

Social Justice Watch 0808

[图集精选](#)

[消息精选](#)

[Anti-maskers explain themselves](#)

[CBBC airs gay coming out scene after same-sex kiss complaints](#)

[Calgary police launch hate crime investigation after homophobic attacks](#)

[Dear White People: If you have ever said any of these things then you are part of the problem | The Milwaukee Independent](#)

[Drag Race: Alexis Mateo says India Ferrah 'cheated her out of \\$100,000'](#)

[Facebook takes down inauthentic pro-Trump Romanian network targeting the United States](#)

[Georgia teens shared photos of maskless students in crowded hallways. Now they're suspended.](#)

[INTERVIEW: Sam, Nele, and Ellie transitioned as young women, living as 'men' before realizing they'd made a mistake](#)

[Lilly Wachowski confirms that The Matrix is an allegory for trans experience](#)

[Poland ministers continue to fan flames of relentless homophobic hate](#)

[Thug convicted after two-year homophobic campaign against his cousin](#)

[Trans Traveller reveals the harsh reality of living through the pandemic](#)

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镜像

图集精选

[返回目录](#)

**Being a stereotypical
“alpha male” with lots of
toxic traits is so normalized
that guys who actually
respect women are being
called simp. Respectful
men are being ridiculed
by toxic men for not being
toxic men.**

@ The Feminist Vibe

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If any fields on a form are left blank, it will automatically be rejected. Even if it makes no sense for the applicant to fill out that field. For example, if "Apt. Number" is left blank because the immigrant lives in a house: rejected. Or if the field for a middle name is left blank because no middle name exists: rejected, too. . . .

It's hard not to see this as a preposterous new layer of red tape designed to deny visas to legally eligible applicants . . .

The policy change, at first affecting just asylum applicants, was announced without fanfare on the USCIS website sometime in the fall. "We will not accept your [application] if you leave any fields blank," reads a note you wouldn't know existed unless someone told you where to find it. "You must provide a response to all questions on the form, even if the response is 'none,' 'unknown' or 'n/a.'"

Then, days before the New Year, USCIS added a similar notice for U-visa applications. In both cases the processing changes were effective immediately — even if documents had been mailed in before the policy was announced.

That's the truly Kafkaesque touch.

Rampell continues with the story of the rejected visa applicant:

To be clear, the absence of a son's middle name wasn't the only blank on her application. As many attorneys told me has always been common practice, she also left other fields unfilled if they didn't apply.

For example, she checked the boxes saying each of her sons is "single." A subsequent section says: "If your family member was previously married, list the names of your family member's prior spouses and the dates his or her marriages were terminated." Because no "prior spouses" exist, she didn't enter anything; USCIS cited this, too, among the reasons for rejection. . . .

The news report was actually from Feb but I've just been aware it. Crazy... [link source](#)

The municipality used for mailing purposes, when different than the municipality of residence, is not sufficient.
The name of the municipality of residence (voting municipality) must always be listed.

Signature of Electors	Printed Name of Elector	Street & Number or Rural Route Rural address must also include box or fire no.	Municipality of Residence Indicate Town, Village, or City	Date of Signing (m/d/y)
1.	Whitney Payne	9261 Co West Atlyn	<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City	8-3-20
2.	Kanye West	10436 N DANZER WISCONSIN	<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City	8-3-20
3.	Bernie Sanders	716 W. 1st Ave.	<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City	8-3-20
4.	Christian Vennett	1117 W. Oklahoma	<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City	8/3/20
5.	Carolina Andrade	2956 A S. 14th St. Milwaukee	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input type="checkbox"/> City	8/3/20
6.			<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input type="checkbox"/> City	
7.			<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input type="checkbox"/> City	

looks like GOP operatives forged signatures in order to put Kanye West on Wisconsin ballot (why am I not surprised? [link source](#)

[返回目录](#)

消息精选

[返回目录](#)

telegra.ph/Poland-ministers-continue-to-fan-flames-of-relentless-homophobic-hate-08-05

Telegraph

Poland ministers continue to fan flames of relentless homophobic hate
The justice minister of Poland is raging over the withdrawal of EU funding to
'LGBT-free' zones, claiming it would soon lead to farmers losing their
subsidies. Six towns that signed homophobic 'LGBT-free' pledges saw their
requests for EU grants rejected...

<https://telegra.ph/Dear-White-People-If-you-have-ever-said-any-of-these-things-then-you-are-part-of-the-problem--The-Milwaukee-Independent-08-05>

Telegraph

Dear White People: If you have ever said any of these things then you are part of the problem | The Milwaukee Independent
My dear white friends, I'm about to lay some hardcore truth on you right now. Many of you are the problem. Yes, you read that right. Many of you are the reason why these riots are happening. Many of you are the reason why it has come to this. This is especially...

telegra.ph/Calgary-police-launch-hate-crime-investigation-after-homophobic-attacks-08-05

Telegraph

Calgary police launch hate crime investigation after homophobic attacks
Police in Canada have launched an investigation after three brutal homophobic attacks took place over the course of just four days. The attacks – which occurred in Calgary, Alberta — are being investigated as suspected hate crimes by local police. The first...

[telegra.ph/Drag-Race-Alexis-Mateo-says-India-Ferrah-cheated-her-out-of-100000-08-05](#)

Telegraph

Drag Race: Alexis Mateo says India Ferrah 'cheated her out of \$100,000'
Drag Race icon Alexis Mateo accused India Ferrah of “cheating” her out of \$100,000 as their All Stars 5 drama spills over into real life. Alexis Mateo let rip on India Ferrah in an hour-long Instagram video, telling her that their friendship is over and calling...

[telegra.ph/Lilly-Wachowski-confirms-that-The-Matrix-is-an-allegory-for-trans-experience-08-05](#)

Telegraph

Lilly Wachowski confirms that The Matrix is an allegory for trans experience
Lilly Wachowski, who co-directed and co-wrote The Matrix with her sister Lana Wachowski, has confirmed that the film series is a metaphor for the trans experience. Lana and Lilly Wachowski co-wrote and co-directed the initial Matrix trilogy, released between...

[telegra.ph/Thug-convicted-after-two-year-homophobic-campaign-against-his-cousin-08-05](#)

Telegraph

Thug convicted after two-year homophobic campaign against his cousin
A man who waged a two-year homophobic hate campaign against his cousin tried to blame his victim’s “bad manners” in a court appearance. Mahir Eroglu, 45, bombarded his cousin with homophobic abuse in a series of phone calls and text messages over the course...

[telegra.ph/CBBC-airs-gay-coming-out-scene-after-same-sex-kiss-complaints-08-05](#)

Telegraph

CBBC airs gay coming out scene after same-sex kiss complaints

Just days after CBBC received more than 100 complaints for airing a same-sex kiss, the children's channel has shown a "beautiful" coming out scene on the teen drama Mystic. Set in New Zealand, Mystic follows a group of "horse-mad teenagers" who must save...

telegra.ph/Trans-Traveller-reveals-the-harsh-reality-of-living-through-the-pandemic-08-05

Telegraph

Trans Traveller reveals the harsh reality of living through the pandemic

A solidarity fund to combat the effect of the pandemic on isolation and mental health has been launched by Traveller Pride to support trans and non-binary Travellers. Traveller Pride, which made history at Pride in London last year as the first Gypsy, Roma...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lrn5in0iBd8>

YouTube

Is WeChat a problem for democracies?

Politicians from Canada, the US and Australia have all turned to Chinese "super app" WeChat to reach Chinese voters in their countries.

In this latest episode of Because China, we go to Australia to understand how WEChat could affect elections and democratic...

telegra.ph/Facebook-takes-down-inauthentic-pro-Trump-Romanian-network-targeting-the-United-States-08-06

Telegraph

Facebook takes down inauthentic pro-Trump Romanian network targeting the United States

Inauthentic assets posted pro-Trump, Christian imagery, and QAnon content

telegra.ph/Georgia-teens-shared-photos-of-maskless-students-in-crowded-hallways-Now-theyre-suspended-08-07

Telegraph

Georgia teens shared photos of maskless students in crowded hallways. Now they're suspended.

At least two North Paulding High School students have been suspended after sharing images of a school hallway jammed with their mostly maskless peers, and the principal has warned other students against doing the same. North Paulding High School in Dallas...

The latest in Hong Kong: 24 people charged for joining this year's Tiananmen vigil. A longtime organizer who's facing 9 charges over 4 different protests—including 3 just for the vigil—says the latest charges are clearly meant to chill peaceful rallies: [link source](#)

NY Times

Dozens Charged in Hong Kong for Taking Part in Tiananmen Protest

The charges against 24 people for attending an annual vigil are the latest signs of an intensifying crackdown on the pro-democracy movement.

telegra.ph/Anti-maskers-explain-themselves-08-07-3

Telegraph

Anti-maskers explain themselves

“If I’m going to get Covid and die from it, then so be it”: What it’s like to be against masks.

“Childcare care is basic infrastructure. If you want this economy to work, if you want to boost our G.D.P., or now, during a pandemic, if you want to get people back to work, then we need to make a national investment.” [link source](#)

Nytimes

Elizabeth Warren on Child Care in a Pandemic

The senator says child care is crucial for bringing the economy back: “Women continue to have to manage it all.”

When we lived in public housing my mom started a community garden to grow food to save money and to occupy the kids that lived there and the public housing authority came & pulled out all the plants and poured bleach into the ground to destroy it. Because gardens weren't allowed. [link source](#)

Twitter

Armani

what radicalized you?

As the incarceration rate increased, Blacks' confidence in courts & the legal system fell while Whites' confidence grew.

[#SocSciResearch](#)

[link source](#)

Sciedirect

Racing justice: Mass incarceration and perceptions of courts

This article examines how the emergence of mass incarceration in the United States affected public perceptions of its judicial institutions. Analyses ...

[Warning: Controversial Content] [telegra.ph/INTERVIEW-Sam-Nele-and-Ellie-transitioned-as-young-women-living-as-men-before-realizing-theyd-made-a-mistake-08-08](#)

Telegraph

INTERVIEW: Sam, Nele, and Ellie transitioned as young women, living as 'men' before realizing they'd made a mistake

Sam, Nele, and Ellie all lived as transmen before realizing they had made the wrong decision. Chantal Louis interviewed the three women, after they contacted EMMA, a German feminist magazine. This interview was published in EMMA in March 2020 and translated...

[返回目录](#)

Anti-maskers explain themselves

[返回目录](#)

“If I’m going to get Covid and die from it, then so be it”: What it’s like to be against masks.



Supporters and members of Patriot Prayer and People's Rights Washington take part in a rally against Washington state's mask mandate on June 26, 2020, in Vancouver, Washington.

At the outset of the pandemic, Amy, a 48-year-old mother of two from Ohio, was afraid. When the government began recommending people wear masks, she not only complied but also made masks for others. “I was like, oh, this is scary, this could be really bad,” she said.

But when Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine announced the state would extend its lockdown for the month of May, she’d had it. Pandemic over or not, she was done. After that, Amy became vehemently anti-mask and began to doubt

whether the coronavirus was really that big of a deal. Her mother unfollowed her on Facebook over her “anger posts” about masks, and she hasn’t heard from her in a month. She carries a homemade mask with her, just in case, but she doesn’t believe in them.

“It’s a violation of my freedom, I think, and then also I just don’t think they work,” Amy said. “A lot of stuff says it does, but then some doesn’t.”

Masks have become an extremely heated point of contention during the Covid-19 outbreak. Viral videos of people having meltdowns over masks are commonplace, and in many parts of the country, it’s not abnormal for strangers to confront each other publicly over the issue. A small but vocal segment of the population has dug in and ignored the growing evidence that masks make a difference in combating the coronavirus. For those who believe that at the very least wearing a mask can’t hurt, it’s hard to not develop some animosity toward those who refuse. The question I keep hearing from pro-mask friends and family is always the same: What are these people thinking?

In recent weeks, I spoke with nearly a dozen people who consider themselves anti-mask to find out just that. What I discovered is that there is certainly a broad spectrum of reasons — some find wearing a mask annoying or just aren’t convinced they work, and others have gone down a rabbit hole of conspiracies that often involve vaccines, Big Pharma, YouTube, and Bill Gates. One man told me he wears a mask when he goes to the store to be polite. A woman got kicked out of a Menards store for refusing to wear a mask amid what she calls the “Covid scam garbage.”

But there are also many commonalities. Most people I talked to noted government officials’ confusing messaging on masks in the pandemic’s early days. They insist that they’re not conspiracy theorists and that they don’t believe the coronavirus is a hoax, but many also expressed doubts about the growing body of scientific knowledge around the virus, opting for cherry-picked and unverified sources of information found on social media rather than traditional news sources. They often said they weren’t political but acknowledged they leaned right.

Most claimed not to know anyone who had contracted Covid-19 or died of it, and when I told them I did, the responses were the same: How old were they? Did they have preexisting conditions? They knew their position is unpopular,

and most spoke on condition of anonymity and will be referred to only by their first names. Amy told me people are “not very nice about this.”

The mask debate is complex. As much as it’s about science, health, and risk, it’s also about empathy. If someone doesn’t personally know anyone who died from Covid-19, does it mean those lives don’t matter? Are older and immunocompromised people disposable? Does one person’s right to ignore public health advice really trump someone else’s right to live?

“Death is happening in these wards where even family members can’t visit their loved ones when they’re sick with Covid, so the death and the severity of this disease are really invisible to the public,” said Kumi Smith, an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota who studies infectious diseases.

It leads some people to brush the issue aside.

“I’m empathetic that anyone has to die ever, but that’s the reality of our lives. And I almost feel like if I’m going to get Covid and die from it, then so be it,” said Gina, a Pennsylvania real estate agent who wears a mask at work but otherwise opposes mask mandates.

“I’M EMPATHETIC THAT ANYONE HAS TO DIE EVER, BUT THAT’S THE REALITY OF OUR LIVES”

But the empathy question also works the other way — attacking people for not wearing a mask doesn’t change minds. An open, more forgiving conversation might. That’s what happened with Scott Liftman, a 50-year-old man from Massachusetts who read a story in the Atlantic about men who won’t wear masks. He contacted the article’s author, Harvard epidemiologist Julia Marcus, and has come around — somewhat — on the idea of putting one on, at least in certain situations.

“I want to be sensitive, I want to follow scientific principles, but I also want to exercise common sense, too,” Liftman told me. “You never want to read something that just shames you. I really think that no two people are so different that they can’t find some common ground.”

“These people are part of our community, and they are putting other people at risk,” Marcus said. “If you can inch some people, you will see risk reduction overall.”

Freedom, but for your face

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to spin out of control in the United States, many states, localities, and businesses have turned to requiring people to wear masks in the hope the measure will slow the spread of infection. Currently, 34 states have mask mandates, and polls show a hefty majority of Americans would support a national mask mandate, as well.

For those who disagree, that's partially where the problem resides: They insist they're not anti-mask, they're anti-mandate. "If you want to wear a mask, great. I will never look down on you, have anything bad to say to you, do what you want. But the mandates are what I disagree with and I don't think are right, especially now," Gina said.

Rallies against mask mandates have popped up across the country, much like the protests to reopen the economy that took place at state capitols earlier this year. People wanted the freedom to get a haircut; now they want the freedom to go to the grocery store without covering their face.

Some of the people I spoke with drew the line, specifically, at government mandates. It's one thing for a private business to require customers to wear a mask, they said, but another thing for a state government to do it. Private establishments "have a right to do so, and you should respect those rules," Jason, a paramedic from Michigan, said.

Others, however, chafed at rules from businesses, too. Members of one Facebook group circulated a list of stores with mask requirements, chatting about boycotting those retailers or visiting to try to challenge the rules.

When I spoke with Jacqueline, who lives in Wyoming, she was upset over the mask requirement at her local Menards. She'd been to the home improvement store, sans mask, twice in recent days — the first time, she was allowed to make her purchase despite ignoring the rules, but the second time, she had no such luck. She was asked to leave the store after a physical altercation ensued — Jacqueline says a worker pushed her, the store says she rammed someone with a cart — and management called the police to file a report. She's now banned from the store. "They don't have to ban me because I'll never go back again," Jacqueline said. She told me she'll go to Home Depot instead. (It also appears to require masks for customers.)

As to why she believes she's exempt from the rules, Jacqueline cited the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution. "No states are allowed to make laws that take our freedoms and liberties away," she said.

But then she mentioned a mask exemption card she got — not from a doctor, but from a friend. It appears she has one of the fake cards some people are using to try to get out of wearing a mask by claiming they have a disability. "I get overheated really easy," she explains.

The issue with the freedom argument is that wearing a mask is about more than protecting yourself — there's growing evidence masks are useful for protecting others from those who may have Covid-19 and not know it. Not wearing a mask may encroach on another person's freedom to go out in relative safety.



An anti-mask protester holds an American flag during a rally on July 18, 2020, at the Ohio Statehouse.

Part of the problem is the facts have changed. Another part is where the facts are coming from.

There is no denying that Covid-19 messaging from official channels has, at

times, been confusing and contradictory. Early on, people were told not to wear a mask, but now that's changed. Scientific consensus evolves with new information, this is a new disease, and like it or not, the world is full of uncertainty.

Given that uncertainty, it makes sense people would have doubts. If officials changed their minds on masks before, what's to stop them from doing it again? Some people also feel the pandemic isn't as bad as it was made out to be in the spring. They don't know very many people, if anyone, who have gotten sick, and in some places, especially more rural areas, masks just aren't that common.

Among those I spoke with, however, I noticed that while the conversation might begin with contradictory messaging and doubts about efficacy, it often devolved into conspiracy theories. The mainstream media was lying, they said, asking whether I'd seen this video on YouTube or followed that person on Twitter. Jacqueline's Facebook timeline was filled with posts the platform had flagged as false, and with diatribes that the company was censoring her. She told me she hurt her hand several weeks prior, and that she had weighed going to the emergency room but decided against it: She's 65 and believes she'd automatically be given a positive Covid-19 test and placed on a ventilator to likely die.

Bryan, who lives in New Jersey, declined to speak on the phone for this story out of concern I might misconstrue his words. He opted to communicate via LinkedIn, sending over several days more than 4,000 words explaining his thoughts on masks and the pandemic. Initially, he said his main issue was the mandate.

"What the mandates have done is scare people into believing they are a must if they are to avoid catching the virus. And because those scared few feel that way, they become angry and vile towards anyone who does not share in their fear," he wrote.

Bryan told me that he and his fellow "truth seekers" have always questioned the numbers on Covid-19's mortality rate, and he expressed doubts about government officials' advice and the media's coverage of the pandemic. He acknowledged that some of what he was saying made him sound like a conspiracy theorist, but also leaned in: He believes masks are a step in "getting people into compliance so that they can make vaccines mandatory as well." His

theory: “Soon it will be, ‘take the vaccine,’ or you can’t travel, shop, etc.” Or worse, he said, digital IDs or “health care passports.”

Certain theories and conspiracies came up over and over again. Nearly everyone I spoke with referenced a single Florida man whose death in a motorcycle crash was erroneously listed as a Covid-19 death, saying it was evidence the virus’s fatality count was vastly overstated. (Research has shown that coronavirus deaths are likely underreported.) Many said that hydroxychloroquine is the miracle cure for Covid-19, despite evidence it is likely ineffective, and that efforts to develop other drugs or a vaccine are simply a ploy by Big Pharma to make money. Sometimes Bill Gates was involved, though exactly why he was painted as a nefarious figure was somewhat unclear.

Bryan mentioned an event related to pandemic preparedness, hosted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in October 2019, as evidence of activity that seems “strangely coincidental” given current events. “Who is one of the ones backing all of that ‘preparedness?’ Good ole Bill Gates, a man who not long ago had a huge image problem due to some monopolistic practices, etc. Now he seems to have revived his image because he is a ‘virus and vaccine expert?’” Bryan wrote.

Most of the people I spoke with got their information from their own “independent investigations” or content they found on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

“YouTube is where alternative thinkers are going to do their thinking,” Mak, whose hot yoga studio in British Columbia was shut down due to the coronavirus, told me.

“There’s definitely some sort of an agenda here to initiate control upon the people and to make people more obedient and compliant, and see which people are going to comply with some directives,” he said.

“I KNOW THEY’RE LYING TO THE MASSES”

Some anti-maskers have turned to making content of their own. Tanya, also from British Columbia, had gone to local hospitals to try to record what was going on and prove that media stories about the outbreak were false.

“I know they’re lying to the masses,” she told me. “I don’t know anybody who

has had coronavirus, I don't know anybody who knows anybody, and I know a lot of people."

"Anti-maskers will say masks are making you breathe in your own carbon dioxide," said Eleanor Murray, an epidemiologist at Boston University. "That's not at all a thing, because we know ... there are plenty of people whose occupations require them to wear a mask."

Politics is part of it, but not all of it

Like so many things, masks have become a politicized issue. President Donald Trump and many Republicans have spent months using them as a political lightning rod. Some have since changed their tune — the president has begun recommending masks, though his message hasn't been consistent or wholehearted.

"The challenge is that when you had political leaders early on saying we are not wearing masks, we don't think it's important, we don't think it's a good idea, there are a lot of people in the country who very, very seriously follow President Trump," said Catherine Sanderson, a professor of psychology at Amherst College. "When you have somebody in that sort of a vivid role saying, 'I'm not going to do this,' it creates a norm people are motivated to follow."

Jacqueline told me she believes the pandemic death count has been inflated in an effort to undermine the president. "They're all saying this so that they can make the president look bad, so they can cause the problems they are causing," she said.



After months of refusing to wear a mask in public, President Donald Trump wears one on July 11, 2020, while visiting Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Politicization is playing out at a much more local level, too. I spoke with Anthony Sabatini, a member of the Florida House of Representatives who has filed multiple lawsuits over mask mandates. Ahead of our interview, he emphasized he's worried about mandates and government overreach, not the masks themselves.

During our discussion, he initially claimed that police would be going into businesses and homes, checking to see whether people were wearing a mask. When I asked for evidence, he referenced to an ordinance against gatherings of more than 10 people — not masks — but claimed they were “part and parcel” of the same issue. When I asked Sabatini whether he personally wears a mask, his initial response was, “Where? In my bed?” I clarified: when he goes out, like to the grocery store. Sabatini, who is 31, told me he doesn’t go to the grocery store because he’s “too busy” and “a millennial,” and therefore eats out all the time. He conceded he sometimes goes to the grocery store, so when I asked whether he wears a mask there, he insisted I name which specific store.

Sabatini said older people are generally most at risk of dying of Covid-19, adding that he is “very careful” around them — specifically those 82 or older. The majority of deaths have been in nursing homes, he explained, and he doesn’t know anyone personally in a nursing home. “Anyone in my age group, it’s just rare that you know anybody that’s in that age group,” he said.

According to the Florida House of Representatives’ website, there were more than 500 people residing in nursing facilities in Sabatini’s district as of the 2010 census, and about 5 percent of the population he represents is age 80 or older.

“Grandmas and grandpas die all the time”

Spring outside of my Brooklyn apartment had been a symphony of sirens. If there’s a chance wearing a piece of cloth over my face will do something to help stop that, that’s fine by me. It was an issue I posed to many of the anti-maskers: If I’m wrong, the worst that happens is I was a little uncomfortable at the grocery store in July. If you’re wrong, you and others could get sick and die. Is that worth the risk?

“I don’t want to be responsible for killing anybody,” Gina, the Pennsylvania real estate agent, told me, though she still insisted the virus is overblown. “If the cases weren’t reported on anymore and talked about, coronavirus would be gone.”

“I hear all the time, people are like, ‘I’d rather be safe than sorry, I don’t want to be a grandma killer.’ I’m sorry to sound so harsh,” Mak said, chuckling. “I’m laughing because grandmas and grandpas die all the time. It’s sad. But here’s the thing: It’s about blind obedience and compliance.”

“WHEN THERE IS A VACCINE, THESE ARE THE SAME GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE SAYING THEY’RE NOT GETTING A VACCINE”

As tempting as it is for many people to write off the anti-mask crowd, it’s not that simple. As Lois Parshley recently outlined for Vox, enforcing a mask mandate is a difficult and complex task. But it’s an important one: A lot of anti-maskers also have doubts about a vaccine, which public health experts say will be a crucial part of moving past the pandemic.

“Masks are actually probably a proxy for not believing in science, not believing

in experts,” Amherst College’s Sanderson said. “The challenge, of course, is when there is a vaccine, these are the same group of people who are saying they’re not getting a vaccine.”

So how do you break through? As enticing as it may be for some people to shame and attack people who won’t wear a mask, it’s probably not the answer.

“One of the challenges is that you need to bring people to your side without saying, ‘You’re stupid,’ because when it’s, ‘You’re stupid,’ it’s very hard to convince someone,” said Sanderson, who’s also the author of *Why We Act: Turning Bystanders Into Moral Rebels*, a book about social norms.

As difficult (and at times contentious) as some of the conversations were, across the board, everyone was extremely nice. They also sent follow-up information to try to get me to see things their way. It’s easy to see how, for someone who’s on the fence, you might get sucked in: If pro-mask Bob tells you you’re a murderer but anti-mask Sue tells you she’s got a video you should see, you might prefer to deal with Sue.

Masks aren’t a panacea, Smith, from the University of Minnesota, said. But that doesn’t mean they’re not worthwhile. “We’re at this point where we are desperate in the United States,” she said. “I’m not about to argue anti-maskers down and say, ‘No, this will save everybody’s lives most definitely,’ but I think to reject it wholesale because some scientist changed their mind is really problematic.”

Like it or not, we’re all in this together, mask on or mask off. And just like the science can change, minds can too.

Liftman, the Massachusetts man who spoke with the Harvard epidemiologist who wrote about men who won’t wear masks, told me his conversation with the writer changed his mind. He felt like she showed compassion and didn’t condemn him. He’s still a little skeptical — he thinks it’s bad he’s supposed to wear a mask when ordering from the ice cream truck outside. But when he’s inside a store or in a crowded area, he gets it. While he still believes in individual liberty, he says it’s not just about himself, it’s also about the worker at the grocery store who doesn’t have a choice, and the person next to him in line.

“I was kind of very skeptical about the whole thing. Is this about government control? Do we really need it? As the science has evolved, I’ve become more in

line with the idea that we really should protect ourselves more often than I initially thought,” Liftman said. Speaking with Marcus, and another virologist he reached out to, made a difference. “It opened my eyes up to being a little bit more sensitive.”

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

CBBC airs gay coming out scene after same-sex kiss complaints

[返回目录](#)



(Screenshot: CBBC/Mystic)

Just days after CBBC received more than 100 complaints for airing a same-sex kiss, the children's channel has shown a "beautiful" coming out scene on the teen drama *Mystic*.

Set in New Zealand, *Mystic* follows a group of "horse-mad teenagers" who must save their community from environmental disaster. Episode four sees Caleb (played by Joshua Tan) come out as gay to his best friend Issie.

In the emotional scene, London teen Issie (Macey Chipping) explains that she feels like she doesn't fit in with her New Zealand friends. Caleb then reveals that he too feels like "an outsider" because he likes boys.

"I've been thinking about what you said earlier, about trusting us and you know, feeling like an outsider and stuff," he says. "I do feel like that sometimes."

Issie suggests that Caleb is just "trying to make her feel better for being the

“weird girl”, but he admits it’s more than that.

“I’m weird too,” he replies. “I’m gay... I think. No, I know I am.”



I'm...I'm gay, I think.

After briefly fumbling with an awkward joke, Issie comforts her friend. “Thank you for telling me. It must have been really hard,” she says.

“Being gay is... it’s like one little piece of who you are. A good piece. You know that, right? Take your time. No pressure.”

The “beautiful” scene was applauded for giving children a realistic representation of LGBT+ characters on screen.

CBBC hits back at homophobic criticism of same-sex *Next Step* kiss.

Viewers also praised the BBC for affirming its commitment to diversity in the wake of complaints about a same-sex kiss in another CBBC show, *The Next Step*.

Rejecting claims that the kiss was “inappropriate for the audience age”, the broadcaster said that “CBBC regularly portrays heterosexual young people dating, falling in love, and kissing, and it is an important way of showing children what respectful, kind and loving relationships look like”.

It continued: “This is an important part of our mission to make sure that every

child feels like they belong, that they are safe, and that they can be who they want to be.

“We believe that the storyline, and the kiss, was handled with sensitivity and without sensationalism, following as it did the portrayal of Jude and Cleo’s developing relationship.”

It added that same-sex relationships had already featured in several other CBBC shows, including *Jamie Johnson*, *4 O Clock Club*, *Dixie* and *Marrying Mum and Dad*.

Contrary to what was reported in the press, *The Next Step*’s same-sex kiss was far from the first on CBBC — that honour goes to *Byker Grove*, nearly 30 years ago.

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

Calgary police launch hate crime investigation after homophobic attacks

[返回目录](#)



Police in Canada have launched an investigation after three brutal homophobic attacks took place over the course of just four days.

The attacks — which occurred in Calgary, Alberta — are being investigated as suspected hate crimes by local police.

The first incident occurred on Friday (July 31) near the intersection of 17 Avenue and 12 Street in the middle of the day. The victim was set upon by a group of men who attacked him while calling him homophobic slurs, before quickly fleeing the scene.

On Saturday (August 1), a drag king was spat on by a man while recording a video at the rainbow crosswalk at the intersection of Centre Street and Stephen Avenue Mall S.W.

Finally, on Monday (August 3), a queer couple were out walking near the intersection of 9 Street and Memorial Drive at around 5.30pm when they were approached by two men and two women on electronic scooters.

The two men proceeded to beat the men using a belt, rocks and a recycling bin. It is believed that the couple were targeted because of their sexual orientation.

Police have since identified the suspects photographed in the August 3 incident, but have not yet released their names. They have asked the public to remain patient while they collect evidence.

Homophobic attacks branded ‘extremely disturbing’ by Calgary Police.

“It is shocking to see anyone targeted for a crime because of a personal characteristic, but it is extremely disturbing to see the same community targeted three times in one weekend,” said sergeant Arlene Padnivelan of Calgary Police in a press release.

“It is unacceptable that this is happening and we will absolutely investigate anytime a crime is motivated by hate or bias.”

Calgary Police urged anyone who has been the victim of a hate crime in the city to report the incident.

“We fully recognise that sometimes people do not want to involve the police or don’t feel comfortable coming to us for help,” Padnivelan said.

“We respect the wishes of those who are most affected by the incident and never force a victim to participate in a police investigation.

“However, if there is a way we can help make a person feel safe enough to come forward, we want to try do that.”

Police are urging anyone with information in any of the three cases to come forward by calling 1-800-222-8477 or visiting its crimestoppers website.

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

Dear White People: If you have ever said any of these things then you are part of the problem | The Milwaukee Independent

[返回目录](#)



My dear white friends, I'm about to lay some hardcore truth on you right now. Many of you are the problem. Yes, you read that right. Many of you are the reason why these riots are happening. Many of you are the reason why it has come to this. This is especially true if you've ever, and especially in the last weeks, said any of the following:

1. “It’s awful but...”

No. No buts. In the English language, the word “but” is often used to deflect or to justify behavior. Police murdering black people in the street is awful. Period. End. of. discussion.

2. “I support the movement but not these disruptive protests...”

No, you don’t. Right now the movement is taking the form of disruptive protests. They’re the same thing. You either want police to stop murdering black people in the street, or you don’t. If you do, then support the protests – even if you find them disruptive and frustrating – because that’s black people fighting for their lives.

3. “All lives / White lives matter too...”

No one said they didn't. The conversation is specifically about black lives right now because police are murdering them in the street. Until police stop doing that, and White people stop dismissing it, it's not "All lives Matter", it's "MOST lives matter." It's not "ALL Lives" until Black Lives Matter too. Stay focused.

4. "There are good cops..."

This isn't about the actions of individuals. It's about systemic, state-sanctioned violence against black people and other people of color. In fact, racism – historically and currently – is so embedded in policing that even if there weren't any bad cops, racism and racist police practices would still exist. Police forces are there to protect and advance the status quo. Period. The same so-called "good cops" who are sharing BLM hashtags and are kneeling with you now, won't think twice about kneeling on your neck at a later time. And if you think you're a good cop, but are silent when confronted with human rights abuses, then how good are you?

5. "I don't support the looting and destruction..."

No one says you have to, but please stop acting like looting nullifies the entire protest. And definitely stop acting like looting is "just as bad." That's like comparing someone stealing your car to someone murdering your child. They're not equally bad. Stop pretending they are. Police murdering black people in the street is definitely worse than robbing a Target.

6. "Just because I'm white doesn't mean my life has been easy..."

Of course not. Everyone struggles. But being white has never been one of those struggles. Being poor is a struggle. Being handicapped is a struggle. Being a woman is a struggle. Being gay is a struggle. Being an immigrant is a struggle. But being white has never been a struggle. The same can't be said for people of color. I could go on and on about white privilege but it would be so much easier if you educated yourself instead. This isn't about how you, a white, cisgender, straight man or woman has suffered in your life. This is about police murdering black people in the street. Stop trying to make it about you.

7. "I really wish they would protest peacefully..."

Of course you do. They're easier to ignore that way. And what you really want is for them to die more quietly. People of color have been peacefully protesting for

hundreds of years. It hasn't been all that successful. The reason riots and violent demonstrations work is because it makes people – especially white people – uncomfortable. You can't ignore them when they're waving torches in your faces. It scares you. It puts you on edge. Which is exactly where you need to be. People only pay attention to the extreme. If you have trouble recalling a single one of the hundreds of peaceful protests that BLM held across North America last year, but you can still recall, with crystal clarity, the 1992 Los Angeles riots, then you've just proven my point.

8. “I don’t see color...”

Congratulations! You’re lying to yourself. Of course you see color. And that’s good! Black people want you to see their color. Their colors are beautiful and the very foundation of who they are. If you don’t see their color, then you also don’t see their culture. If you don’t see color then you erase their very identity. If you don’t see their color, then you also can’t see the pattern of violence they’re confronted with every day. If you don’t see color, then you’re blind to more than just racial injustice. You’re blind to the world.

9. “They shouldn’t have committed a crime...”

This one is a big one for me. Consider me triggered. A boy who steals a can of pop from a 7-11 does not deserve to be shot in the back – three times. A man illegally selling CD’s on a street corner doesn’t deserve to be shot to death in front of a record store. A man selling cigarettes on the street does not deserve to be strangled on the streets of Staten Island. A man who runs a red light does not deserve to be shot while reaching for his registration. This isn’t about their crimes, this is about racialized policing. Stay on topic.

10. “Black people kill white people too...”

Yes, murderers exist in every race and walk of life. But, that’s not what we’re talking about. We’re talking police brutality, and the reality is, black officers are not murdering unarmed white men in the street. That seems to be almost exclusively white officer behavior. Stop gaslighting.

If any of you are guilty of saying any of the above, then I have unsettling news for you. You are the reason it has come to this. You are the reason peaceful protests haven’t worked. They haven’t worked because you haven’t been listening. You haven’t been learning. These riots are happening because you

have left black people no other choice.

These riots are happening because no matter how black people have said it: taking a knee, marching the streets, bumper stickers, banners, signs, or chants, you still don't get it. That doesn't mean you're bad people. That doesn't mean you're racist. It only means you're white. And that's not a crime, any more than being black is. The difference is, police aren't going to shoot you in the street for it.

- Written By

Patrick Benjamin

Editor's Note: When this essay was first published it was mistakenly attributed to the wrong author, who actually plagiarized the original work. The actual writer, Patrick Benjamin, granted us permission to allow the work to remain in place with corrected credit. It is with our apologies and thanks that we continue to share his voice on this important subject.

- BLM | Coverage

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

Drag Race: Alexis Mateo says India Ferrah 'cheated her out of \$100,000'

[返回目录](#)



Drag Race icon Alexis Mateo accused India Ferrah of “cheating” her out of \$100,000 as their *All Stars 5* drama spills over into real life.

Alexis Mateo let rip on India Ferrah in an hour-long Instagram video, telling her that their friendship is over and calling out her partner for allegedly sending her private messages, demanding that she keep quiet over their feud.

Drag Race fans were shocked when, half way through *All Stars 5*, India accused Alexis and Mayhem Miller of campaigning against eventual winner Shea Couleé.

India was eliminated shortly after she made her bombshell claims. Alexis followed a week later after the other queens deemed her “backyard ball” look to be the worst, but the Puerto Rican star said she feels as though her name had

been tainted.

“A lot of people posted, ‘you got robbed’. I don’t think I got robbed, I think I got cheated,” she said Tuesday (August 4).

Alexis Mateo called a ‘sore loser because she’s brown’.

Alexis said that had she remained in the running, she feels as though she would have excelled in the penultimate week’s comedy challenge and ultimately progressed to the top three.

“I’m a very good dancer, I’m good at choreography, I’m a good singer, so I probably would have done very good in my final video clip too.”

She continued: “A lot of my friends are like, ‘this is very white privilege’. I am tired of this whole bulls**t situation, about, ‘if Alexis says something she’s a sore loser because she’s f***king brown’.

“If I was white everybody would be like, ‘oh I feel so sorry for her’. No b***h. No more.”

[View this post on Instagram](#) A post shared by Alexis Mateo (@miss_alexis_mateo) on Aug 3, 2020 at 5:18pm PDT

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

Facebook takes down inauthentic pro-Trump Romanian network targeting the United States

[返回目录](#)

Inauthentic assets posted pro-Trump, Christian imagery, and QAnon content



(Source: @zkharazian/DFRLab via Gage Skidmore/Wikimedia)

On August 6, 2020, Facebook announced the removal of a network of assets based in Romania engaged in coordinated inauthentic behavior and targeting the United States. Prior to their removal, the DFRLab had access to a subset of assets — two pages, 22 individual Facebook accounts, and 78 Instagram accounts — that largely posted content supporting U.S. President Donald Trump. A few of the assets also referenced QAnon, the sprawling far-right conspiracy theory that has moved from the fringes to the mainstream in recent months. Although the conspiracy was not a significant focus of the network, its inclusion is noteworthy given *NewsGuard*'s recent report on QAnon's spread to Europe.

In a statement, Facebook indicated:

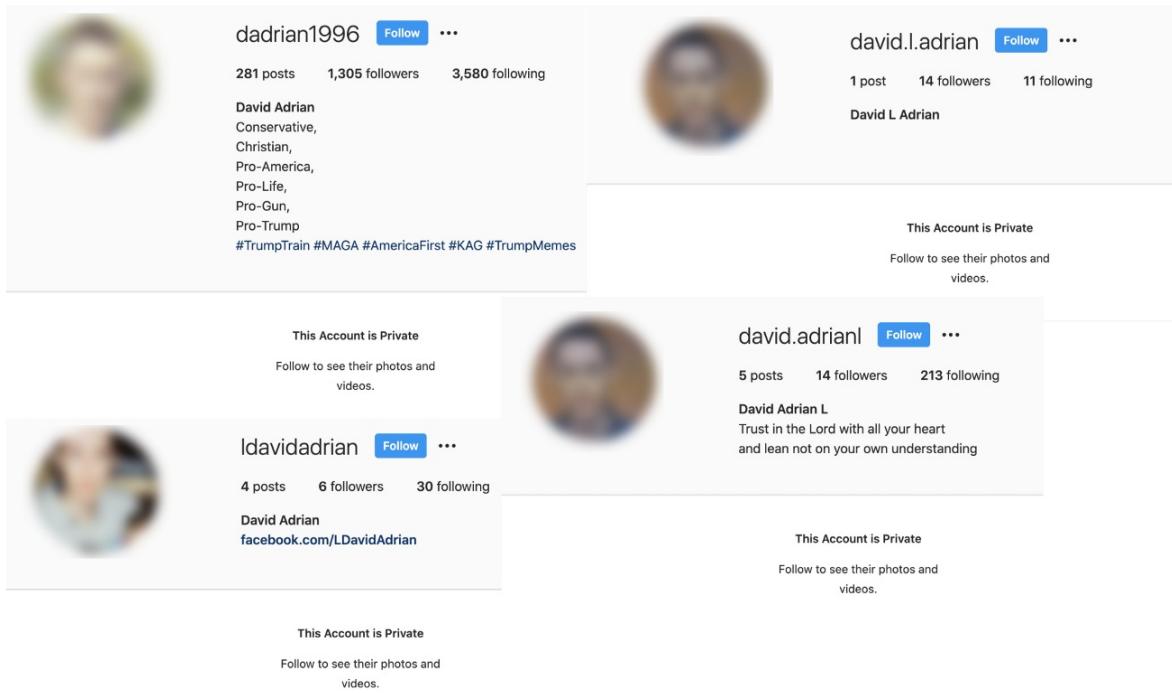
The people behind this network used fake accounts — some of which had

already been detected and disabled by our automated systems — to pose as Americans, amplify and comment on their own content, and to manage Pages including some posing as President Trump fan Pages. This network posted about US domestic news and events, including the upcoming November election, the Trump campaign, support for the campaign by African Americans, conservative ideology, Christian beliefs, and the QAnon network known to spread fringe conspiracy theories. They also frequently reposted stories by American conservative news networks and the Trump campaign.

The open-source clues this network left behind as to its operators or motivations were sparse — but there was ample evidence that it was misrepresenting itself and engaged in inauthentic amplification of pro-Trump messages and imagery. The overall impact of this effort appears limited, as many of the accounts primarily interacted with one another's posts. Some user profiles on both Facebook and Instagram, however, had built up several thousand friends or followers. While many of these followers appeared inauthentic, others seemed like real people. Overall, the network appeared to be targeting pro-Trump conservatives in the United States.

The many versions of David Adrian

A persona named “David Adrian” appeared to be central to the network, with several assets bearing variations of the name across Facebook and Instagram. It is against Facebook’s Community Standards to maintain more than one personal account.



David Adrian's various Instagram profiles. (Source: Instagram)

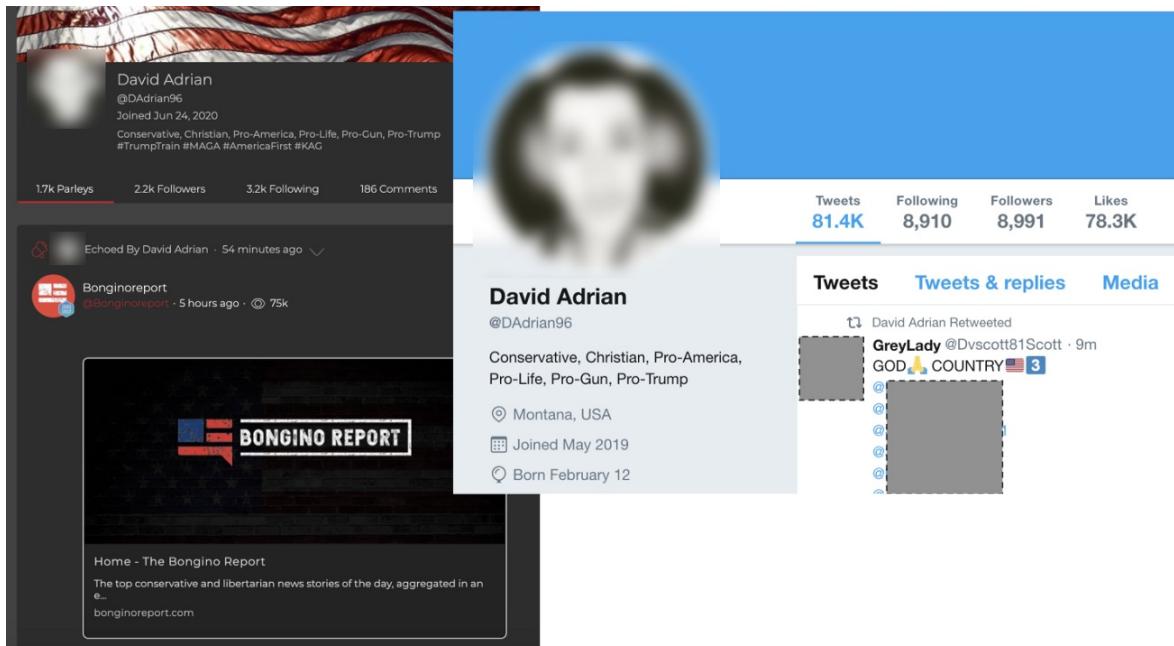
On his primary Facebook account, David Adrian primarily posted official Trump campaign content. He also frequently posted memes to a pro-Trump group called “Trump Train,” a group he apparently joined three weeks ago.

David Adrian primarily reposted official Trump campaign content and pro-Trump memes. (Source: Facebook)

David Adrian consistently portrayed himself as a pro-Trump conservative — he even maintained an account on Parler, a “pro-free speech” conservative social network that has recently gained notoriety as a number of high-profile Republicans have allegedly reduced their Twitter use for the supposedly more

free-speech environment of Parler. On Twitter, a matching account to David Adrian had been suspended, but the DFRLab found a cached version. He tweeted pro-Trump and Christian content and participated in “Trump Trains,” a social media follower growth hacking strategy that independent researcher Erin Gallagher has previously documented as unique to pro-Trump Twitter. The fact that he had a nearly identical number of followers (8,911) and accounts he was following (8,910) indicated that this growth hacking strategy worked — for nearly every follow, he got a follow-back.

There were other signs of inauthenticity across David Adrian’s accounts. For example, while on Facebook, he indicated he was from and living in Romania, on Twitter, he indicated he was in “Montana, USA.” The DFRLab could not confirm that “David Adrian” was a real person — other than his Parler and suspended Twitter account, there were no corroborating records of him online — either in Romania or in Montana, USA. There was also no evidence, however, that his profile content was stolen from somewhere else. As of publication, Adrian’s Parler account is still active and posting content.



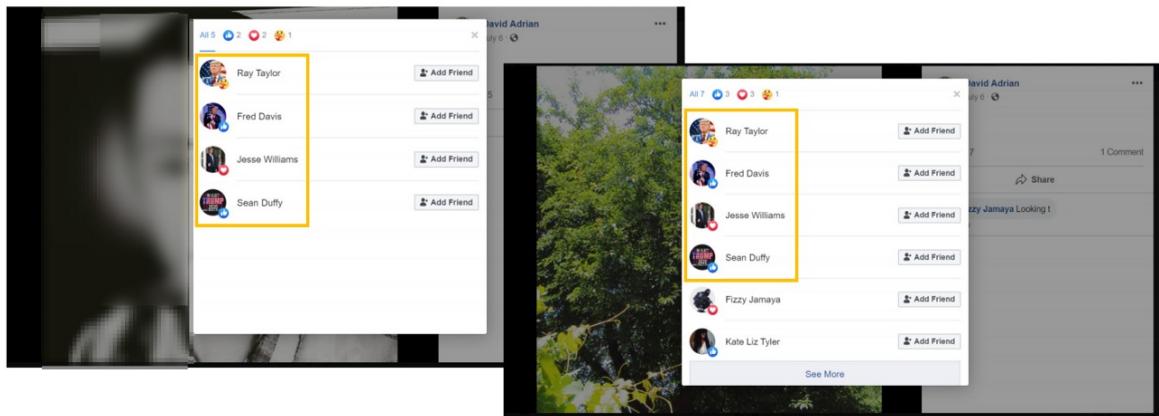
David Adrian’s Parler and (now suspended) Twitter accounts. (Source: Parler, left; Twitter via Google Cache, right)

Coordinated behavior

In addition to the multiple David Adrians on Facebook, other Facebook profiles

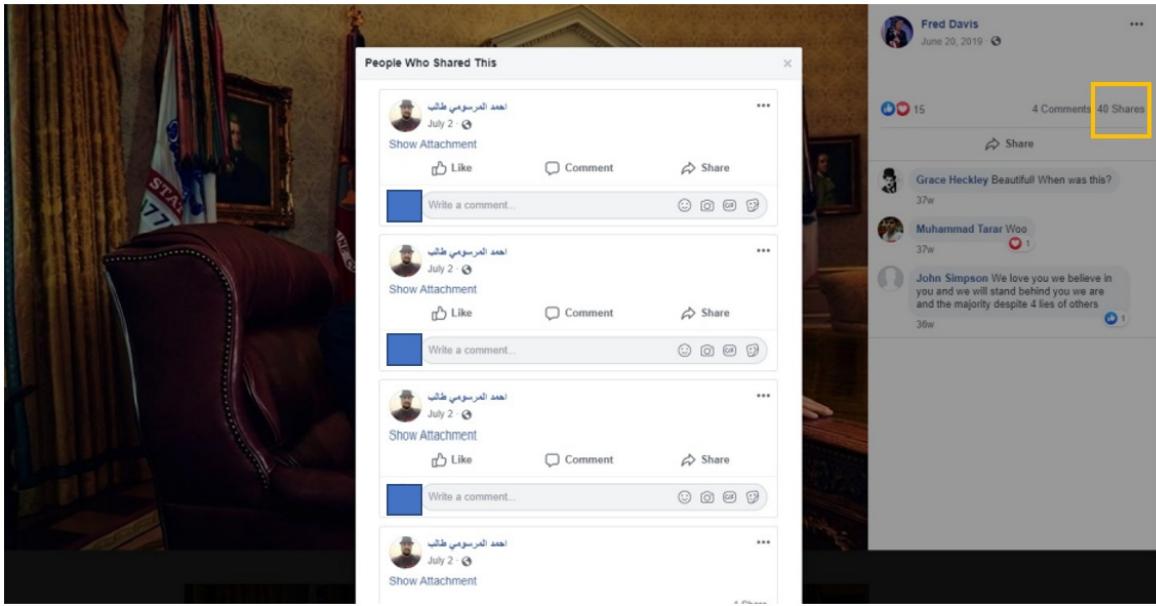
in the network had similar names, such as “David White,” “David Black,” “Dave Black,” “Adrian Adrian,” and “Ady Adrian.” Although some of the profiles did not have public posts, several of the profiles that did largely shared pro-Trump content and a couple shared Christian imagery.

There was some coordinated behavior among many of the accounts, including accounts liking each other’s pictures, identical pro-Trump profile imagery, and friendship ties.



Coordinated likes among accounts on the profile of David Adrian. The yellow box indicates accounts that were in the network. (Source: Facebook)

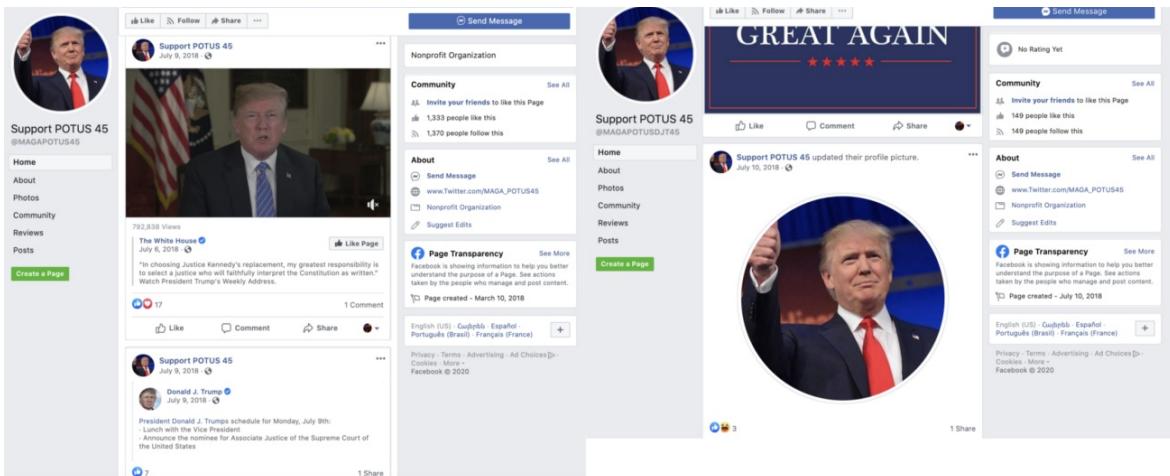
Some of the accounts in the network had posts with numbers of shares that were disproportionate to the other engagement they received. For example, one profile, Fred Davis, had 40 shares on one picture, but the picture only garnered 15 reactions and four comments.



A profile in the network with a disproportionate comment/like-to-share ratio. (Source: Facebook)

Pro-Trump pages

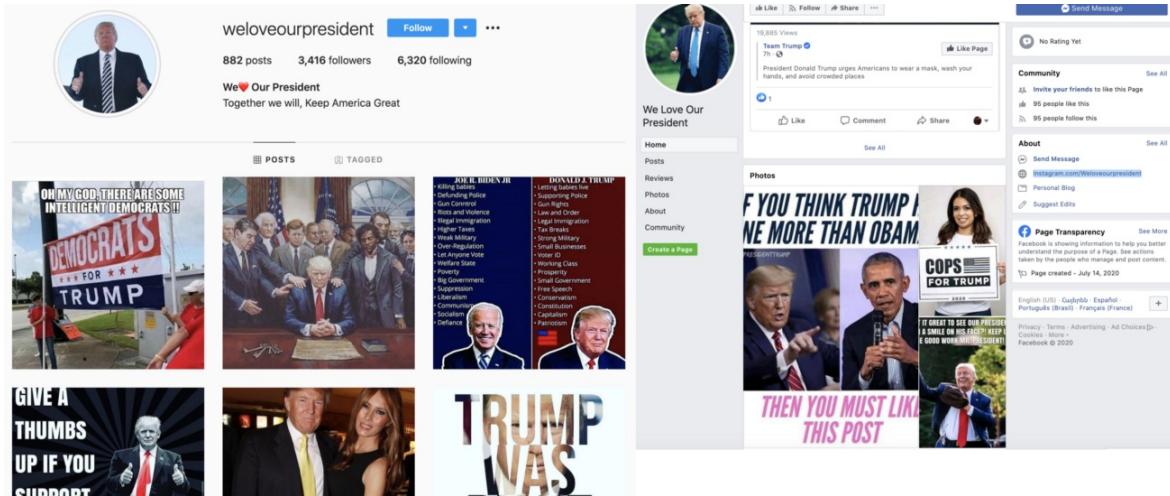
The Facebook pages posted and amplified pro-Trump content. Two of the pages, @MAGAPOTUS45 and @MAGAPOTUSDJT45, almost exclusively shared posts from Trump's official page, with occasional shares from the official White House page. Both pages were active solely in July 2018.



Two duplicate pro-Trump pages created by the network that were active in 2018. (Source: Facebook)

Another page, "We Love Our President," was created in mid-July on Facebook,

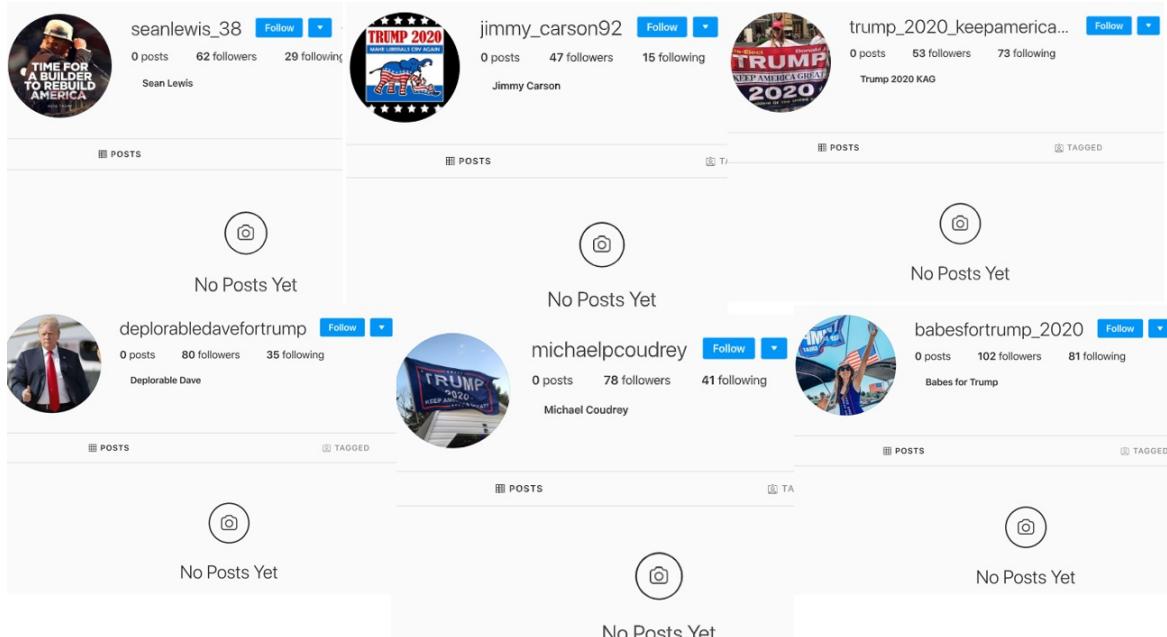
but had a matching Instagram with over 3,000 followers.



An Instagram account in the network, *weloveourpresident*, which that primarily posted pro-Trump memes and, had a matching Facebook page. (Source: Instagram, left; Facebook, right)

Pro-Trump content on Instagram

Out of the 77 Instagram accounts the DFRLab analyzed, only 15 accounts had public posts the had content the DFRLab could access. A majority of the Instagram accounts — seventy 70 percent — had no posts; it is unclear if these accounts deleted previously existing posts or if the accounts never posted at all. Despite the lack of posting, many of these accounts indicated they were pro-Trump through their bios, profile pictures, or handles like “4moreyears_trump.”



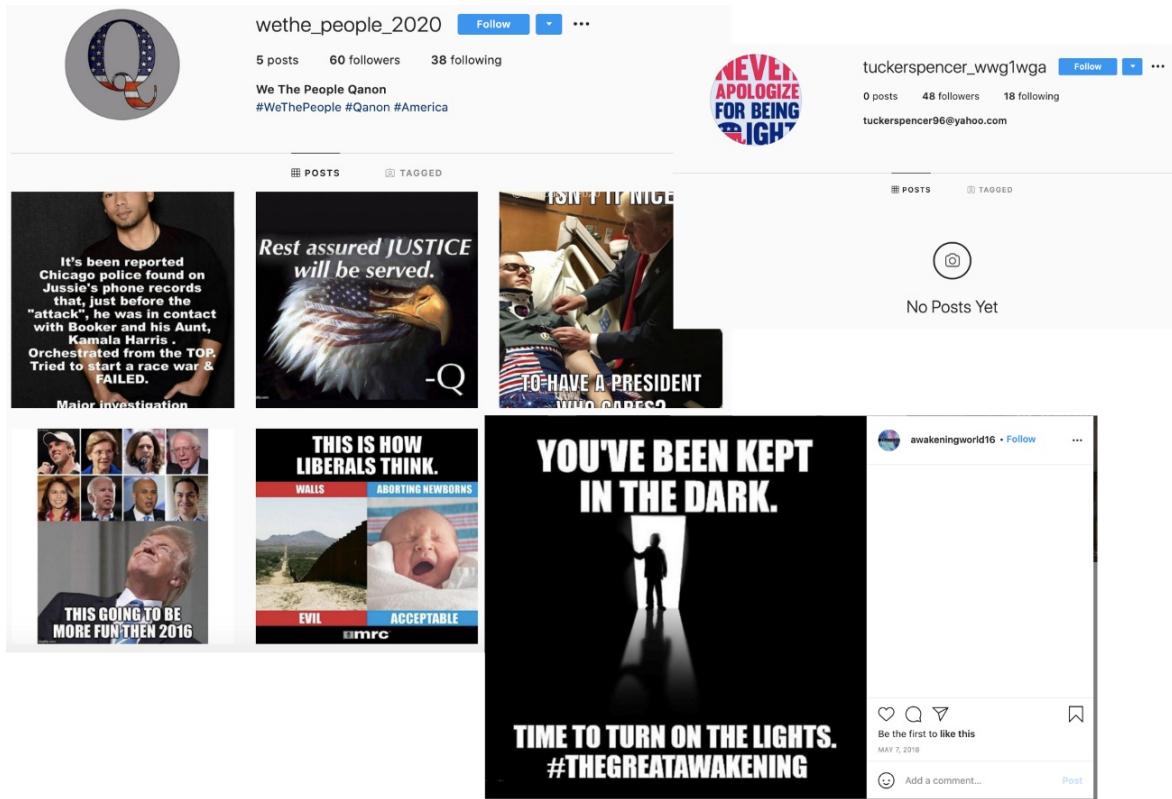
Accounts in the network with no posts that indicated they were pro-Trump through their profile information. (Source: Instagram).

One Instagram account, “blackpeoplevotefortrump,” had two posts, both of which were allegedly of pro-Trump Black people.

Some of the assets posted content that seemed extraneous to the general pro-Trump nature of the network. For example, one account was devoted solely to the television show 13 Reasons Why; another, “veteransfortrump45,” posted more general content about different national days than about political affairs. These accounts may have been intended for audience-building purposes.

QAnon content

On Instagram, several accounts in the network posted QAnon content or invoked the conspiracy theory in their handles. These accounts all had only a few dozen followers each, but they were tied to rest of the network via their follower-following relationships. Curiously, the QAnon accounts were primarily active in 2018 to early 2019, and largely stopped posting after that time.



Instagram accounts tied to the network that invoked QAnon. (Source: Instagram)

This network largely posted pro-Trump memes and amplified Trump campaign pages, adding little, if any, original commentary that would indicate the operators' objectives. It was primarily active in the early half of 2018, but some profiles on both Facebook and Instagram continued to actively post until their removal. Its consistent and enduring devotion to amplifying official pro-Trump campaign content is curious, given Facebook's attribution of the network to Romania.

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Follow along on Twitter for more in-depth analysis from our #DigitalSherlocks.

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

Georgia teens shared photos of maskless students in crowded hallways. Now they're suspended.

[返回目录](#)



In this photo posted on Twitter, students crowd a hallway on Tuesday at North Paulding High School in Dallas, Ga. (AP)

At least two North Paulding High School students have been suspended after sharing images of a school hallway jammed with their mostly maskless peers, and the principal has warned other students against doing the same.

North Paulding High School in Dallas, Ga., about an hour's drive from Atlanta, was thrust into the national spotlight this week when pictures and videos surfaced of its crowded interior on the first and second days of its first week back in session. The images, which showed a sea of teens clustered together with no face coverings, raised concerns over how the district is handling reopening schools during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Facing a fierce online backlash, Paulding County Schools Superintendent Brian Otott told parents and guardians in a letter that the images “didn’t look good.” But he argued that they lacked context about the 2,000-plus student school, where masks are a “personal choice.”

Hannah Watters, 15, wore a mask as she captured the inside of her school. On Wednesday, she ended up with a five-day suspension for violating the district’s student code of conduct, BuzzFeed News reported. The rules bar students from using social media during the day or using recording devices without the permission of an administrator.

“Not only did they open, but they have not been safe,” Watters told BuzzFeed News. “Many people are not following CDC guidelines because the county did not make these precautions mandatory.”

The teen, who said she’d never before run afoul of the code of conduct, told the news outlet that she understood she broke the rules. But she also said she viewed her punishment as overly harsh.

Another anonymous student told BuzzFeed News that he, too, faced disciplinary action for the same reasons.

On Wednesday, Principal Gabe Carmona warned students about “consequences” if they copied Watters and the other student, according to audio obtained by CBS 46.

“Anything that’s going on social media that’s negative or alike without permission, photography, that’s video or anything, there will be consequences,” he told students over an intercom announcement.

Carmona and Otott did not respond to requests for comment.

Watters told BuzzFeed that she and her family intend to fight the suspension. Paulding County’s school code of conduct says the penalty for using social media or recording devices can range from in-school suspension to expulsion, according to the degree of the offense.

On the basis of the district’s policy, Watters’s speech probably would have been better protected had she been off school grounds when she posted a social media message about what happened, said Fred Smith Jr., an associate professor of law

at Emory University.

“From a rights perspective, the question I would have is whether or not the school has exercised similar discipline for other students who have posted anything during the school day, especially instances of people posting favorable things,” he told The Washington Post on Thursday.

A lack of equal enforcement of the rules could pose a potential First Amendment problem for the school because it could show that the institution applies the rules selectively to speech, he said.

“Schools have a compelling interest in ensuring that there are not substantial disruptions on school grounds,” he said. “As long as that’s what going on, the school’s within its rights.”

Otott, the superintendent, emailed a letter to parents on Thursday that stated the district will be providing all staff with cloth masks and face shields and will try to reduce crowding in school hallways during class changes.

Social distancing and the wearing of masks are “strongly encouraged,” but the district has not required either. It notified parents this month that both would be nearly impossible to enforce on school buses and in classrooms.

Otott said he and his staff will be “reviewing student discipline matters” that happened this week, perhaps referring to Watters and the other student.

“This is a new environment for all of us, but I want to reassure our community that we are addressing the issues that have come to light,” he wrote.

The school district is also gaining more unwanted attention after a video shared on Snapchat allegedly showed a student in a virtual classroom using a racial slur, WXIA-TV reported.

One parent told The Post that her daughter wanted to return to North Paulding High School because she missed the social aspect of her schooling. Michelle Salas said her daughter, Chelsea, has been horrified by how the school has handled reopening and by some of her fellow students’ dismissal of safety concerns.

Salas said her daughter has been bullied by classmates for being vocal about her

disappointment in the school's response to the virus and to Watters. But, she said, that will not prevent her from speaking out about what she sees wrong in the school — even though punitive consequences are possible.

Chelsea Janes and Haisten Willis contributed to this report.

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

Lilly Wachowski confirms that The Matrix is an allegory for trans experience

[返回目录](#)



Director Lilly Wachowski accepts award for Outstanding Drama Series onstage during the 27th Annual GLAAD Media Awards at the Beverly Hilton Hotel on April 2, 2016 (Frederick M. Brown/Getty)

Lilly Wachowski, who co-directed and co-wrote *The Matrix* with her sister Lana Wachowski, has confirmed that the film series is a metaphor for the trans experience.

Lana and Lilly Wachowski co-wrote and co-directed the initial *Matrix* trilogy, released between 1999 and 2003, before either had come out as trans, and rumours have swirled that the iconic film series is an allegory for the trans experience.

Critics have suggested that the double life of hero Thomas Anderson/ Neo,

played by Keanu Reeves, could signify a closeted trans existence, the “red pill” could symbolise red estrogen pills, and that the Matrix’s warnings being described by Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) as being “like a splinter in your mind” is a metaphor for gender dysphoria.

In 2016, film critic and YouTuber Film Runner pointed out the parallel that authority figures in the film always only refer to Neo as Mr Anderson, while his “friends use the name he has chosen for himself”.

Now, after years of speculation, Lilly Wachowski has finally confirmed that a trans narrative in *The Matrix* was the sisters’ “original intention”.

In an interview with Netflix Film Club on the 21st anniversary of the first film’s release, she said: “I’m glad that it has gotten out that that was the original intention. The world wasn’t quite ready for it. The corporate world wasn’t ready for it.”

Wachowski continued: “I’m glad people are talking about *The Matrix* movies with a trans narrative.

“I love how meaningful those films are to trans people and the way that they come up to me say, ‘Those movies saved my life.’

“Because when you talk about transformation, specifically in the world of science fiction, which is just about imagination and world-building and the idea of the seemingly impossible becoming possible, that’s why it speaks to them so much.

“And I’m grateful I can be a part of throwing them a rope along their journey.”



Wachowski explained that the character of Switch, played by Belinda McClory, was originally written to be gender fluid, but the idea was ultimately thrown out.

She said: “*The Matrix* stuff was all about the desire for transformation, but it was all coming from a closeted point of view.

“We had the character of Switch, who would be a man in the real world and then a woman in the Matrix, and that’s where [both of] our head spaces were.”

“I don’t know how present my transness was in the background of my brain as we were writing it,” she continued, “but it all came from the same sort of fire that I’m talking about.

“Especially for me and Lana, we were existing in this space where the words didn’t exist, so we were always living in a world of imagination.

“It’s why I gravitated toward science fiction and fantasy and playing Dungeons and Dragons.

“It was all about creating worlds. And so I think it freed us up as filmmakers because we were able to imagine stuff at that time that you didn’t necessarily see

on screen.”

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

Poland ministers continue to fan flames of relentless homophobic hate

[返回目录](#)



The justice minister of Poland is raging over the withdrawal of EU funding to ‘LGBT-free’ zones, claiming it would soon lead to farmers losing their subsidies.

Six towns that signed homophobic ‘LGBT-free’ pledges saw their requests for EU grants rejected last month on the grounds that they were no longer respecting “EU values and fundamental rights”.

Zbigniew Ziobro, who is also the country’s prosecutor general, hit back at the Commission with apoplectic rhetoric.

“The Polish government should... defend Polish governors against the illegal

actions of the European Commission,” Ziobro declared on state TV on Monday (3 August).

“LGBT+ activists have strong EU financial backing, but despite their hooligan excesses, Commissioner Dalli won’t spare a thought for taking away their money,” EU Observer reported.

Although the towns in question were able to apply for grants of up to €150,000 through the EU scheme, the symbolic fines actually amounted to less than €25,000 each.

But for Ziobro, it was only the beginning. He claimed it would lead to the EU Commission one day “taking away [Polish] farmers’ subsidies or money for road infrastructure because Poland didn’t legalise homosexual marriage”.

The financial penalties to homophobic regions shouldn’t have come as a surprise, given the European Parliament’s strident and repeated condemnation of Poland’s ‘LGBT-free’ zones and thinly-veiled threats to reduce funding.

Yet Ziobro wasn’t the only one to react with outrage; several other members of Poland’s ruling party, PiS, also took to the airwaves to denounce the EU.

Janusz Kowalski, the PiS’ deputy minister for state assets, called for a law banning Polish state funds that “pay for any actions and institutions which are aimed at openly promoting LGBT+ ideology”.

“The entire territory of Poland should be designated as an LGBT+ ideology-free zone, since the Polish constitution clearly identifies a family as a relationship between a man and a woman,” he told *Reuters*.

Przemysław Czarnek, another PiS MP, went further.

“There’s no doubt, that LGBT+ ideology grew out of... the same root as Germany’s Hitlerian National Socialism, which was responsible for all the evil of World War II,” came the bizarre claim.

An estimated 10-15,000 gay men was murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

Thug convicted after two-year homophobic campaign against his cousin

[返回目录](#)



A man who waged a two-year homophobic hate campaign against his cousin tried to blame his victim's "bad manners" in a court appearance.

Mahir Eroglu, 45, bombarded his cousin with homophobic abuse in a series of phone calls and text messages over the course of two years.

He was also charged with stalking his cousin, with reported incidents in Best Kebab in Keptie Street, Arbroath and Marmaris in Peterhead.

Eroglu, from Peterhead, Scotland, pleaded guilty yesterday before Sheriff

Gregor Murray at Forfar to the charges, *The Courier and Advertiser* reports.

The man threatened violence against his cousin and told him his business – a kebab shop – would be damaged.

Peterhead man Mahir Eroglu claimed he enacted a two-year homophobic hate campaign because of his cousin's 'bad manners'.

Eroglu's campaign of hate began on 1 March, 2018, and ended on 22 April of this year.

He initially represented himself in court, where he claimed that he had initiated the campaign of hate because of his cousin's "bad manners".

Whatever may be the cultural perception in your homeland of your cousin's relationship, it does not entitle you in this country to seek to abuse and threaten him.

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

Trans Traveller reveals the harsh reality of living through the pandemic

[返回目录](#)



A solidarity fund to combat the effect of the pandemic on isolation and mental health has been launched by Traveller Pride to support trans and non-binary Travellers.

Traveller Pride, which made history at Pride in London last year as the first Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) group to march in a UK Pride parade, announced the new solidarity fund this week.

The UK's network for LGBT+ Gypsies and Travellers said the trans solidarity fund was aimed at counteracting the negative effects of COVID-19 on people's wellbeing, especially given the current negative discourse about trans people in the UK and uncertainty for Travellers with "the Home Office's renewed interest

in criminalising Nomadism”.

“The situation for many of us is bleak right now,” said Tyler Hatwell, the founder of Traveller Pride. “There’s a hostility in the air around our identities which is worsened by the isolation and fear due to COVID.

“Many of us have jobs which have been gutted by lockdown and so we’re pleased to be able to offer some tangible services to people in this moment.”

Traveller Pride also announces free, ‘culturally aware’ LGBT+ therapy service.

As well as the trans and non-binary solidarity fund, Traveller Pride is also launching a free therapy service for LGBT+ Travellers, where people can “be heard”.

“A lot of people may be reluctant to engage in therapy,” Tyler said, “worrying that they will be rejected due to their sexuality or because they’re a Traveller. We are first giving free training to any interested therapists to ensure we are getting people with a good level of cultural awareness.”

Trans Travellers can apply for the solidarity fund – with pots of up to £50 per person available – on the Traveller Pride website. The idea is for funds to be used for something material that will help people feel more at ease in themselves, such as binders, packers, make-up, clothes or anything else that makes transitioning more accessible to trans and non-binary Travellers.

James*, a trans man who wished to remain anonymous out of concerns his neighbours would find out he is trans and a Traveller, told *PinkNews* that being a trans Traveller in the UK right now is like “how a mouse feels when it’s standing on the trap, but hasn’t sprung the wire yet”.

“Any little movement is going to inevitably trip the spring, and we’ll be blamed for not stepping carefully enough, or for being too keen on cheese, rather than putting the blame squarely on the person who chose to convince the public that we’re dangerous vermin, and set the trap,” he said.

Living at the intersection of two minority groups is also “a bit of a lonely feeling”, James added. “There’s a common stat that comfortable, safe,

appropriate housing and land could be provided for every Traveller in the UK with a square mile of land. I worked out that, statistically, every trans Traveller in the UK could fit into an average-sized church hall.”

Travellers ‘particularly vulnerable’ during pandemic, government admits.

In April, the government admitted that Travellers are “particularly vulnerable and have the potential to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19”, but left providing support up to local authorities.

While James told *PinkNews* he’s been “extremely lucky to be housed in bricks”, his friends and family living roadside or on sites have suffered violence, water supplies being turned off – making it difficult to control the spread of COVID-19 infection – evictions, and “blanket injunctions”, which are when a council bans Travellers from stopping anywhere in the local area, often at short notice.

“Obviously,” he added, “during the pandemic, if you’re not allowed to travel, but not allowed to stop, you quickly end up in sticky legal and practical territory.”

And for Travellers who are also trans, there can also be pandemic-related challenges relating to their gender identity.

“Many trans Travellers who usually wouldn’t spend much time at home with their parents have been crammed back into close quarters with them, which is inconvenient at best and an absolute nightmare if your family isn’t supportive, or don’t know that you’re trans,” he said.

Tyler added that the community-led Traveller Pride hopes that the trans solidarity fund and free therapy sessions will “provide some relief, either a space where you can be heard or something material to help you feel more at ease as yourself which can be so vital at a time when we’re so often stripped of personhood in the popular imagination.”

“As a trans person,” James said, “it can feel very vulnerable and disorienting to be seen ‘wrongly’ by others – not to mention that it’s dangerous, when safety can rely on passing as cis.

“Being unable to get away from other people can really heighten that stress – I

know trans men who have gone from binding just at work, to staying in their binder from when they get up at 8am to when they go back to their trailer at bedtime, which is incredibly dangerous, and trans women reporting going through make-up at twice the normal speed, from never getting time alone to go bare-faced.

“Hopefully, the trans solidarity fund will help to cover that kind of expense, as well as maybe providing a bit of a bright spot in a dark time – letting other trans GRT people know that they’re not alone, there are more of us out here, and we want to help them.”

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)