key Words	Context
"The elite control events and we are the pawns. We don't have to be if we DO NOT COMPLY"	The elite, the Rothschilds	This post was a video of Jakob Rothschild, which says "we own your news, the media,

		your oil and your government. You have probably never heard of me".
"All I want for Christmas is the great awakening"	Great Awakening	Reference to the Great Awakening, the time where the sins of the pedophilic elite will be brough to light and they will be held accountable.
"Today's the day guys…many will fall. It's about time"! #theelite #sinwillfindyouout #liesexposed #liarliar	Pedophilic Elite	This video says "watching the downfall of the pedophilic elite"
It's just so frustrating. #savehumanity #conspiracytheories #freedomofchoice	COVID-19, sex trafficking	She posted a photo of an elephant being pushed into a corner labelled " sex trafficking" while everyone looks to a wall which says COVID cases. She suggests that the pandemic is an intentional distraction by the elite to cover up rampant pedophilia.
"The real pandemic in this country is pedophilia"	COVID-19, Pedophilia	She suggests that the pandemic is an intentional distraction

		by the elite to cover up rampant pedophilia.
"Balenciaga is the tip of the iceberg, my friends. We have been trying to tell so many of you for years about this kind of stuff."	Balenciaga	This is referring to the Balenciaga Advertisement scandal
"Satan has literally taken over the earth and is showing his face. It's almost as if evil is the norm and it's under the guise of love and tolerance and inclusivity"	Satan, Hollywood	Referring to Sam Smith Grammy Performance.

Table 5: Influencer Three

Although this thesis will not focus specifically on Anti-Semitic rhetoric, it is important to identify the Anti-Semitism embedded within the QAnon conspiracy theory. Many of the QAnon beliefs are inherently Anti-Semitic, drawing upon historical tropes seen in Anti-Semitic writings such as *The Elders of Zion* and *The International Jew,* which suggest that the world is controlled by Jews (Garry et al., 2021, p. 157). QAnon posits that George Soros and the Rothschild Family, both wealthy Jewish families are the sinister elite controlling the world behind the scenes (Rothschild, 2022). Additionally, QAnon theories suggest that these sinister forces who feed on the blood of traumatized and tortured children, utilize adrenochrome for improved health or hallucinogenic effects (Bloom and Moskalenko, 2021). This concern, also known as 'blood libel' is an anti-Semitic trope against Jews, specifically the belief that Jews utilize blood, more specifically the blood of Christian children, to gain super powers (Rothschild, 2022). Mia Bloom and Sofia Moskalenko (2021) argue that adrenochrome conspiracy theories are "the modern manifestation of blood libel" (p.32). The inherent anti-Semitism of the QAnon conspiracy theory warrants further investigation. Anti-Semitism within conspiracy theories is a specific and historically continuous type of hate, warranting full attention and critical analysis, not to be viewed as an additional factor or feature of research. Although it would certainly be possible to discuss white motherhood, QAnon and anti-Semitism, the scope of this thesis is limited, and trying to address anti-Semitism within the discussion risks the dilution of an important and salient feature of conspiracy theories.

The Great Awakening is a core QAnon belief. The Great Awakening refers to the moment where the truth about QAnon is revealed, a day of reckoning also referred to as "the storm" where Trump

will arrest the enemy (the liberal elite) and they would be exposed for their crimes (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021; Buntain et al., 2022). The Great Awakening was supposed to materialize on inauguration day January 20, 2021, with QAnon adherents suggesting that Trump would declare martial law, and send all of the enemies to Guantanamo bay to be hung (Wong, 2021). After this did not materialize, many Q followers felt betrayed by the movement, leaving Qboards and Q groups (Wong, 2021). However, the influencers still reference the Great Awakening, usually referring to the truth surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine, which they suggest is a tool of the elite, namely Bill Gates, to control the population. This demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of conspiracy theories. The Great Awakening is not limited to the one prediction, and can always be explained and renegotiated. Conspiracy theories are conclusions in themselves, and proponents utilize facts to reach the already drawn conclusions.

5.3 The Story of QAmoms

This research focuses on what these women say about their role as mothers, and the rhetorical tools they utilize in their posts. It seeks to destabilize assumptions surrounding women as mothers, as natural, apolitical and non-violent and instead position them as deliberate, intentional and active creators and disseminators of conspiracy theories. Often understood in relation to men, this thesis hopes to add to a growing literature which identifies that although women may not be in the same position as men, they can still benefit from their position as mothers, and should be understood on their own terms. By placing a rhetorical emphasis on motherhood, parenthood or family life, these women can successfully spread their ideology.

The successful entry of QAnon into the mainstream reflects how the framing of issues as those of women and mothers can soften extreme rhetoric (Crawford and Argentino, 2021; Matfess & Margolin, 2022). As social media has increased the visibility of mothers online, the prevalence of communities and influencers dedicated to issues concerning motherhood has grown (Bamberger, 2011). Cultural constructions of womanhood and motherhood inform how these spaces are viewed (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Positioning them as apolitical or non-violent undermines the agency of mothers and also the scope of their influence. Further, concerns surrounding the spread of conspiracy theories and misinformation and their potential to increase polarization in American

society warrant investigations into these online spaces rife with misinformation (Global Risks Report, 2017). If women can successfully recruit others into more extremist ideologies by framing issues as those of mothers and families, then it is important to investigate the rhetorical tools they use (Nigro, 2022). It is important to note that although this thesis positions these women and mothers as agentic, and capable of a deliberate and calculated use of motherhood, it does not try to prove that these women believe what they post. Further, it does not try to prove that they intentionally calculate their use as a mother in their rhetoric as these would be impossible to ascertain. Motherhood within QAnon is contextualized within the massive growth of QAnon, especially by women and the use of white motherhood within the United States as a 'softening' of more extremist rhetoric. Locating this research at the nexus of QAnons popularity and assumptions surrounding motherhood hopes to illuminate the popularity of QAnon and the rapid spread of QAnon online. It seeks to understand how the use of motherhood could potentially mask or soften more extreme rhetoric, and therefore facilitate the rapid dissemination of the conspiracy theory.

The rest of the section is divided into five themes. Theme 1, As a Mother…, establishes the centrality of motherhood to each QAmom account. Theme 2, Mothers as the Protectors of Future Generations, expands upon Theme 1, highlighting an important facet of motherhood; the protection of children and potential grandchildren. Theme 3, Mothers and the Centrality of the Nuclear Family, locates gender complementarity as a central feature within QAmom accounts. Theme 4, Mothers Co-Parenting with the Government, identifies the government and educational institutions as spaces of tension for QAmoms who fear the indoctrination of their children and the remedies they provide to challenge this purported indoctrination. The final theme, Mothers versus Satan, briefly discusses the centrality of Christianity, specifically a battle between good and evil, within the QAmom accounts.

5.3.1 As a Mother…

Notably, each influencer consistently referred to themselves as mothers, either in the posts or in their username, utilizing their positionality as mothers as their primary motif for entering politics. Influencer one tells the story of "waking up" after having children, that her entrance into

conspiracy theories and challenging mainstream narratives resulted from her passage into motherhood.

> Question everything. because the world is full of deception & our kids rely on us! having a child during these times has been a blessing. they're why i looked into shots. they're why i woke up! they're why i question everything going on. & they're why i grow closer & closer to God everyday.

She emphasises her role as a mother, thanking her children for motivating her to 'wake up' and become politically active. The role of her children in her politics is paramount, they woke her up, they are why she questions everything. If it was not for them, she never would have woken up. Further, as a mother it is her duty to question everything because her children rely on her. Her position as a mother is framed as both the entry point and main motivator of her politics.
Like influencer one, influencer two credits children, though not specifically her own children, for her entrance into conspiracy theories.

> It's about the children. It always has been. Why I take so much hate gladly... every single damn day. It's about protecting humanity for generations to come. By saving and teaching our children. It's about saving innocent children around the world who are living through literal hell on Earth. #humantraffickingisreal"

Here influencer two emphasizes the protection of children as her paramount concern, her motivation for continuing her work, even when faced with hate from others. She presents herself as a protector, a saviour and a teacher. Influencer three conflates her commitment to her work as a commitment to her children, stating "I will never stop because our children need us to fight for them." Like Influencer one and two, influencer three suggests that her children, or children in general, are the primary motivator for her entrance into politics. All of these women position themselves as protectors of children, as mothers, and suggest that this is what motivates them. The centrality of children to their rhetoric neutralizes their messaging making it apolitical, inherently good. When the rhetoric expresses a desire for happy, healthy and safe children and family life, it cannot be seen as bad, even if there are more sinister undertones (Darby, 2020). This protection

extends to the protection from Satan (and the evil cabal), the liberal education machine (and communism), the vaccine, and transgendered people and drag queens. Influencer two invokes the #savethechildren element of QAnon by using the #humantraffickingisreal hashtag. Importantly, the #savethechildren hashtag was removed from Instagram. She states the saving of children as the primary motivation for her work. At face value, saving children from child trafficking is a noble and important effort. However, as mentioned previously, the #savethechildren campaign has harmed actual efforts to stop child trafficking (Buntain et al., 2022). Knowingly or not, these influencers are promoting an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, all in the name of protecting their children, even when the promotion of this conspiracy theory harms legitimate efforts to prevent child trafficking. Positioning their concerns as primarily for their children creates a broad appeal which can be dangerous as it masks a more sinister conspiracy theory.

5.3.2 Mothers as Protectors of Future Generations

Another important element when establishing their purpose as mothers was accountability to their children, specifically future children such as their grandchildren. Influencer one invokes this concern by asking her followers whether they will be able to tell their children they stood up and used their voices.

> everything we are fighting for NOW.. is for their FUTURE. will you be able to say you stood up & used your voice? that you didn't bow down to the tyrannical leaders? i know i'll be able to say i did.

Influencer two also touched upon this accountability, imagining a scenario in which she would have to explain to her grandchildren what she did "during the most insane time in history"

> Are you willing to tell your grandkids one day that you stood silently on sidelines & let humanity fall deeper and deeper into the abyss? What will you tell your grandkids you did during the most insane time in history? Will you say you just rolled over? Or will you say you stood up for humanity...

Similarly, Influencer three suggested the historical significance of their actions stating

I will not go down in history as the one who stayed silent and let things happen to me and my family. I made the decision to become a warrior.

The invocation of children's future is a powerful tool for mothers. As mentioned above, Sarah Palin utilized this in her political campaign to become the governor of Alaska, positioning taxation and big government as the risks for children's future (Mezey & Pillard, 2012). She called upon mothers to become 'Mama Grizzlies,' to become politically active in the name of securing a safe future for their children (Deckman, 2016). Katrina Pierson of the Dallas Tea Party framed her concern over taxation of big government as primarily about her children and her grandchildren (Deckman, 2016). These influencers position themselves as mothers of all children, both present and future. Importantly, their posts are geared towards other women, asking "what will you tell your grandkids?" or "will you be able to say you stood up?" This invocation of motherly duty has been utilized as a powerful rhetorical tool by women in politics (Deckman, 2016). This essentializes political activism as an inherent and natural extension of motherhood, especially when it concerns the future of children (Brennan, 2008). Throughout their posts they refer to themselves as grizzlies, lionesses and warriors, carefully locating themselves as both masculine and feminine. Influencer two refers to herself as a lioness and her community as the lioness den, telling of a dream she had 11 years past where realized her power as a lioness. She suggests that women as lionesses "have started to side up and adapt to leadership roles during this pivotal time in history" that "their intuition told them something was not right and their maternal instincts made them move into action." These references to animals, be it grizzlies or lionesses invoke a kind of primal instinct. Deckman (2016) suggests that the rhetorical use of mama grizzlies legitimizes female anger and aggression, allowing that anger and aggression to be located within the confines of motherhood, specifically the protection of children. Further, women invoke their role as protectors of children as proof of their morality and goodness (Darby, 2020). Rhetorically situating politics under the guise of motherhood serves the purpose of casting a moral light on the content, while also providing women with a legitimate space for anger and aggression.

5.3.3 Mothers and the Centrality of the Nuclear Family

Although positioning themselves as warriors, fighters, grizzlies and lionesses, these women emphasize the importance of traditional masculinity with Influencer two posting "I love toxic masculinity." Influencer three suggests that "our society doesn't value strong men" and "Men are ashamed of being men. We are glorifying men who want to be women." All three influencers suggest that the societal 'attack' on men is a deliberate act by the government, as the weakening of men will allow the government to exert more control over their citizens. They suggest this intentional weakening of men also includes the acceptance of transgendered people within society, and the 'glorification' of transgendered women. They express concerns over the decreasing relevance and centrality of the nuclear family, with Influencer two stating that "almost every issue in our country can be boiled down to one single issue: The destruction of the nuclear family and the weakening of males." This positions the nuclear family (read: white, married and heterosexual) as foundational to a stable and thriving society.

Figure 3: Influencer Two Nuclear Family Post

This reverence for the past, of the 1950's white nuclear family with a picket fence is often found within Trad wives, or traditional wife communities found online (Darby, 2020). These communities emphasize gender complementarity, situating a women's power within her ability to bear children, positioning men as the protectors and head of the family (Darby, 2020). This "nostalgic femininity" provides a coded language for promoting a "white ethnostate," conjuring

images of a past in which the white, nuclear family was central (Jeppesen et al., 2022, p.172). Notions of gender complementarity are found within alt-right and white supremacist communities, although it is important to note that Trad Wife communities, although expressing a reverence for a 1950's past (notably pre-civil rights era), are not necessarily white supremacist. However, Zahay (2022) found that there is "considerable overlap" between the content found in Trad wife or mommy blogs and far-right women's blogs (p. 173). Trad Wife spaces illustrate how alt-right discourses can be woven into seemingly harmless online spaces. This illustrates how feminine aesthetics of ideal motherhood; the white picket fence and the nuclear family can mask more sinister anti-feminist or racist ideas and idealize or white wash history.

5.3.4 Mothers Co-Parenting with the Government

Interestingly, the role of government within the lives of these mothers was of primary concern. The relationship between them and government was often framed as an abusive one, with the government being manipulative, emotionally abusive and controlling. Only once they "woke up" were they able to escape the abusive relationship. The often position themselves as the primary caregivers, with the government trying to usurp that role. They suggest that schools are the primary spaces where government seeks to "brainwash" their children, with Influencer two and three deciding to pull their children from public schools and homeschool. Influencer one does not discuss public schools or homeschooling, but this could be explained by the fact that she does not have school age children. Influencer two views the system as "grossly failing our kids, indoctrinating them at every turn" and suggests its best to "pull our kids from school and let the system just implode on itself," and "take back control over our kids, completely." This notion of control is also expressed by Influencer three, stating "You are the only thing standing in the way between total control of your children." Their suspicion of public school resides in their assumption that the government wants to indoctrinate all children into a 'woke, liberal' ideology. Influencer two suggests more sinister goals, a long-term government plan to brain wash children. She states: "The government would love nothing more than having more time with your children and their mind than you do. Because they plot and plan long term." Influencer three also echoes these fears

You could be the president of the PTA and know every teacher in that school…they are still sneaking stuff in that they want to hide from you. Also, public schools think they own your kid and have to the right to intervene in your parenting when they see fit. #publicschools #indoctrination #hiddenagenda

These women not only suggest that the government is trying to brainwash their children, but that the government is attempting to usurp the role of mothers, whose primary role is to teach their children. Influencer two suggests that her duty is divinely ordained, that "god entrusted me to care for not only what goes into their bodies, but what goes into their minds." The tensions between public education and mothers can be diluted to one specific feature, what constitutes the domestic versus the public. During the civil rights movement, white women invoked their positionality as mothers to extend the domestic sphere into the public, stating that what is taught at school should not usurp what is taught in the home (Gillespie McRae, 2018). They feared that desegregated public schools would encourage inter racial relationships, undermining the teaching of whiteness which took place in the home (Gillespie McRae, 2018). During the Red Scare, women expanded their domestic responsibility to include the schools, to protect children against any communist teaching (Brennan, 2008). A central are of concern for women in the Tea Party is the size of government, which they suggest is to large and as a result likely to usurp the natural role of mothers as caretakers and protectors (Deckman, 2016). These influencers frame the control of information as a primary duty of mothers, specifically of information from the government to their children. One way that they control information is through books. The control or censorship of textbooks by white mothers has historical roots in the United States. For example, during the civil rights movement, women organized communities and committees to censor textbooks (Gillespie McRae, 2018). Additionally, The United Daughters of the Confederacy edited textbooks to deny the relationship between slavery and the civil war (Darby, 2020). These women suggest another avenue for subverting the "liberal education machine," homeschooling, and conservative or libertarian books. Influencer three posted about her concerns for her children, that when she walks into books stores and libraries that all of the books are about gender identity or queer history, specifically the stonewall riots. She stated that she cannot trust libraries or bookstores anymore as the books there will confuse her children. She recommends Brave Books, published by Brave Publishing co. which promote conservative, Christian values. She promoted three titles, one of which will be shown below (Figure 4).
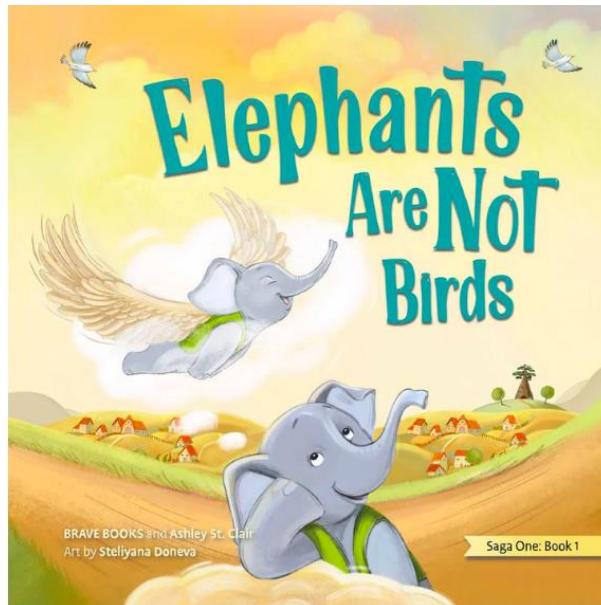
Figure 4: Elephants are not Birds

The first title, *Elephants are not Birds*, deals with gender identity, teaching children that "boys are not girls and elephants are not birds" (St. Clair, 2021). Influencer three expresses a lot of anxieties surrounding the "acceptance of transgendered people" as she conflates the acceptance of non-traditional gender identity as an acceptance of pedophilia. Those existing outside of the gender or heteronormative binary have often faced accusations of pedophilia. For example, positioning gay men as groomers and pedophiles was a conservative talking point during the 1990s (Walker, 2023). With the legalization of gay marriage came the accusation that it would open the society to an acceptance of pedophilia (Walker, 2023). Influencer three suggests the acceptance of transgendered people within society is an intentional ploy by the elite to normalize their pedophilia, conflating QAnon talking points with transphobia. She states "I can tell you what the end game is. It is to make pedophilia legal." She promotes these books as essential for standing up to liberal indoctrination and commends the authors as being "brave enough to stand up for what is right and true." She also promotes the title *Little Lives Matter,* a book which focuses on the rights of the unborn and *The Island of Free Ice Cream,* a book which discusses the merits capitalism versus the dangers of communism.

Influencer two also promotes conservative books called *The Tuttle Twins*. She states that she is a "momma combatting the liberal education system with these amazing books" and that the books are "a must for patriot parents." The main topic of these books is government overreach, personal

responsibility and free market capitalism. They are intended for an older audience than the Brave Series books. These mothers position themselves as gatekeepers to their children's minds, protecting them from the liberal education system.

5.3.5 Mothers versus Satan

An important feature of each influencer's posts was the invocation of a battle between good and evil, more specifically between Christians and Satan. This was a surprising, but present feature between all of the accounts. The connection between QAnon and Satan, specifically the presence of Satan in Hollywood can explain the popularity of religious belief amongst QAnon followers in general, and these three QAmoms in particular (Exeline el al., 2022). The relationship between religious belief, motherhood and QAnon could be the topic of an entire thesis. Although I will not go into extensive detail, it is important to mention this element as it is a salient feature within their posts. Influencer one and two position their role as mother as divinely ordained with Influencer one citing scripture "her children rise up & call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her. Proverbs 31:28" stating that "of all the rights of women, the greatest is to be a mother." Influencer two called on other mothers to stand up to the government, specifically mask mandates in school, and not allow them to exert more control over children stating that "you created this body with god grace" and "they are my children that god entrusted me to raise up.*"* They often utilized demonic attributions to their posts either related to vaccines, transgendered people or Hollywood, and suggest that the visibility of the devil has increased as the devil no longer needs to hide in a "woke" and "liberal" society. Recently, transgender artist Sam Smith performed his song 'Unholy' at the 2023 Grammys, dressed in a devil costume and surrounded by fire. Like Balenciaga and Wayfair, their performance was used as proof of a satanic cabal. In response to the performance Influencer three wrote "Satan has literally taken over the earth and is showing his face. Its almost as if evil is the norm and its under the guides of tolerance and inclusivity." Influencer two called upon fellow Christians stating that "it is important that we as Christians call this out, expose it and God willing shed enough light on it that more people will begin to open their eyes more and more." In their view, Satan is no longer hiding, and his presence in Balenciaga, Wayfair, and Sam Smiths performance is proof of the existence of the evil cabal. It is important to note that Sam Smith is a known transgendered artist, and all three influencers conflate queerness, specifically being

transgendered with pedophilia. The conflation of demonic attributes is a salient feature within these QAmom accounts and QAnon belief in general (Exeline et al., 2022).

6. Conclusion

This thesis has explored the centrality of motherhood to posts by the three selected QAmoms, with the main research question *How central is motherhood, or notions of mothering to QAmom's social media posts?* The purpose of this research question is then illustrated in the sub-questions which explore the role of QAmoms and motherhood within the wider QAnon movement, the connection between QAmoms and the wider literature on the politics of white, American motherhood and if these can partly explain the entrance of QAnon into the mainstream and its popularity amongst women.

The thesis was conducted using netnography, also known as digital ethnography, recognizing the ubiquity of social media in daily life and viewing social media sites, specifically Instagram, as legitimate sites of social construction. Three Instagram influencers were chosen as research subjects, each requiring a following of over 50k, positioning themselves as mothers (either in name or content, or both), and promoting QAnon core and adjacent beliefs. Over 1600 posts were reviewed and collected from Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, and Parler. The main space of data collection was Instagram. The analysis of the data set utilized a hermeneutic approach, engaging with the data on a daily basis to identify patterns and themes, and then weaving a story fitting it within the literature discussed in chapter 3.

The story of these three influencers found that motherhood was a central and salient feature to their posts, with the protection of children being the primary goal. The protection of children, a noble cause which can be said to be universal, can be used to mask a conspiracy theory rife with misinformation, with real world consequences ranging from individual violent acts to the collective action seen on January 6th. Further, the misinformation has been shown to negatively impact organizations which seek to prevent and raise awareness about child trafficking. Motherhood is a powerful rhetorical tool as it is understood to be inherently good, apolitical and non-violent. The use of motherhood as a rhetorical tool, whether intentional or not, has allowed QAnon misinformation to spread as harmless and noble, masking sinister anti-Semitic and Anti-Democratic meanings. Further, the incorporation of other conspiracy theories into QAnon has provided followers with a variety of different rabbit holes, with seemingly-innocent entry point

leading to more extremist rhetoric. An algorithm which promotes emotionally jarring content not only aides but actively facilitates this process. The softening of the messaging can partly explain QAnons entrance into the mainstream, with the wellness, yoga, and mommy blogging communities being essential sites for the dissemination of misinformation. These sites are not only identified as central spaces for the growth of QAnon, but essential spaces for women to enter QAnon.

In addition, similarities were found between these influencers, an invocation of motherly duty, suspicion of the government, promotion of alternative media and the emphasis on a black and white world view, between good and evil, God and Satan. Interestingly, their posts often used language which called out to other mothers, invoking a necessary motherly duty which others should follow. This fits within the context of the 'mama grizzlies' campaign, the invocation of motherhood which galvanized conservative women to join, grow and take leadership positions within the Tea Party. Motherhood creates a legitimate and palatable space for women to enter politics while also invoking a sense of duty. Further, the fears of the government usurping the role of mothers was seen in the influencer's posts, and also from the women in the tea party, women who opposed the civil rights movement and desegregation, and women against communism during the red scare. If the invocation of motherly duty has historically been a popular tool in getting mothers involved, perhaps it can partly explain the growth of QAnon and the centrality of women and mothers to its growth.

However, these questions can only be partly explained. Three accounts, although numerous in posts, similar in content, and fitting within the literature, do not reflect a larger trend. The limitations of time and resources may constrict the meaning of this thesis to a specific space. However, the findings and the current invisibility in the literature highlights the need for an increased attention to QAmoms. Like QAmom accounts, mommy-blogs and trad wife communities are spaces for the dissemination of hate and misinformation often masquerading as innocuous communities for mothers. It is essential that academics engage with these communities to understand how mothers spread alt-right conspiracy theories, especially considering the centrality of social media to our daily lives. Exploring these communities will contribute to a growing body of feminist peace research which locates women as agentic and political. Additionally, tensions between motherhood communities surrounding the instrumentalization of

motherhood within politics is an important research avenue. Lastly, to better understand the QAnon movement as a whole and the role of the QAmoms it may be interesting to analyse how men engage with QAmom accounts. Conclusively, my hope is that this small research project demonstrates the importance of QAmoms within QAnon. The term QAmom is not intended to be reductive, but instead to carve out a specific term acknowledging the relevance of motherhood to QAnon. By using the term QAmom, I hope to add to a growing literature surrounding mothers within QAnon.

7. References

Abetz, J., & Moore, J. (2018). "Welcome to the Mommy Wars, Ladies": Making Sense of the Ideology of Combative Mothering in Mommy Blogs. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, *11*(2), 265–281. https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcy008

Anti-Defamation League. (n.d.) *Glossary of Extremism* [Dataset]. https://extremismterms.adl.org/glossary/fall-cabal

Argentino, M.-A. (2020, April 8). QAnon conspiracy theories about the coronavirus pandemic are a public health threat. *The Conversation*. http://theconversation.com/qanon-conspiracy-theories-about-the-coronavirus-pandemic-are-a-public-health-threat-135515

Argentino, M.-A. (2021a, March 12). The WQmen of QAnon. *GNET*. https://gnet-research.org/2021/03/12/the-wqmen-of-qanon/

Argentino, M.-A. (2021b, March 17). Pastel QAnon – GNET. *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*. https://gnet-research.org/2021/03/17/pastel-qanon/

Argentino, M.-A., & Crawford, B. (2021, May 29). QAnon Women in Politics Part Two: QAnon Careers. *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*. https://gnet-research.org/2021/04/29/qanon-women-in-politics-part-two-qanon-careers/

Arkin, D. (2022, July 8). How the Georgia Guidestones became a magnet for conspiracy theorists. *NBC News*. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/georgia-guidestones-became-magnet-conspiracy-theorists-rcna37279

Atkinson, P., & Delamont, S. (2010). *SAGE Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857028211

Bamberger, J. (2011). *PunditMom's Mothers of Intention: How Women and Social Media Are Revolutionizing Politics in America*. Bright Sky Press.

Bangerter, A., Wagner-Egger, P., & Delouvée, S. (2020). How Conspiracy Theories Spread. In M, Butter & P, Knight (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp.206-218). Routledge.

Banks, E. (2022). Redefining Motherhood: How Formerly Incarcerated Black Mothers Frame Mothering Choices. *Feminist Criminology*, *17*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/15570851221098374

Barkun, M. (2013). *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. University of California Press.

Bleakley, P. (2021). Panic, pizza and mainstreaming the alt-right: A social media analysis of Pizzagate and the rise of the QAnon conspiracy. *Current Sociology*, 00113921211034896. https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921211034896

Bloom, M., & Moskalenko, S. (2021). *Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the Mind of QAnon*. Redwood Press.

Bracewell, L. (2020). Gender, Populism, and the QAnon Conspiracy Movement. *Frontiers in Sociology*, *5*, 615–727. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.615727

Breland, A. (n.d.). The summer QAnon went mainstream. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved January 3, 2023, from https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/08/qanon-mainstream/

Breland, A. (2020, August). QAnon candidates keep winning primaries and top Republicans keep welcoming them in. *Mother Jones*. https://www.motherjones.com/2020-elections/2020/08/marjorie-taylor-greene-qanon-congressional-republicans/

Brennan, M. (2008). *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade Against Communism*. University Press of Colorado. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tampere/detail.action?docID=3039810

Buntain, C., Deal Barlow, M., Bloom, M., & A Johns, M. (2022). Paved with Bad Intentions: QAnon's Save the Children Campaign. *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v1i2.51

Burrell, J. (2017). The Fieldsite as a Network: A Strategy for Locating Ethnographic Research. In L. Hjorth, H. Horst, A. Galloway., & G. Bell (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp. 51-60). Routledge.

Butler, K. (n.d.). The terrifying story of how QAnon infiltrated moms' groups. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved January 3, 2023, from https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/09/the-terrifying-story-of-how-qanon-infiltrated-moms-groups/

Butter, M., & Knight, P. (Eds.). (2020). *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*. Routledge.

Caliandro, A. (2018). Digital Methods for Ethnography: Analytical Concepts for Ethnographers Exploring Social Media Environments. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *47*(5), 551–578. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241617702960

Campion, K. (2020). Women in the Extreme and Radical Right: Forms of Participation and Their Implications. *Social Sciences 2020, Vol. 9, Page 149*, *9*(9), 149. https://doi.org/10.3390/SOCSCI9090149

Cartner-Morley, J. (2022, November 29). Balenciaga apologises for ads featuring bondage bears and child abuse papers. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2022/nov/29/balenciaga-apologises-for-ads-featuring-bondage-bears-and-child-abuse-papers

Cho, H., Cannon, J., Lopez, R., & Li, W. (2022). Social media literacy: A conceptual framework. *New Media and Society*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211068530

Contera, J. (2021, December 16). A QAnon con: The viral Wayfair sex trafficking lie hurt real kids. - Document—Gale Business: Insights. *The Washington Post*. https://go-gale-com.libproxy.tuni.fi/ps/i.do?p=GBIB&u=tampere&id=GALE|A687035584&v=2.1&it=r

Costello, L., McDermott, M.-L., & Wallace, R. (2017). Netnography: Range of Practices, Misperceptions, and Missed Opportunities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917700647

Crawford, B., & Argentino, M.-A. (2021, May 28). QAnon Women in Politics Part One: The QAnon Candidates – GNET. *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*. https://gnet-research.org/2021/04/28/qanon-women-in-politics-part-one-the-qanon-candidates/

Daniels, J. (2009). Rethinking Cyberfeminism(s): Race, Gender, and Embodiment. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *37*(1/2), 101–124. https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.0.0158

Darby, S. (2020). *Sisters in Hate: American Women and White Extremism*. Little, Brown and Company.

Deckman, M. (2016). *Tea Party Women: Mama Grizzlies, Grassroots Leaders, and the Changing Face of the American Right*. New York University Press. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tampere/detail.action?docID=4045260

Dickinson, C. (2020, October 22). "Pastel QAnon," where pro-Trump conspiracy theories meet New Age spirituality. *Yahoo News*. https://ca.sports.yahoo.com/news/pastel-q-anon-where-pro-trump-conspiracy-theories-meet-new-age-spirituality-222152937.html

Dickinson, E. J. (2020, September 15). QAnon Is Taking Over the Yoga and Wellness Influencer Community – Rolling Stone. *Rolling Stone*. https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/qanon-wellness-influencers-seane-corn-yoga-1059856/amp/

Dickinson, E.J. (2020, September 2) The Birth of QAmom– Rolling Stone. *Rolling Stone. https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/qanon-mom-conspiracy-theory-parents-sex-trafficking-qamom-1048921/*

Dietz, M. G. (1985). Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking. *Political Theory*, *13*(1), 19–37.

Dixon, S. (2022, May). *Instagram users worldwide 2025* [Statistics]. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/183585/instagram-number-of-global-users/

Exline, J. J., Pait, K. C., Wilt, J. A., & Schutt, W. A. (2022). Demonic and Divine Attributions around COVID-19 Vaccines: Links with Vaccine Attitudes and Behaviors, QAnon and Conspiracy Beliefs, Anger, Spiritual Struggles, Religious and Political Variables, and Supernatural and Apocalyptic Beliefs. *Religions*, *13*(6), 519. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060519

Fall of the Cabal | Center on Extremism. (2023, February 6). Anti-Defamation League Glossary of Extremism. https://extremismterms.adl.org/glossary/fall-cabal

Fitzgerald, J. (2022). Conspiracy, anxiety, ontology: Theorising QAnon. *First Monday*, *27*(5), 1–41. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i5.12618

Flora, L. (2020, June 24). "I love you my beautiful #QAnon!": When lifestyle influencers also peddle conspiracy theories. *Glossy*. https://www.glossy.co/beauty/i-love-you-my-beautiful-qanon-when-lifestyle-influencers-also-peddle-conspiracy-theories/

Garry, A., Walther, S., Rukaya, M., & Ayan, M. (2021). View of QAnon Conspiracy Theory: Examining its Evolution and Mechanisms of Radicalization. *Journal for Deradicalization*, *26*, 152–216.

Gillespie, E. (2020, September 30). "Pastel QAnon": The female lifestyle bloggers and influencers spreading conspiracy theories through Instagram. *SBS News*. https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-feed/article/pastel-qanon-the-female-lifestyle-bloggers-and-influencers-spreading-conspiracy-theories-through-instagram/xdfslvw4s

Gillespie McRae, E. (2018). *Mothers of Massive Resistance*. Oxford University Press.

Giry, J., & Tika, P. (2020). Conspiracy Theories in Political Science and Political Theory. In M, Butter & P, Knight (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp.108-120). Routledge.

Hallett, R. E., & Barber, K. (2014). Ethnographic Research in a Cyber Era. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *43*(3), 306–330. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241613497749

Harambam, J. (2020) Conspiracy Entrepreneurs, Movements and Individuals. In M, Butter & P, Knight (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp.278-291). Routledge.

Haubursin, C. (2020, October 28). The Instagram aesthetic that made QAnon mainstream. *Vox*.
https://www.vox.com/videos/2020/10/28/21538763/save-the-children-qanon-instagram

Hendricks, V. F., & Vestergaard, M. (2019). *Markets of Attention, Misinformation and Manipulation*.
Springer.

Himelboim, I., Borah, P., Lee, D. K. L., Lee, J., Su, Y., Vishnevskaya, A., & Xiao, X. (2023). What
do 5G networks, Bill Gates, Agenda 21, and QAnon have in common? Sources, distribution, and
characteristics. *New Media & Society*, 146144482211428-.
https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221142800

Hine, C. (2017). From Virtual Ethnography to the Embedded, Embodied, Everday Internet. In L.
Hjorth, H. Horst, A. Galloway., & G. Bell (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*
(1st ed., pp. 21-28). Routledge.

Hjorth, L., Horst, H., Galloway, A., & Bell, G. (Eds.). (2017). *The Routledge companion to digital
ethnography*. Routledge.

Hristov, T., McKenzie-Mcharg, A., & Romero-Reche, A. (2020). Introduction. In M, Butter & P,
Knight (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp.11-15). Routledge.

Hsu, W.F. (2017) A Performative Digital Ethnography: Data, Design and Speculation. In L. Hjorth,
H. Horst, A. Galloway., & G. Bell (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed.,
pp. 40-50). Routledge.

Isenstadt, A. (2021, February 12). The Lincoln Project implodes amid infighting and scandal.
POLITICO. https://www.politico.com/news/2021/02/12/lincoln-project-scandal-468984

Jeppesen, S., Giroux, H., Hoechsmann, M., Kumanyika, C., ulthiin, iowyth hezel, VanDyke, D., &
McKee, M. (2022). *The Capitol Riots: Digital Media, Disinformation, and Democracy Under
Attack*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003246862

Johnston, D. D., & Swanson, D. H. (2003). Undermining Mothers: A Content Analysis of the
Representation of Mothers in Magazines. *Mass Communication and Society*, *6*(3), 243–265.
https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0603_2

Killen, K. (2019). "Can You Hear Me Now?" Race, Motherhood, and the Politics of Being Heard.
Politics & Gender, *15*(4), 623–644. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000697

Kim, J.-H. (2016). *Understanding Narrative Inquiry: The Crafting and Analysis of Stories as
Research*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802861

Kisyova, M.-E., Veilleux-Lepage, Y., & Newby, V. (2022). View of Conversations with other (alt-right) women: How do alt-right female influencers narrate a far-right identity? *Journal for Deradicalization*, *31*, 38.

Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined* (2nd edition.). Sage.

Kozinets, R.V. (2021). Netnography Today: A Call to Evolve, Embrace, Energize and Electrify. In R.V Kozinets & R. Gambetti (Eds)., *Netnography Unlimited: Understanding Techno culture using Qualitative Social Media Research* (1st ed., pp. 3-23). Routledge.

Kozinets, R. V., & Gambetti, R. (Eds.). (2020). *Netnography Unlimited: Understanding Techno culture using Qualitative Social Media Research*. Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003001430

Kużelewska, E., & Tomaszuk, M. (2022). Rise of Conspiracy Theories in the Pandemic Times. *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, *35*(6), 2373–2389. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-022-09910-9

Lange. P.G. (2017). Participatory Complications in Interactive, Video-Sharing Environments. In L. Hjorth, H. Horst, A. Galloway., & G. Bell (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp. 147-157). Routledge.

Lathifah, A., Tiani, R., & Mazida, F. (2021). Public Perception of Information about Covid 19 on social media Instagram: An Netnography Study of Visual Information. *E3S Web of Conferences*, *317*, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202131705015

Legewie, N., & Nassauer, A. (2018). YouTube, Google, Facebook: 21st Century Online Video Research and Research Ethics. *FQS: Forum Qualitative Social Research*, *19*(3).

Lorin Basden, A., & Martin, B. (Eds.). (2016). *Taking the Village Online: Mothers, Motherhood and Social Media.* Demeter Press.

Matfess, H., & Margolin, D. (2022). *Women of January 6th: A Gendered Analysis of the 21st Century American Far-Right* (Program on Extremism, p. 58). The George Washington University.

Mattheis, A. (2018). View of Shieldmaidens of Whiteness: (Alt) Maternalism and Women Recruiting for the Far/Alt-Right. *Journal for Deradicalization*, *17*, 128–162.

McCall, L., & Orloff, A. S. (2017). The multidimensional politics of inequality: Taking stock of identity politics in the U.S. Presidential election of 2016. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *68*(S1), S34–S56. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12316

McCarver, V. (2011). The Rhetoric of Choice and 21st-Century Feminism: Online Conversations About Work, Family, and Sarah Palin. *Women's Studies in Communication*, *34*(1), 20–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2011.566532

Mezey, N., & Pillard, C. (2012). Against the New Maternalism. *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law*, *18*(2), 229–296.

Miller, M. E. (2021). Pizzagate's Violent Legacy. *The Washington Post*.

Moskalenko, S., & McCauley, C. (2021). QAnon: Radical Opinion versus Radical Action. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *15*(2), 142–146.

Nigro, M. (2022, April 30). How Right-Wing Extremists Weaponize the Idea of Motherhood. *MSNBC*. https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/how-far-right-uses-motherhood-manipulate-recruit-women-n1294922

Oliver, J. E., & Wood, T. J. (2014). Conspiracy theories and the paranoid style(s) of mass opinion. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*(4), 952–966. https://doi.org/10.1111/AJPS.12084

Orton-Johnson. (2016). Digitally Mediated Motherhood: Mommy Blogs and Reading Mothering. In A, Lorin Basden & B Martin (Eds)., *Taking the Village Online: Mothers, Motherhood and Social Media* (1st Ed. pp. 17-25). Demeter Press.

Papasavva, A., Aliapoulios, M., Ballard, C., Cristofaro, E. D., Stringhini, G., Zannettou, S., & Blackburn, J. (2022). The Gospel according to Q: Understanding the QAnon Conspiracy from the Perspective of Canonical Information. *Proceedings of the ... International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, *16*, 735–746. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v16i1.19330

Patterson A., & Ashman, R. (2021). Getting Up-Close and Personal with Influencers: The Promises and Pitfalls of Intimate Netnography. In R.V Kozinets & R. Gambetti (Eds)., *Netnography Unlimited: Understanding Techno culture using Qualitative Social Media Research* (1st ed., pp. 241-248). Routledge.

Petersen, A. H. (2020, October 29). The Real Housewives of QAnon. *ELLE*. https://www.elle.com/culture/a34485099/qanon-conspiracy-suburban-women/

Pettersen, T. (2021). Feminist Care Ethics: Contributions to Peace Theory. In T. Väyrynen, S. Parashar, E. Féron., & C. Celia Confortini (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research.* Routledge.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *8*(1), 5–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080103

Ridgeway, C. L., & Correll, S. J. (2004). Unpacking the Gender System: A Theoretical Perspective on Gender Beliefs and Social Relations. *Gender and Society*, *18*(4), 510–531.

Retzkin, S. (2018). *Hands-On Dark Web Analysis: Learn What Goes on in the Dark Web, and How to Work with It*. Packt Publishing.

Rothschild, M. (2022). *The Storm is Upon Us: How QAnon Became A Movement, Cult, and Conspiracy Theory of Everything*. Monoray.

Salim-Nefes, T., & Romero-Reche, A. (2020) Sociology, Social Theory and Conspiracy Theory. In M, Butter & P, Knight (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp.94-107). Routledge.

Schreiber, R. (2016). Gender Roles, Motherhood, and Politics: Conservative Women's Organizations Frame Sarah Palin and Michele Bachmann. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *37*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2016.1115319

Singh, S., & Féron, É. (2021). Towards an intersectional approach to populism: Comparative perspectives from Finland and India. *Contemporary Politics*, *27*(5), 528–549. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2021.1917164

Skjelsbæk, I., Leidig, E., Segers, I. B., & Thorleifsson, C. (2020, September 7). *What role does gender play in the far right? - C-REX - Center for Research on Extremism*. https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/compendium/what-role-does-gender-play-in-the-far-right.html

Smallpage S.M., Drochon, H., Uscinski, J.E., & Klofstad, C. (2020). What are conspiracy theorists? Demographics and Conspiracy Theories. In M, Butter & P, Knight (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp.263-277). Routledge.

Sparks, H. (2015). Mama Grizzlies and Guardians of the Republic: The Democratic and Intersectional Politics of Anger in the Tea Party Movement. *New Political Science*, *37*(1), 25–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2014.945252

Spring, M. (2020, July 15). Wayfair: The false conspiracy about a furniture firm and child trafficking. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-53416247

The Global Risks Report 2017. (No. 12; p. 78). (2017). World Economic Forum.

Thiem, A. (2020). Conspiracy Theories and Gender and Sexuality. In M, Butter & P, Knight (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp.292-303). Routledge.

Thórisdóttir, H., Mari, S., & Kronwel, A.(2020). Conspiracy Theories, Political Ideology and Political Behaviour. In M, Butter & P, Knight (Eds)., *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (1st ed., pp.304-316). Routledge.

Tilley, E., & Woodthorpe, K. (2011). Is it the end for anonymity as we know it? A critical examination of the ethical principle of anonymity in the context of 21st century demands on the qualitative researcher. *Qualitative Research*, *11*(2), 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794110394073

U.S Food and Drug Administration/Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. (2019). *Be Aware of Potentially Dangerous Products and Therapies that Claim to Treat Autism: FDA Public Health Advisory.* Consumer Updates.

Valaskivi, K. (2022). Circulation of conspiracy theories in the attention factory Valaskivi, Katja. *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture*, *20*(3), 153–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/1

Väyrynen, T., Parashar, S., Féron, E., & Confortini, C. C. (2021). *Routledge handbook of feminist peace research*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429024160

Villegas, D. (2021) Political Netnography: A Method for Studying Power and Ideology in Social Media. In R.V Kozinets & R. Gambetti (Eds)., *Netnography Unlimited: Understanding Techno culture using Qualitative Social Media Research* (1st ed., pp. 100-115). Routledge.

Walker, J. (2023, February). A Modern History of "Groomer" Politics. *Reason*, *54*(9), 24–32.

Ward, C., & Voas, D. (2011). The Emergence of Conspirituality. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, *26*(1), 103–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2011.539846

Wendling, M. (2018). *Alt-Right: From 4chan to the White House*. Pluto Press.

Wendling, M. (2021, January 6). QAnon: What is it and where did it come from? *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/53498434

Wong, J. C. (2021, January 21). QAnon's "Great Awakening" failed to materialize. What's next could be worse. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/20/qanon-biden-inauguration-trump-antisemitism-white-nationalism

Ye, B., Won, B., Criezis, M., & Chapman, J. (2022, December 7). Influential Moms: Examining Extremist Influencer Mothers – GNET Influential Moms: Examining Extremist Influential

Moms: Examining Extremist Influencer Mothers – GNET. *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*.

Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender and Nation: SAGE Publications*. SAGE Publications, Limited. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tampere/detail.action?docID=1474792

Zahay, M. L. (2022). What "Real" Women Want: Alt-Right Femininity Vlogs as an Anti-Feminist Populist Aesthetic. *Media and Communication (Lisboa)*, *10*(4S1), 170–179. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i4.5726

Zuckerman, E. (2019). QAnon and the Emergence of the Unreal. *Journal of Design and Science*, *6*. https://doi.org/10.21428/7808da6b.6b8a82b9