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Bad men, good men, and loving women: gender constructions in British state messaging on counterterrorism, countering violent extremism and preventing violent extremism

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Bad Men, Good Men, and Loving Women: Gender Constructions in British State Messaging on Counterterrorism, Countering Violent Extremism and Preventing Violent Extremism

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ABSTRACT

The United Kingdom presents itself as a leader in counterterrorism (CT), countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE). The Action Counters Terrorism Campaign is a public-facing campaign of the U.K. government aimed at raising the public's awareness of how it can support its CT/CVE/PVE efforts. A narrative analysis of the campaign's YouTube channel (2017–2020) reveals a clear dominant narrative that "ordinary people" can assist in CT/CVE/PVE by being alert and following basic rules (such as Run, Hide, Tell). However, a gendered narrative analysis reveals far more surprising results: The terrorist threat is understood as exclusively male and only men are viewed as at risk of radicalization. Women are predominantly portrayed in relation to men in their lives. Through their love and care, women can support efforts to save men by noticing when "something is wrong." This article reveals how the gendered constructions of the British awareness campaign are so engrained in a powerful metanarrative of gender and political violence that they ignore even widespread public security debates, such as those surrounding British girls and women joining ISIS. It concludes that a narrative analysis must include a gendered analysis to understand the political and security implications of CT/CVE/PVE narratives.

KEYWORDS

Counterterrorism; gender; narrative; CVE/PVE; methodology

Introduction

Messaging and narratives are central to groups using terrorist violence and to states countering terrorist violence. Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and their wider support networks spend a considerable amount of energy and resources in designing and undertaking messaging campaigns. Similarly, state actors also spend human and financial resources in messaging campaigns to counter violent extremist ideologies and to raise public awareness of how to prevent, counter, or prepare for terrorist violence. Often this involves public campaigns using a variety of media and targeting different audiences. Online campaigns of violent extremist organizations—specifically of actors linked to ISIS since its rise in the 2010s—have garnered particular attention in policy circles, the press, and academia.[1] Scholars have also analyzed state narratives in the counter terrorism (CT), countering violent extremism (CVE), and preventing violent extremism (PVE) space, examining the construction of specific ethnic and religious groups (such as Muslim communities in Western Europe or Kurds in Turkey).[2] However, little scholarly attention has been paid to the gender constructions of state narratives.

This article aims to fill this gap by examining two empirical areas that have garnered little attention: state narratives of CT/CVE/PVE aimed at increasing the general public's awareness and, more specifically, gender constructions in these narratives. Indeed, if some analysis has been carried out

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on state narrative campaigns, there is very little literature on the gendered constructions of state narratives.[3] The empirical focus of this article is the Action Counters Terrorism (ACT) campaign of the U.K. government and its online YouTube video campaign between 2017 and 2020. A gendered analysis of this campaign clearly demonstrates why investigating gendered constructions in narratives is necessary to understand the message that is being put forward by states. Furthermore, the analysis identifies important potential security implications of these narratives.

The narrative analysis carried out in this article reveals the dominant narrative of the ACT campaign is rather straight-forward: "ordinary people" can assist in counterterrorism and counter radicalization by being alert and following basic rules, such as *Run, Hide, Tell*. The gendered narrative analysis, however, reveals how this simple narrative put forward by the videos in fact contains a layered and highly problematic construction of gender and violent extremism. By using a mixed methods narrative approach designed specifically for this research, this article shows how official U.K. public information campaigns present an entirely male threat—only men are perpetrators or suspects and only men are at risk of radicalization.[4] Women are most often relegated to support roles of caring for "their men" as wives, daughters, girlfriends, or friends. Men overall are ascribed far more agency than women as perpetrators and suspects but also as heroes and competent civilians. Women mostly play supporting roles or the role of victims, at times incompetent victims who put others at risk.

As such, the gendered analysis is essential to reveal how British authorities—in this case the Counter Terrorism Policing Unit—understand the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. As will be demonstrated in the article, without a gendered analysis of the video campaign, a simple narrative analysis allows for only a very partial view of the authorities' framing. The gendered analysis also allows us to draw out the serious security implications of these narratives. What are the effects of focusing entirely on a male threat and representing women as only victims or secondary characters? What are the implications of presenting women as only relevant because of their relationships with men? Finally, the gendered analysis demonstrates the power of what this article identifies as the "metanarrative" surrounding gender and political violence. This metanarrative, I argue, naturalizes men's violence while presenting women's violence as deviant. It sustains constructions of agential men vs. emotive passive women. Indeed, the gendered constructions in the ACT campaign show that this metanarrative is so powerful that it overrides widespread security concerns raised by girls and women leaving the U.K. to join ISIS since 2015.

This analysis is carried out in four steps. I begin with laying out the theoretical foundations of the analysis, presenting key work in narrative analysis and particularly recent work in feminist security studies examining the narratives surrounding gender and political violence.[5] Here, I draw on the strong body of literature on gender and political violence to devise a "metanarrative" on gender and political violence. I then present an original mixed methods approach that can be used to analyze gender constructions in narratives. Crucially, the paper engages with how gender is assigned and the epistemological problems of assigning agency to another. This article recognizes that ascribing gender is itself a political act. Section three will introduce the U.K. government's ACT campaign and offer a first analysis using descriptive statistics of the campaign's Youtube videos published between 2017 and 2020. It will the use this statistical analysis as a basis for an in-depth qualitative narrative analysis of the video campaign to examine what roles are ascribed to different genders and the impact of these roles. Finally, the concluding section outlines the scholarly and policy implications of the gendered narrative analysis and points at future directions for research.

The article makes two distinct contributions to knowledge, one methodological and one empirical. Methodologically, the article offers an original mixed methods narrative approach that can be used to investigate constructions of power inequalities within narratives, be they based on gender or other social divisions. The methodology aims to be both robust and workable by individual scholars and practitioners. Empirically, the article reveals distinct and problematic gender constructions in U.K. state narratives in CT/CVE/PVE. Aside from having clear scholarly and policy implications for the U.K., these findings are relevant beyond the British context since the U.K. claims to have a leading role in international CT/CVE/PVE policymaking. Indeed, even in 2023 despite strong criticism nationally and internationally, British Home Secretary Suella Braverman claimed in the revised version of the U.K.'s CONTEST Counter-

Terrorism Strategy that "our global allies, and independent experts, recognise the core CONTEST Framework—Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare—to be a world leading counterterrorism programme."[6]

A note on terminology is important, particularly as CT, CVE, and PVE are not clearly defined or delineated areas of policy. Counterterrorism (CT) historically precedes any use of the terms CVE and PVE. It denotes primarily a law enforcement and military response to terrorist violence. CT indeed is mainly related to police (and at times military operations) aimed at uncovering terrorist groups, thwarting their plans, minimizing the impact of attacks or capturing perpetrators after the attacks. Starting in the 2000s, alongside intensive CT operations states and international organizations began to develop what was dubbed a "whole of society" approach to terrorism. This approach argued that before actors become violent "terrorists" they become engaged in "violent extremism." In 2012, terrorism studies doyen Alex Schmid distinguished CT from CVE as follows: "'Countering Violent Extremism' stands for a policy that addresses the propaganda of terrorists and not just their violence. It marks a turn away from a mainly coercive to a more persuasive counter-terrorist strategy whereby the narrative of the terrorists is one target of attack."[7] Narratives are thus central to CVE. Although CVE and PVE are often referred to in unison and are hard to distinguish, PVE brings the idea of challenging violent extremist ideas as well as terrorist actions into a "pre-crime" space. In the U.K., this was captured in the PREVENT programme launched in 2007.[8] PREVENT included "funding of educational and social activities through a counterterrorism remit [. . .] intended to build the 'resilience' of [British Asian] communities to violent extremism—increasing their resistance to problematic ideologies and enabling them to challenge extremist viewpoints."[9] Part of the CVE/PVE agenda is how to avoid actors being "radicalized," leading to the term counter-radicalization being used to label policy in this area.[10] Most relevant for this article, the Action Counters Terrorism campaign has CT, CVE, and PVE aims as will become clear in the analysis below.

It is also important to justify the choice of material under examination. The Action Counters Terrorism Youtube video campaign was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, it is a public facing campaign, the specific aim of which is to raise awareness of issues of CT/CVE/PVE. Secondly, it covers all these policy areas with some videos focusing on how to prevent the recruitment of young people, others on how to behave if someone is already being radicalized, and finally some videos specifically focusing on what to do in case of an attack. The video campaign analyzed here is also representative of the broader ACT campaign, that includes a website and a training course aimed at security officers. Finally, the video campaign offers a wide variety of characters, across various situations (domestic, professional, public), allowing for gender constructions to be presented across these settings.

Excluding Welsh versions, hearing impaired versions, and ten videos pertaining to the Salisbury attacks (not relevant to non-state violent extremism), twenty-six videos were analyzed, the first released in August 2017 and the latest in November 2020 (all videos are listed in the Appendix). The most popular video—one of Bear Grylls urging people to "Run, Hide, Tell" in case of a marauding attack—has some 65,000 views.[11] The least viewed (just over 1,000) is that of Paul Parker urging people to follow instructions in case of an attack at a football stadium.[12]

Gendered narratives

Why do narratives matter and how do they work? Narratives are the way we give meaning to life. "Narratives order our world and are the 'primary way in which human experience is made meaningful.'"[13] Without narratives, one event would follow another without reason or meaning.[14] It is thus through narratives that we understand the world around us as well as constitute our identities—explain to ourselves who we are—and our place in the world. "Everything we know, from making families, to coping with illness, to carrying out strikes and revolutions is at least in part a result of numerous crosscutting relational story-lines in which social actors find or locate themselves."[15] As such, narratives also "guide action," according to sociologist Margaret Somers.[16] People are "guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of projections, expectations, and memories derived"

from multiple narratives that surround us.[17] How members and supporters of violent extremist organizations behave is guided by narratives that mold their projections, expectations, as well as their rationalizations of the past. Similarly, how law enforcement officials, private security contractors and "ordinary citizens" respond to a perceived or actual threat of terrorist violence is also molded by narratives.

It is important to first understand what is meant by the term narrative. Narratives have the following key elements: a beginning, a middle, and an end, with causal emplotment linking the three.[18] Narrative analysis finds meaning in how events/elements are connected, temporally and spatially. Narratives also work at different levels of human relations. There are personal narratives—through which individual lives are given meaning to. Individuals do not however have complete freedom in writing their own personal narratives. Indeed, these are "crafted out of existing stories that circulate in certain contexts."[19] These existing stories are public/institutional narratives that "transcend the individual: they are the cultural stereotypes that exist in the wider communities of interpretation."[20] Public narratives range from within a family, to a local community, to a workplace, to a nation. The narratives "are not neutral but shape and are in turn shaped by particular understandings of the world which tend to prioritise one meaning over another."[21]

Public narratives are often easy to identify. There is a public "Blitz" narrative of resilience in the face of adversity in the U.K. for example. It often starts with World War II and ends with a contemporary instance of resilience, with British people as the protagonists. The plot demonstrates their capacity to overcome adversity without breaking their spirit or "making too much of a fuss."[22] Football clubs have narratives (for example Liverpool or either of the Glasgow teams), as do schools (Eton), businesses (Ben & Jerry's, Amazon), and communities (Irish in Boston, Copts in Egypt). These narratives are relatively well known and most importantly are identified *as narratives*.

Metanarratives on the other hand are so broadly accepted that they are often not recognized as narratives as "they usually operate at a presuppositional level . . . beyond our awareness."[23] These are the narratives "that transcend the boundary of an individual profession or discipline. Metanarratives may include the master narratives of contemporary social life, such as democracy, freedom or the doctrine of progress" or they may include "sets of understandings about sexual difference."[24] By being so broadly accepted, metanarratives can permeate and inform public narratives in very different (and indeed opposing) social and political settings.

All narratives are gendered. Indeed, there is no social action that is "gender-free." Gender is understood here as the social and historical framing of how men, women, and non-binary gender identities should behave and how they should be distinguished from one another. It frames all aspects of life: from how one sits, to what sports one plays at school, to what career path one is recommended, to whether one is seen as a credible candidate for high political office. Gender relations are power relations. More specifically, violence and in particular political violence are profoundly gendered. This includes the obvious gender-based violence carried out by armed actors, but also recruitment strategies for men and women, and the roles they are allowed to take up in armed groups. Gendered constructions can also be seen in state responses to terrorism, such as in who is identified as a potential terrorist in threat assessments and who is searched or detained.

Considerable work has already been carried out on gender and political violence. This article draws on the work of numerous feminist and critical security scholars, including Cynthia Enloe, Laura Sjoberg, Caron Gentry, Annick Wibben, Ayelet Harel-Shalev, Alice Martini, Victoria Basham, Raquel da Silva, Elizabeth Pearson and Cynthia Weber among others.[25] These scholars have carried out extensive primary and secondary research on gender and political violence and I argue that by examining this body of work as a whole, one can identify the dominant metanarrative on gender and political violence. These research projects focus on a variety of different aspects of the intersection between gender and political violence. Some of this work focuses on masculinity and violence, some on military women, and some on women in non-state armed groups. However, what emerges from this body of literature as a whole is the "cultural dominance" of a particular narrative on gender and

political violence.[26] Although no single work necessarily includes all elements, a deep reading of this body of work leads to the following summary of the dominant metanarrative.

The metanarrative is as follows:

> Sex and gender are presented as fixed and immutable. They are confused and broadly seen as determined by biology. Men's violence is viewed as unexceptional and is often linked to male "natural" (likely biological) factors. Women's violence on the contrary is seen as exceptional, again often for biological reasons. Some men are more prone to violence, either because they are political or because they cannot control their impulses. Women are guided by their bodies and are understood as embodied actors to a much greater degree than men who are understood as cognitively-led. When men are led by their bodies/instincts/emotions, they are feminized. Heteronormativity is central to the metanarrative. The metanarrative presents women as driven to violence by how they relate to sex with men: either by a deviant desire to please men or by a deviant determination to reject men. Related to this, men are seen as independent actors capable of agency, while women are understood as in relation to men. This can be found in how women are described (mothers, wives, daughters of men) and in relation to their motivations for engaging in violence (to please men or because they fear them). Men are understood as political actors while women are understood as social actors. This can be noted in the narratives surrounding their rationale for using violence, in the roles ascribed to them in violent groups (male agents vs female recruiters and connectors) and in the policies designed to deal with them (political negotiations with and criminalization of men, compared to social welfare programmes for women).

None of the narratives include every element of this metanarrative. However, this article argues that the metanarrative summarized above offers the general lines upon which the relationship between gender and political violence is broadly understood and upon which public/institutional and personal narratives are constructed. The public and personal narratives are of course context-specific, but they are sustained or on the contrary delegitimized by the broader metanarrative.[27] The gender/political violence metanarrative is itself part of the broader metanarrative on gender hierarchy that sustains and reflects gender essentialism and the subordination of women across social contexts.[28] Importantly, metanarratives are "present in society as commonly known "truths." They are "widely spread, frequently told and rarely questioned."[29] I argue here that this metanarrative is not only widespread but also largely unnoticed, except by feminist and critical security scholars who have worked to highlight its dominance in a variety of public and personal narratives. Importantly, although these scholars have collectively produced the research on which I have extrapolated this metanarrative, this article is the first to summarize and state this metanarrative explicitly. This direct identification of the metanarrative on gender and political violence is essential for this research. It also aims to make a broader contribution to those investigating other aspects of gender and political violence.

In this article, I examine whether and to what degree the gender/political violence metanarrative can be identified in the ACT videos. To do so, it is important to first grapple with the question of whether and how one can *assign* a gender identity to another. Assigning a gender identity to another is both ordinary and deeply problematic. I regularly assign a gender identity to every person I meet, while at the same time recognizing that gender is not a binary concept and that the person may not identify with the gender identity I have assigned to them. In their article on how gender can be researched, Anna Lindqvist, Maria Gustafsson Senden and Emma Renstrom offer some very useful insights on how to operationalize the study of gender.[30] They remind us that "gender is a non-essential category which instead is repeatedly performed based on societal norms."[31] It is performed by the person whose gender is being determined and by those doing the determination. In texts, it is also performed by those who are authoring texts (be they written, oral, video, etc). In the case of the ACT videos, gender is performed by the authors and producers of the video campaign, by the actors in the films, and by the audience who categorize characters also along gender lines.

Unlike most research in social sciences, this research does not conflate sex and gender.[32] As such I coded for the categories of men/women/non-binary gender identities rather than male/female. However, due to the material that I am researching, I do use a cisnormative framework to code gender in the videos. This needs to be explained and justified. "The term cisnormativity designates the idea that sex and gender are aligned, which includes the underlying assumption that all women have bodily attributes associated with a female sex, such as

a vagina, while all men are presumed to have bodily attributes associated with a male sex, such as a penis."[33] More broadly, this means attributing a gender identity based on the physiological/bodily aspects of an individual. These bodily aspects are then aligned, in cisnormative frameworks, with "social gender in terms of norm-related behaviours and gender expressions."[34] This approach to gender ignores gender identity and self-defined gender. It is therefore cisnormative.

The reason behind this analytical choice is simple: The ACT video campaign clearly adopts a cisnormative position in its representation of gender in the videos. All characters are presented through gender stereotypes for men and women. The campaign clearly wants the audience to identify some characters as men (they have short hair, they are wearing clothes stereotypical for men, they have facial hair, etc) and some characters as women (they almost exclusively have long hair, they wear clothes that are associated with women, as well as jewelry and make-up). As such, I am coding representations of men and women as per the authors of the campaign. I am not stating that they *are* a certain gender but rather that we are *meant to understand* them as a specific gender as per the intentions of the campaign's authors.

A mixed methods narrative approach

With our theoretical framing outlined above, it is now possible to present what is meant in this article by a gendered narrative analysis. To the core, this entails an *analysis of gender power dynamics in narratives*. It begins with the basic narrative analytic enquiry, which requires researchers "to *locate* the actors as characters in their social narratives and to *emplot* them in a temporal and spatial configuration of relationships and practices."[35] This means investigating the "network of relationships and institutions in which actors are embedded."[36] I begin this investigation with a descriptive statistical analysis of *who* is in the narrative, what role they are assigned in the narrative (whether beneficent or maleficent); and how much agency they are accorded.

I thus coded all primary and secondary characters in the videos according to their: gender identity (man, woman, non-binary, and undetermined (for characters whose face or body is covered in such a way that it cannot be determined)); level of importance of the character in the narrative (1—main character (excluding suspects/perpetrators); 2—main antagonist (suspect or perpetrator); 3—secondary actor); level of agency ascribed to the character (1—ultimate decision-marker/authority; 2—conscious decision-maker; 3—unconscious agent; 4—follower, victim,); role played by the character (suspect, perpetrator, security agent, state agent, observer, victim, relative/friend, third party); and whether the character had a positive (beneficent or helpful) or negative (maleficent or harmful) or neutral impact on the narrative. I then added a brief description of the character and role they play in the narrative. This coding allowed me to undertake a descriptive statistical analysis of the video campaign, assessing the gender balance and relating it to agency and role assigned in the narratives.

Subsequently, each video was analyzed qualitatively for its overall narrative, the gender constructions in each narrative, and the function these gender constructions play in the narrative. In practice, this means identifying the central actors and the plot. How are the actors part of a meaningful movement from the beginning to the middle to the end of the narrative? This will reveal how the actors are related to one another and the power relations between the actors. In this project, we are specifically searching for the gender dynamics of these narratives. This involves examining specific mentions of gender and sex (men, women, male, female, transgender, gender non-binary) and sexual orientation (heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality). It also means investigating the roles they play within the narrative (beneficent, maleficent, helpful, harmful or neutral) and whether and how their actions advance the plot. As will be seen in the next two sections, the combination of a descriptive statistical analysis that offers an overall picture of gendered constructions in the campaign and an in-depth qualitative analysis reveals different but reinforcing evidence of dominant gender constructions.

Gender and agency in the ACT campaign

Before undertaking an analysis of the gender dynamics, one must situate these within the overall narrative. The ACT campaign has a very clear dominant narrative that tells the story of how "ordinary life is potentially under threat" (beginning), but if you "follow basic steps and rules" and "actively monitor your surroundings" (middle), you can "make a difference and keep yourself and others safe" (end). The best example of this narrative can be found in the "Communities Defeat Terrorism" video released in March 2018.[37] Here several "ordinary people" going about their lives (running, walking through a market, serving tables in a café, buying tools in a hardware shop) see someone behaving suspiciously and report it. The message flashing on the screen is: "If you see something that doesn't feel right, report it. Communities defeat terrorism." Although this is the clearest example of this dominant narrative, it is present is a vast majority of the ACT videos. Indeed, eighteen of the twenty-six videos begin with a scene of ordinary life under threat and fourteen out of twenty-six finish with safety being reached through the following of rules and procedures.

This dominant narrative is countered but also reinforced by the single contesting narrative that can be found in the "Run, Hide, Tell" videos. These are black and white close-up interviews with notable people in the U.K.: Adventurer Bear Grylls, rugby player James Haskell, Taekwondo Olympian Jade Jones, former Royal Marine and television personality Ant Middleton, and football player Jamie Vardy.[38] Here the narrative begins with exceptional human beings (athletes, soldiers, adventurers), holding back on their instinct to engage potential assailants to follow the rules (the middle), and keep themselves and everyone else safe (the end). This series will be analyzed in further depth later as it presents an interesting gendered construction. What is worth noting here is that although these videos differ from the dominant narrative of "ordinary people" following the rules, they also reinforce them by stressing that even "extraordinary people" need to follow the rules.

The videos present 119 characters (excluding people who have no role aside from passing by in public places), seventy-nine of them are identifiable as men (66 percent), thirty-eight as women (32 percent), none as non-binary, and two as undetermined as they cannot be identified based on their gender (2 percent). In terms of the importance of characters, thirty-eight are the main characters, eighteen are suspects/perpetrators, and sixty-three are secondary characters. Finally, in terms of levels of agency, only three characters qualify as ultimate decision-maker/authority, eighty-six characters are "conscious decision-makers" at least once in the video, twenty-two characters act as "unconscious agents," and eight characters only act as followers or victims.

More revealing is to relate these findings to one another (Table 1). Breaking down the importance of characters along gender lines shows that for the main characters (excluding suspects and perpetrators), 67 percent are men and 33 percent are women. Even more relevant however is that Category 2 characters—suspects and perpetrators—are all men. No woman is represented as a threat or potential threat in any of the videos, and thus the notion of threat is entirely masculine in this campaign. This also means that men represent 78 percent of the main characters and suspect/perpetrators.

Analyzing agency along gender lines (Table 2) gives a similar result: Men represent 74 percent of all characters that are attributed any form of conscious decision-making. Thus, a descriptive statistical analysis of the characters in the videos reveals that there is a clear gendered understanding of suspects and perpetrators. They are all men. Men represent most of the main characters (even excluding the suspects and perpetrators) and are overall attributed considerably more agency than women.

Table 1. Gender breakdown of main characters

	Men	Women
Main characters	24	12
Suspects/perpetrators	18	0
Main characters + suspects/perpetrators	42	12

Table 2. Gender breakdown for levels of agency

	Agency			
	1	2	3	4
Men	2	62	12	3
Women	1	22	10	5

Men's predominance in agency is also reflected in the gender breakdown of the characters when analyzed on a beneficent/maleficent spectrum (Table 3). Here, I distinguish between five different categories: beneficent for characters which intentionally carry out actions that have a positive effect ("do good") in the narrative; maleficent for characters who intentionally have a negative effect on the narrative; helpful for characters who unwittingly do good; harmful for characters who unwittingly have a negative effect; and neutral for actors that have neither a positive nor negative effect.

As expected, men are far more agential in the beneficent and particularly in the maleficent category since all suspects and perpetrators are men. The only woman who is maleficent is a woman who bullies a young boy at school. No one can be seen to be "helpful"—do good unwittingly—which also reflects the dominant narrative that you have to act to do good. Particularly interesting is the predominance of women in the "harmful" category. As we shall see in the qualitative analysis of the narratives, women more often than men unwittingly act in the way that is negative or detrimental, either by failing to act positively through ignorance or panic, or by putting others at risk by not following the rules.

Although these basic statistics are revealing, narrative analysis has to go well beyond the gender breakdown of main characters, suspects, and the attribution of agency according to gender lines. It requires a qualitative analysis of the narratives themselves—the stories being told—and what functions gender performs within these stories. Here, I will examine the principal gendered constructions of the dominant narrative of the videos—identified earlier as "the existence of danger in ordinary lives that can be countered by ordinary people being alert and following the rules." I shall then examine the gendered constructions of the contesting narrative—in the "Run, Hide, Tell" videos—which as noted above contrasts but at the same time reinforces the dominant narrative.

If a simple quantitative analysis immediately reveals that only men are understood as potential suspects and/or perpetrators of terrorism, a qualitative analysis also reveals that only men as seen as at risk of radicalization. From the faceless (but clearly masculine) animated character of a young man being pulled into a computer screen[39] to the fictionalized short film of a young man struggling with low self-esteem who is being pushed into carrying out an attack by a man online,[40] all these characters are men.

Their masculinity is dealt with in different ways though. In the video of the young man being urged to carry out an attack ("Staying Safe Online—Radicalisation"), the narrative indicates that the main character feels undermined in his pride. He remembers being called "a total loser" by a young woman.[41] His handler stresses that they see his (masculine) strength, by saying "Come one! Remember who you are! You're not a loser anymore!" The handler urges him to "Be strong—remember everything we've been through and taught you. You make us proud tomorrow, right?" Arguably, the handler is positioned in the narrative as trying to restore the young man's injured masculinity. This narrative is clearly aimed at countering violent extremism from the extreme right, which is widely believed to recruit young men searching for comfort in violent forms of hypermasculinity. This gendered construction is not necessarily heteronormative as can be seen with the popular British soap opera Hollyoaks video in which the character being radicalized, Ste Hay, is gay.[42] His recruiter however uses arguments of "male bonding" and stereotypical language associated with

Table 3. Gender breakdown on beneficent/maleficent spectrum

	Beneficent	Maleficent	Helpful	Harmful	Neutral
Men	51	18	0	3	7
Women	23	1	0	8	6

masculinity to draw Ste in. "Take him to a match, show him a good time and we become his best mates. I want him to know that the only place he belongs is with us." A real-life testimony is then given to add factual grounding to the Hollyoaks video, showing a young man ("John") who left the extreme right. He says: "When I was in the far-right, I was very angry, very aggressive." Interestingly, it was a similar form of male bonding with his PREVENT point to contact that drew him out of the extreme right: "We have very similar interests, similar sports and things like that. Just building a good connection with him is what really made me listen to him." Thus, although there is some variation in the videos, radicalization is seen as a fundamentally male experience linked to anger, frustration and the need to prove one's masculinity.

When men are not threats or in danger of being radicalized, they play four principal roles: planners and implementers of policy (particularly PREVENT); security officials, directly challenging suspects/perpetrators; observers who report suspicious behaviour; and as *active* victims who take themselves and others to safety. The latter two categories are particularly present, with many videos portraying men as thwarting threat and danger by following the rules. Indeed, numerous videos present civilian men ("ordinary men") as remaining calm during attacks or when noticing something suspicious. They respond quickly, often directing others to follow instructions. In the animated video "What to do in a Weapons Attack," a young man (Lett) is asked whether he hid during the attack: "No I made it outside and I kept running. I didn't know where you guys were. I found somewhere safe to stop. I called the Police and I told them everything I knew."[43] His friend, a young black woman ("Edie") says: "The Police rescued us. Maybe it was you who sent them?" Lett is thus ascribed considerable agency (running fast, being aware of when it is safe to stop, following the rules, and reporting "everything he knew" to the police). He is not a victim, but rather a "heroic ordinary man." Male security officers, particularly armed police entering buildings after a marauding attack, speak loudly and with authority but remain completely controlled. "You definitely do everything they tell you to do," comments Edie after being led out with her hands in the air by armed police.

How do these roles differ from those given to women? As analyzed earlier, women are neither threats nor in danger of being radicalized in these videos. They do play several other roles, some more agential than others. The principal roles are: supporters, particularly emotional supporters keen to help young men avoid radicalization through care and love; victims, who sometimes do not follow the rules and put other people at risk; observers, who report on activities that they recognize as suspicious; in fewer cases, as active victims, who follow the rules but take the lead and help other victims stay safe during an attack; and finally, some women are presented as law enforcement officers.

The third, fourth and fifth categories of women are very similar in those of men, although with some slight differences. Indeed, women observers often report to men, who then act upon the information. In only one video, "What to do in a Weapons Attack" does a man report to a woman police officer for her to act upon the information.[44] Otherwise, women observers are generally shown as noticing suspicious behaviour and alerting authorities (through a call, text, website, or in person). In the clearest case of a woman being ascribed agency ("conscious decision-maker"), a woman is seen as taking the lead to herd two other civilians to hide and barricade themselves in a hotel room during a marauding attack in a holiday resort abroad.[45] She plays the role of the competent civilian described above for men. She is controlled and effective and clearly there to demonstrate the importance of following the rules. She is an "ordinary heroine."

Women however mainly play roles not ascribed to men. Women are represented as capable of recognizing suspicious behaviour in their loved ones—men. Indeed, one of the key gender constructions in the dominant narrative is that of women using their instincts and their widely attributed inclination to care for others. In one of the latest videos to be released, the animated ACT Early Video, a woman (mother, sister, girlfriend) is "worried" about her "loved one" who "could be drawn down a dangerous path."[46] Interestingly, the woman police officer who arrives at the home is there to "give advice and guidance." The police officer is presented as a reassuring and compassionate character, who tilts her head, nods as she holds on to a cup of tea, and most importantly points the young man toward the right path when he reaches a crossroad.

This association of women with care and emotions emerges most clearly when contrasting the videos of short speeches by two senior police officers, one woman and one man. In "Staying Safe at UK Music Festivals—#BeSafeBeSoundCampaign" Deputy Assistant Commissioner Lucy D'Orsi speaks straight to the camera, saying:

> Festivals are really exciting times. You know we all like going to a festival. It's about how you can do that safely and look after yourself and your friends when you are going to these events. I don't want people to be alarmed when they go to a festival, I want people to enjoy themselves, but I want people to be alert. If you are at any of these events and see something suspicious, I need you to report it immediately, either to the police or to security staff. I need you to act.[47]

This is not necessarily a surprising text in itself. However, the gendered construction becomes clearer when contrasted with the next video, "Together we've got security wrapped up—Winter 2018," with a very similar statement made by Chief Superintendent Nick Aldworth.[48] In both videos, the senior police officers look straight at the camera and make a statement about how to behave in crowded places (summer music festivals in the former and shopping for Christmas in the latter). Aldworth however says:

> The winter campaign recognizes that this time of year there are lots more people going out and about doing their Christmas shopping or going out for Christmas parties and such like. And that of course creates crowded places. We know that terrorists like to attack crowded places and it feels appropriate that at this time of year, we encourage people to be more aware, to look out for each other, and to help us combat, and deter, and disrupt terrorism.

Aldworth speaks of fact: "We know that" this behaviour will happen and that therefore it feels (he does not feel, "it feels") appropriate to "encourage people" to be attentive to "combat, and deter, and disrupt terrorism." D'Orsi, on the other hand, makes an emotional appeal, indeed a personal emotional appeal. She does not "want people to be alarmed," and "want[s] people to enjoy themselves." For this, she "needs" people to report anything suspicious, she "needs" people to act. These may seem as inconsequential or coincidental and there is no reason to believe that the videos were designed to ascribe factual analysis to a man and emotional care and need to a woman. Nevertheless, as noted in the discussion on the metanarrative above, the gendered constructions of these videos reflect the broader metanarrative on gender and political violence, resulting is the reproduction of the man = fact/woman = emotion trope.

Another prevalent role for women is that of passive victim, or worse still victim who puts others at risk. This emerged in women's prevalence in the "harmful" category of characters as highlighted above. Women in various videos demonstrate great fear—particularly during marauding attacks—but also a lack of self-control. In "Stay Safe: Firearms and Weapons Attack #ActionsCountersTerrorism," a young man has to repeatedly tell women to be quiet so as to not attract the attention of the assailants.[49] One woman is clutching her handbag although the rule is to leave one's belongings behind.

Edie's behaviour in "What to do in a Weapons Attack" is particularly problematic.[50] She first mistakes the shots for fireworks and then does not run because she starts taking pictures of the attack. Nur, a young man with Edie, has to urge her to "Stop Edie! We need to go, come on, let's go now" while pulling on her arm to get her to move. Although, it makes sense that mistakes are shown in the videos to illustrate what not to do, it is primarily women who make these mistakes and it is women who make the most egregious mistakes.

This dominant narrative and its gendered constructions are further reinforced by the single contesting narrative that can be found in the "Run, Hide, Tell" series of six videos.[51] These are videos intended to highlight how exceptional individuals—four men (Ant Middleton, Bear Grylls, James Haskell, and Jamie Vardy) and two women (Jade Jones and Deputy Commissioner D'Orsi)—would follow the rules despite their exceptional strength, skill, or training. The men make clear hypermasculine statements: Haskell says he has "tackled beasts," Vardy has "fought my way up to the top," Middleton has been "an elite soldier," and Grylls has "climbed the summit of Everest." The women do not mention their achievements: Jones says she's "trained in Taekwondo for sixteen years" while D'Orsi acts as

a messenger rather than an active subject by saying: "Run, Hide, Tell. These are the message that save lives and hopefully have a lasting impact on young people and their families."

Although the overall narrative of these videos differs from the dominant one—by presenting exceptional people holding back from their instincts in order to follow the rules of ordinary people—the gendered constructions of the dominant narrative are reinforced. The hypermasculinity of the men presented in this series is particularly emphasized (the adventurer, the sportsman, the soldier) with them underlining their superior strength. The women, despite their superior strength and skill, stress either their training or simply pass on the message. Jones indeed could have said she is an Olympic Gold medalist in Taekwondo and D'Orsi could have mentioned her role in a past police operation. This choice was not made and although they are ascribed agency, it is a reduced agency compared to the men in the same series.

These narratives are public and institutional narratives. They "transcend the individual: they are the cultural stereotypes that exist in wider communities of interpretation."[52] In this case, they are public institutional narratives attributable to the U.K. authorities. Importantly, they are "not neutral but shape and are in turn shaped by particular understandings of the world which tend to prioritise one meaning over another."[53] Although this is only one part of the U.K. government's narrative campaign on violent extremism, it nonetheless reveals the gendered meanings that are prioritized. To summarize the gendered construction of the campaign: Only men are potential threats to security and only men are vulnerable to radicalization. Stronger men—good men who are also strong enough to resist radicalization—can actively counter these threats by following the rules. Women are caring and therefore can notice changes in the men they love. This is also true of women who are given agency as security actors. Women however generally play the role of observers, who can report their concerns. Many women are victims and some of them do not follow the rules during attacks putting others at risk.

Similarities between the metanarrative on gender and political violence and the gendered constructions of the ACT campaign are glaring. Men's violence is viewed as unexceptional—indeed, the norm—while women's violence is deemed as such an aberration that it is not even contemplated. Some men are more prone to violence because of their lack of control and their need for reassurance in their masculinity. Men are independent and rational actors—particularly "good men" who assess a situation and then act according to the rules. Women instead are relational actors primarily governed by their emotions. They care for their loved ones or, in the case of Lucy D'Orsi, for the broader public more generally. Women's emotional nature also makes them a threat to themselves and others as they do not always follow the rules. There are no characters with non-binary gender identities and men and women are represented as markedly distinct categories.

Not all elements of the metanarrative are present. Hypermasculinity, for example, is presented in the ACT video campaign both positively and negatively. The fear of not achieving (negative) forms of hypermasculinity is seen as a reason for men to be vulnerable to radicalization, but a (positive) hypermasculinity that can be controlled (that of the soldier, the adventurer and the sportsman) is valorized. There is no direct reference of heteronormativity and one of the main characters being radicalized is openly gay. Nevertheless, heteronormativity is seen as the basis of much of women's agency as they can notice changes in "their men"—husbands, sons, etc—through their care and love for them.

Thus, a gendered analysis of the narratives in the ACT video campaign reveals the extraordinary power of the gender/political violence metanarrative identified at the start of this article. These videos were released between 2017 and 2020 when the political and media narratives surrounding violent extremism focused on the role of girls and women in violent organizations, in particular ISIS. Alice Martini (2018), who analyzed the gender and Neo-Orientalist constructions in discourses on women who had joined ISIS, found 245 articles between 2014 and 2017 about "jihadi brides" in just three mainstream British newspapers (The Guardian, The Telegraph, and the Independent). The issue of girls and women traveling to Iraq/Syria to join ISIS, how to prevent their travel, and how to counter radicalization was very much in the public discourse before and while the ACT YouTube campaign was being designed, produced, and released. The role of women in ISIS was again at the centre of the

political debate in 2019 when Shamima Begum, one of the British girls who traveled to Iraq/Syria in 2015, asked to return to the U.K. She had her British citizenship revoked leading to a long court case and a widespread public debate on whether British citizens could return from Iraq/Syria and on the implications of denationalization. Despite this intense political and media debate, the metanarrative that excludes women from the categories of "perpetrator/suspect" and "at risk of radicalization" persisted in the ACT campaign. This research thus demonstrates the power of the metanarrative in overriding immediate political debates.

The lack of gendered analysis in the design of the campaign risks also undermining the very aim of the ACT campaign: to raise awareness of the risks of radicalization and the threats of terrorist attacks. In an awareness campaign, what are the risks of presenting only men as potential threats? Does this representation not undermine the aim of helping "ordinary citizens" be alert to the current threats of terrorist attacks, be they from the extreme right or from radical Islamist ideologies? This is all the more concerning since these videos also form a key part of the online ACT training module for private security actors. Furthermore, what are the risks for families and others if they only identify young men as at risk of radicalization? We have seen how an increasing number of girls and young women left their homes to join ISIS—at times coerced and at times willingly—and there is increasing evidence of girls and young women adhering to extreme right wing ideologies.[54] Ignoring these realities in campaigns of awareness seems an obvious failure. Finally, are U.K. authorities at risk of further alienating young women by presenting them as disempowered, inept or irrelevant? The latter point is particularly relevant as non-state armed groups have used messaging on the empowerment of girls and women. Even ISIS, widely known for advocating and creating structures of extreme gendered violence, used messages of empowerment to attract girls and women. ISIS publications "gave women a voice" and "evocative efforts were made to portray this as agency, even empowerment narratives."[55] Women, ISIS claimed, could be empowered by freeing themselves of the shackles of "infidel governments" and join in project of the Caliphate as the "twin halves of men."[56] One needs to question what effect these contrasting narratives may have on girls and women if they are being offered the possibility of playing an agential role on the one side and a passive one on the other. Most of all, U.K. authorities (and those of other states) need to interrogate their gender constructions in order to design and produce campaigns that effectively inform and protect all communities and all members of those communities.

Conclusion

Gendered constructions play key roles in narratives. They mould characters, advance plots, and allow for public/institutional narratives to reflect metanarratives and "make sense." Thus, the primary conclusion of this analysis is that gender constructions cannot be ignored. As such, the analysis of narrative and counter-narrative campaigns needs to consider not only the dominant narrative but also what gendered constructions it contains. Without a gendered analysis, a narrative analysis is partial and possibly so distorted it does not allow for a real understanding of the message being put forward. As can be seen above, this goes far beyond simply counting the number of men and women in a series of videos—although this too is revealing. It requires examining what roles are given to men and women and non-binary gender identities, and how they relate to one another. It requires examining how much agency they are given and what type of agency (beneficent or maleficent).

To carry out the above analyses, this article has put forward and operationalized a mixed methods narrative approach that can be used to investigate constructions of power in narratives. The aim of the methodology is to be robust but easy to use for it to be deployable by scholars and practitioners alike. The initial statistical analysis offers an overview of how narratives distribute characters according to gender and what level and type of agency is ascribed to gender categories. This is followed by a detailed qualitative analysis that investigates what each character does and the role/functions they play in the narrative. These constructions are also related to the overall narrative of the campaigns to reveal how gender

is used to build the dominant narrative itself. In this article, the method has been used to analyze gender constructions, but it can be used to examine other social divisions, such as race, ethnicity or social class.

Finally, both the methodological and empirical conclusions of this article point to the need to engage in narrative analysis and specifically in how power is distributed across social divides in narratives. As states, international organizations, and indeed violent extremist groups pay more and more attention to narratives, these constructions of power gain in salience both in scholarship and in policymaking. This article points to the need for a gendered analysis of CT/CVE/PVE campaigns, as well as of training manuals and programmes for those working in CT/CVE/PVE. This requires a gendered analysis of the current terrorist threat to be carried out before any campaign is designed to raise awareness of types of radicalization and terrorist attacks in the making. Such an analysis needs to feed into the designing of CT/CVE/PVE public awareness campaigns. Without such an analysis, the risk is that these campaigns are misinforming rather than informing public, are training officials to recognize only part of the threat, and potentially are further alienating the audience they aim to capture.

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Appendix

List of Action Counters Terrorism (ACT) Videos

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