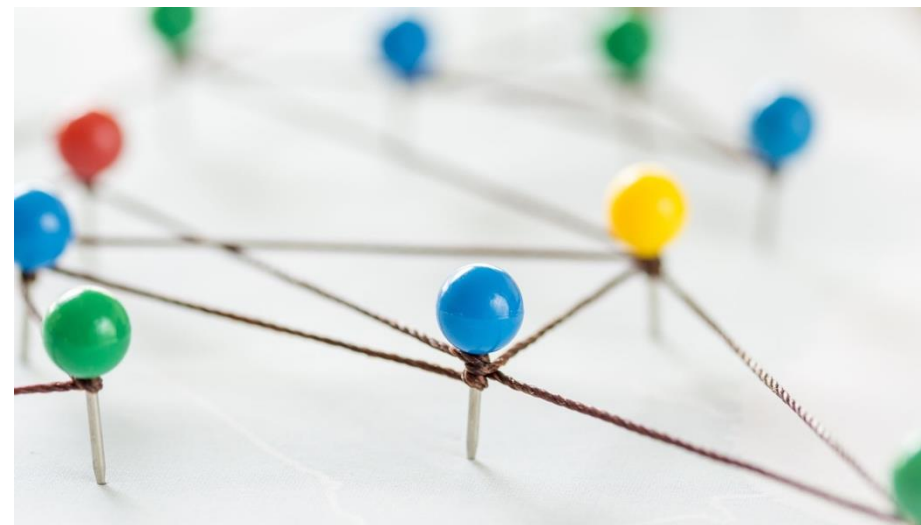


Mapping the emergence of “groomer” discourses in Canada

A discourse analysis of the proliferation of anti-gender politics targeting trans and queer affirming education and youth in schools

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About the Study

- SSHRC (Social Sciences Humanities Research Council) Grant
- Media Reports 2022-2024 – Turning Point
- Anti-Government/Freedom Convoy Protests in Ottawa
- Pan Canadian Million March for Children Protests

Anti-Gender Politics and Right-Wing Extremism

- Anti-Gender Campaigns - historically emergent forms of conservative backlash
- Resurgent right-wing extremist politics as a populist phenomenon
- Fourth Wave Targeting Queer and Trans communities
- “Gender ideology” and “woke ideology” – Rising Anti-LGBT Rhetoric
- Broad-Based coalition of heterogeneous actors - ‘opportunistic synergy’

Graff, A. & Korolczuk, E. (2022). *Anti-Gender politics in the populist movement*. Routledge.

Foucauldian Approach to Discourse

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- Foucault's (1972) notion of discourse refers to a system of thought which is historically contingent
 - “Groomer” discourses functioning as an “enunciative modality” within a right-wing ecosystem
 - According to Foucault (1972) enunciative modality refers to a right to speak within a specific discursive formation in which a statement functions assertively as an indisputable truth
 - Foucault (1991a) calls for the need to examine “clusters and relations” that are specific to the conditions of emergence of specific discourses in their historicity and which determine political basis for determining what comes to count as truth (p. 55)

Foucault, M. (1991). Politics and the study of discourse (Chapter 2). In G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller, (Eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in governmentality*. (pp. 53-72). The University of Chicago Press.

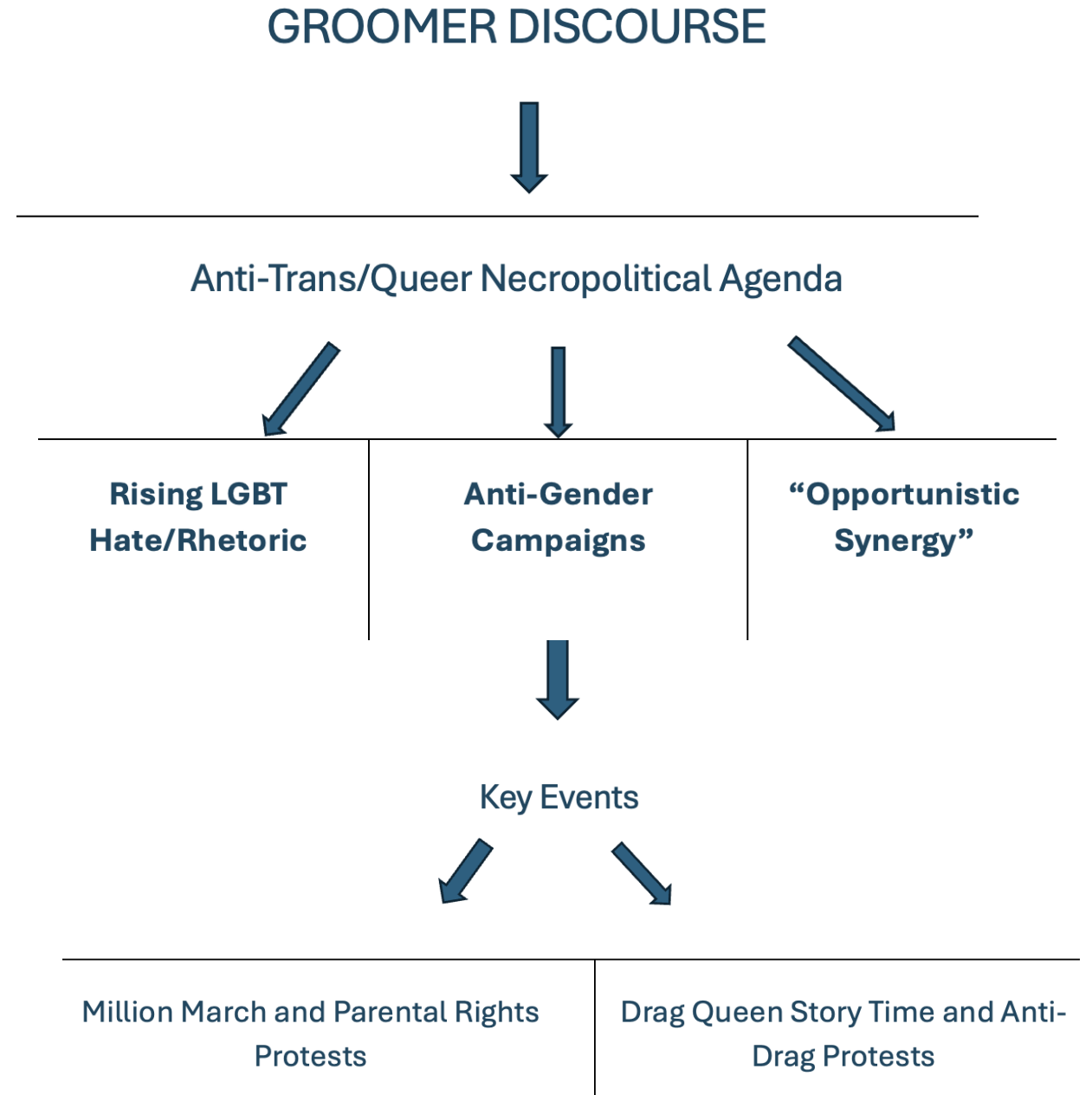
Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. Pantheon Books.

Mapping the Groomer Discourse

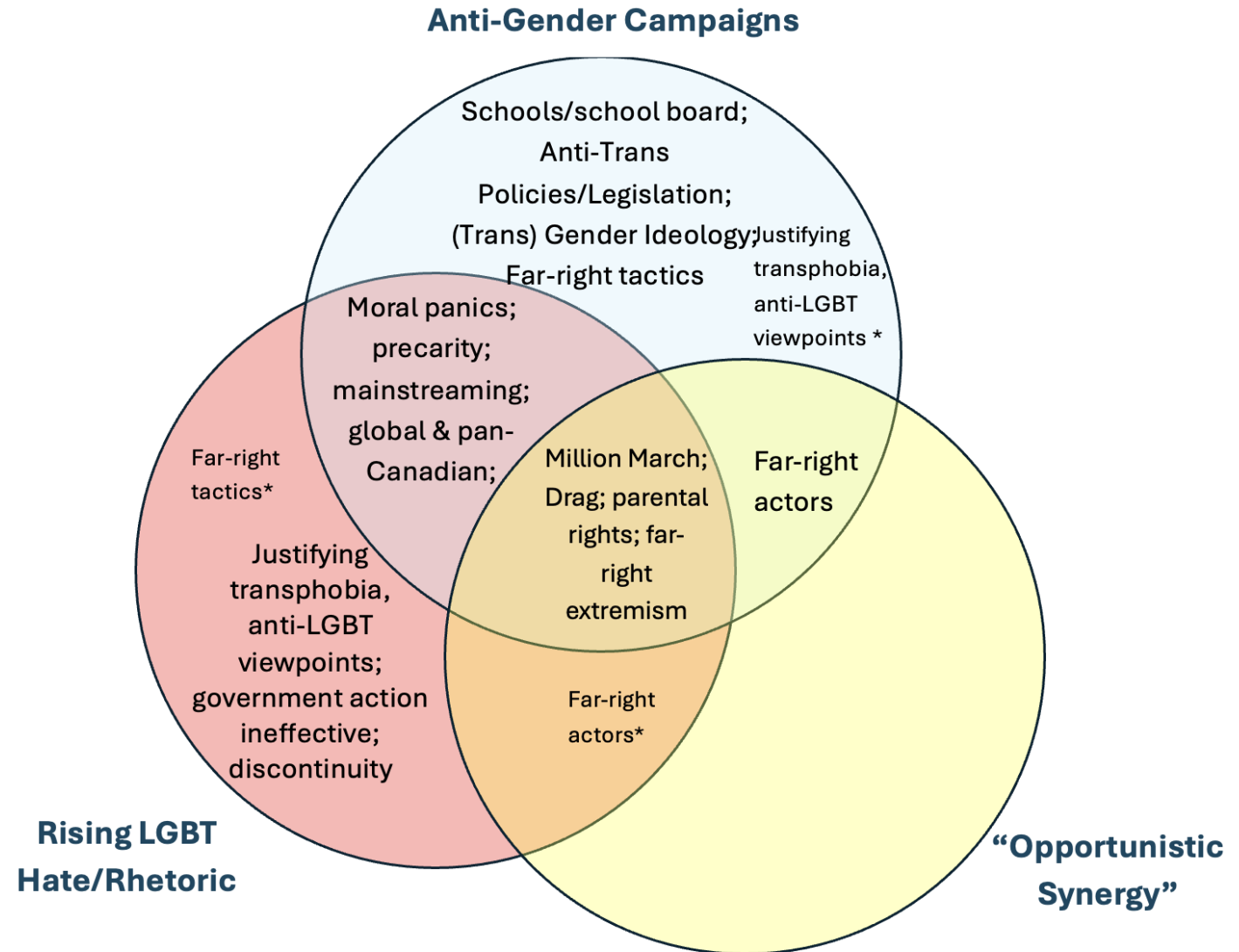
- Key Word Searches – Factiva Data Base
- Dedoose Software: Generated over 221 codes – Groomer and grooming discourse had 383 matching excerpts across 199 media texts. Its associated codes referenced specifically predator, pedophile and/or pervert (164); child abuse/recruitment (113); indoctrination (78) and genital mutilation/mutilator (20)
- Code-co-occurrences and thematic clusters = (i) Rising Anti-LGBT Rhetoric/Hate; (ii) Anti-Gender Campaigns; (iii) “Opportunistic Synergy”

Interrelated Themes

Code Clusters/Codes



Interrelated Themes



*not a theme, but code/code cluster

Spotlight: Case studies

- Focus on operation of groomer discourse through specific, local ‘snapshots’
 - “single event in a bigger context that is dangerous” (Wilson, as cited in Flanagan, 2024)
- See intensification, proliferation, escalation as tactics of far-right actors and networks



CASE 1.

The case of the 9-year-old girl at a track and field school event

- A case of misrecognition on the basis of gender expression which led to an escalation of violence
- The grandfather of one of the other students questioned a Grade 4 girl's gender as she stepped up to compete in a gender segregated shot-put event
- He claimed that it was a girls' event and that boys were not permitted to participate
- The mother intervened which led to asserting that her daughter was cis female
- The man demanding certification that the "nine-year old with a pixie haircut" was indeed a girl and alleging that she was not trans
- The encounter irrupted into the man's partner allegedly calling the girl's mother "a gender mutilator, a groomer and a pedophile"

Who is the target?
How is it emboldened?
What was the trigger?
How did it escalate?

CASE 2.

The case of a politician supporting LGBT Inclusion

- Targeted for posting a rainbow flag in her office
- Accused of “being satanic”, “a danger to children” and a “groomer”.
- Groomer discourse gets deployed as tactic of anti-gender campaign trading in disinformation and conspiracy theories to incite moral panic
- A second wave of perpetrated virulent attacks in response to a photo of the politician with a local teacher in a classroom decorated with rainbow flags
- Instances and accounts of *Anti-Trans LGBT Discrimination, Attacks, Rhetoric and Hate* were identified in 153 news reports and in 353 excerpts with violence, intimidation and harassment coded for explicitly in 89 sources with 155 matching excerpts.


Who is the target?
How is it emboldened?
What was the trigger?
How did it escalate?

CASE 3.

The Case of the Trans Non-Binary Teacher

- Right-wing parent activist* (“Blonde Bigot” on X) launched a vituperative and hateful attack against a trans nonbinary teacher Online doxxing – a photo of self-portrait of the teacher was circulated online
- Accused the teacher and school board as engaging in child grooming, child abuse and pedophilic activities and that they “glorifying their self-mutilation”
- Connected to a broader transnational network of far-right extremists – Libs of TikTok USA

*not a parent in the school



Who is the target?
How is it emboldened?
What was the trigger?
How did it escalate?

Photo: IG account, art teacher, self-portrait post-op top surgery scars evident
Blonde Bigot called teacher “groomer”
Image captured as spectacle, monstrous via the transmisogynistic cisgender gaze

CASE 3.

The Case of the Trans Non-Binary Teacher

TIMELINE:

1. November 22, 2023: Blonde Bigot targets art teacher IG account
2. November 23, 2023: picked up by Libs of TikTok
3. Art teacher receives death threats from others via social media
4. November 28, 2023: Blonde Bigot and Libs of TikTok post again about issue
5. December 2, 2023: other employees of school district targeted
6. December 21, 2023: Blonde Bigot leads protest outside school district office



Far-right Tactics in Case Studies

Targeting: find a threat, make a monster, ‘groomer’

Lying (misinformation; disinformation)

Escalating: from one to many; online to onsite; across provinces; from Canada to USA to global

Inciting/Emboldened: “we need to bring back bullying...I love bullying them! There is so little joy left in Canada...” Blonde Bigot

Proliferation: Libs of TikTok send out “tsunamis of hate mail” (barbara findlay, Lawyers Against Transphobia, as cited in Prasad & Matassa-Fung, 2024); repeated attacks

Conclusion

- Groomer Discourse – far-right extremist tactic – employed by parental rights actors – weaponization of children
- Mass protests – anti-drag and Million March – contexts in which groomer discourse surfaced
- Not simply an irruption of a familiar discourse that is no different than what has transpired previously with the LGBT community being targeted as pedophiles and ‘perverts’
- Opportunistic synergy - alliance building capacity of various conservative and far-right extremist groups opposing trans rights and LGBT education in schools – a defining element of 4th wave anti-gender campaigns

Thank you

Questions?
