



Finding Openings for Change

What the Media Landscape Reveals
About Gender, Care & Families



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Introduction

Gender, family, and care are flashpoints in a cultural contest over what norms and values should define our collective future. Fundamental assumptions about society are currently being contested, often within and through competing visions and narratives about the family, gender, and caregiving.

These cultural contests are rooted in a profound dissatisfaction with the status quo. Across groups, members of the US public are deeply unhappy with how society works. People widely share the view that “the system is rigged” against them. In a recent survey, 70 percent of Americans agreed that “the system is rigged in America,” with majority agreement across race, gender, political party, age, income, and education.¹

While there’s widespread agreement that our current systems aren’t working, people disagree about what, exactly, is wrong. People share an experience of the system being rigged against them, but they don’t always have a clear sense of how systems are failing them.

Against this backdrop, we see narrative contests around gender, family and care. Proponents of a right-wing, authoritarian future offer narratives that tell white, cis, straight, native-born Americans that the system is being rigged to benefit marginalized groups—LGBTQ people, immigrants, people of color, and others—at their expense. Gender and family are central to their narratives, which equate stability, safety, and success with regressive family structures and gender norms.

The Moving Mindsets Innovation Lab: Gender, Families, Care is a multiyear narrative lab dedicated to understanding this narrative contest and supporting field organizations in responding to it. The Lab studies the narrative and digital media landscape, works with field organizations to develop and experiment with counternarratives, and supports a cohort of organizations in developing and executing narrative strategies. Through this work, the Lab aims to develop and spread narratives that challenge and shift harmful mindsets that uphold systemic racism, misogyny, trans exclusion, and health inequities. Ultimately, the Lab seeks to advance narratives capable of building a new cultural common sense that reimagines care and expands our society’s understanding of gender and our definition of family.

This report summarizes findings and strategic takeaways from the Lab’s first phase of research: a qualitative study of narratives about gender, family, and care on social media, TV, and podcasts. This study maps the narrative landscape to better understand the current narrative contest, the range of authoritarian and regressive narratives, and the progressive counternarratives that are breaking through.

While the findings are complex, three major points stand out:

- **Across platforms, but especially in the podcast space, we found an overarching narrative: the War on Western Civilization.** The narrative holds that “Western civilization” once thrived because of traditional nuclear families and gender roles. According to the narrative, progressives, immigrants, people of color, and LGBTQ people have eroded traditional gender roles and nuclear families, leaving people, especially young men, lost and struggling. This narrative obscures the genuine problems with systems in US society and redirects people’s frustrations toward people of color, LGBTQ people, immigrants, and progressives.
- **Narratives that individualize care are common across all media types and platforms.** In suggesting that individuals are wholly responsible for taking care of themselves and their family members, these narratives obscure the systemic failures that cause precarity and inequality.
- **Our sample did not contain big-picture progressive narratives capable of challenging the overarching conservative and individualistic visions of gender, care, and family.** This suggests that progressive counternarratives have not saturated the media landscape enough to show up in our sample.

The good news is that there is ample opportunity to challenge regressive narratives. In many cases, we already have effective counter narratives that explain our current crisis and offer a shared vision for a care-centered future that benefits everyone. The challenge is effectively reaching wider audiences and strengthening our narrative ecosystem to support saturation across the media landscape. We’ve identified some strategic openings where counter narratives might more easily gain traction in the Narrative Obstacles and Opportunities section of this report.

We begin the report by defining narrative and discussing how we use the term in our research. We then discuss our methods of identifying narratives on various media platforms. Next, we discuss research findings and their strategic implications. Finally, we discuss the narrative obstacles that emerge from this research and the opportunities for amplifying progressive counter-narratives grounded in an ethic of collective care, solidarity, and belonging.

What Are Narratives?

Narratives are patterns of storytelling that circulate through public discourse. They shape and reflect our cultural mindsets—the deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we understand the world and make decisions.

Narratives: Patterns of meaning that cut across and tie together specific stories. Narratives are common patterns that can be thought of both as emerging from a set of stories and as providing templates for specific stories.

Stories: Tales about particular events and people. Stories can be thought of as both giving rise to and drawing from narratives.

Narratives are not the same as stories. Rather, they are templates of stories that convey patterned meanings. Stories that share similar types of features—like characters, plots, and settings—can constitute distinct narratives when arranged in particular ways. For example:

The Bootstraps narrative: An individual, down on his luck (could be her, but typically his), struggles to overcome obstacles and tough odds, succeeding through force of will and determination.

The *Bootstraps* narrative can be found in all sorts of individual stories, like the TV show *Empire*, which depicts a family that rises from poverty to run a hugely successful record label. Individual *Bootstraps* stories are about specific people who face obstacles and succeed in particular ways. The fact that these stories share a pattern with other stories is what makes them part of a broader narrative.

The *Bootstraps* narrative reflects and reinforces individualism and, specifically, the cultural mindset of self-makingness—the assumption that people’s success or lack of success is wholly the result of their own effort and determination. The constant flood of *Bootstraps* stories on TV, in film, in our social media feeds, in the news, and in literature makes this ideal of self-makingness seem natural and obvious, which obscures the ways in which our life outcomes are shaped by systems and structures beyond the control of any single individual.

Countering narratives that naturalize social hierarchies, justify oppression, and obscure systems and structures is a critical part of social change. By challenging dominant narratives and fostering alternative ways of talking about and making sense of our experiences, we create space to think differently about the social world and, ultimately, to change unjust systems.

Methods

To understand the landscape of narratives about gender, care, and family in the United States, we conducted a qualitative analysis of stories on TV and podcast episodes and from Facebook, Reddit, TikTok, and YouTube. FrameWorks researchers analyzed 140 pieces of content in total, many of which included multiple stories.

In general, we wanted to capture narratives in mainstream media that the average audience member or user might encounter. But the character of audience viewership and engagement varies across TV, podcasts, and social media (often even among different platforms). To account for this, there was some variation our sampling criteria, which are summarized in the table below.

MEDIA TYPE	CRITERIA
TV Episodes	■ From a show in the top 50 TV shows of 2025 in the US. ■ Contains a story (or stories). ■ Gender, care, and family (in any combination) must be major if not primary themes.
Podcast Episodes	■ From a show in the top 50 TV shows of 2025 in the US. ■ Contains a story (or stories). ■ Gender, care, and family (in any combination) must be major if not primary themes.
Social Media Posts	■ Posted or uploaded between June and August 2025. ■ An original post: — TikTok: Videos, including reposts, stitches, and duets, and their descriptions. — YouTube: Video posts, including their descriptions. — Reddit: Any post (e.g., text, video, image) that starts a thread. — Facebook: any post (e.g., text, video, image) that starts a conversation. If the post is an image or video, the post can include its description. ■ Above the median number of likes, views, or comments (depending on the platform). ■ Contains a story (or stories). ■ Gender, care, and family (in any combination) must be major if not primary themes. ■ Not an advertisement.

We analyzed only top-50 TV shows and podcasts and high-engagement social media posts with above-median engagement to ensure the analysis identified narratives that are circulating relatively widely. Because social media includes a larger volume of content and, in turn, our sampling captured a wider swath of sources, we began with social media analysis. Analyzing a random sample of posts that met the above criteria allowed us to capture a large spectrum of posts about gender, care, and family. We then analyzed podcasts and TV episodes to examine which narratives appeared in these types of media, how they appeared, and whether any additional narratives appeared that were distinctive to these media.

To identify narratives, we labeled each piece of content’s narrative features (e.g., characters, plots, settings) and its visual, audio, and other platform-specific elements. Then, we grouped together stories with similar features and elements and examined these groups to discern patterns of meaning within and across them. These patterns constitute the narratives we discuss in the Findings Overview section of this report. For more information on methods and sampling, see the Methods Supplement that accompanies this report.

Findings Overview

Content Warning

The section below includes examples of racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic rhetoric on care, gender, and family. We include this material to illustrate research findings. We do not endorse these views. Readers who do not want to see this content can read the list of findings below and skip to the [Narrative Obstacles and Opportunities](#) section on p. 28.

FINDING #1:

Across media, conservatives are weaving a coherent story explaining our current crisis, who is to blame, and what needs to be done: the *War on Western Civilization* narrative.

FINDING #2:

The *War on Western Civilization* narrative is spread through specific narratives about masculinity and the family.

FINDING #3:

Narratives that individualize care are widespread, effectively concealing the structural inequities in caregiving.

FINDING #4:

Gender is sometimes discussed as a site of creative self-creation and expression. But for cis men, gender is circumscribed.

FINDING #5:

Among progressive narratives we identified across media, only one—highlighting structural factors shaping health care—offered a societal-level critique.

FINDING #6:

Conservative narratives sometimes frame claims about gender, care, and family as “scientific,” lending a false sense of credibility and authority to regressive ideas.

Narratives of Gender, Family, and Care

FINDING #1

Across media, conservatives are weaving a coherent story explaining our current crisis, who is to blame, and what needs to be done: the *War on Western Civilization* narrative.

Looking across platforms, we see a consistent, overarching regressive narrative that tells a big-picture story about the role of gender, care, and family in our society and history: the *War on Western Civilization* narrative.

The *War on Western Civilization* narrative

Typical plot: In the last few decades, the nuclear family and traditional gender roles—bedrocks of American society—have been under attack by people of color, feminists, the left, and LGBTQ people.

According to this narrative, the problems we are experiencing are due to attacks on the nuclear family and traditional gender roles. Our society (“Western civilization”) used to comprise healthy, nuclear families whose members adhered to traditional gender roles. This narrative posits that this type of society is being eroded by Democrats, the left, immigrants, people of color, or LGBTQ people, and that this is why so many people—especially young men—feel lost and are struggling to survive. Though content supporting this narrative didn’t always specify race, it is clear that white young men are the central concern and target audience for this narrative.

The *War on Western Civilization* narrative weaves together ideas about gender, sexuality, care, and race. Included is a *War on Masculinity* narrative, which posits that heteronormativity is the foundation of a healthy society. Under a heteronormative framework, gender is assumed to be biological, gendered traits are immutable, and thus gender roles are fixed. Men—a category that typically excludes trans men—are considered naturally strong and are therefore seen as natural providers. Women—a category that typically excludes trans women—are meanwhile portrayed as innately predisposed to caring, nurturing, and maintaining the emotional well-being of those around them, which explains why they tend to occupy domestic and caregiving roles.

The *War on Western Civilization* is a white supremacist narrative, echoing the “white replacement” myth (or “great replacement theory”). Central to this myth is the alleged existence of a covert elite—often identified as Jewish people, liberals, or globalists—who are deliberately orchestrating demographic and cultural change through lax immigration policies and multicultural policies. According to this myth, this covert elite seeks to “replace” white Americans and white Europeans with people of color, diminishing or eliminating white political power and cultural dominance. The narrative hones in on the demographic and cultural change components of the “white replacement” myth, implicitly or explicitly portraying attacks on the nuclear family and traditional gender roles as strategies to “replace” white Americans and “white culture.”

Implications

The *War on Western Civilization* is an attempt to channel people's dissatisfaction with the status quo and their anxieties about current social upheaval in a particular direction. We emphasize that it is an attempt, as people do not uncritically accept the narratives they are told. Rather, people engage in a complex process of negotiating the narratives they are “exposed” to vis-a-vis their existing beliefs, personal circumstances, and understandings of the world.

Our [research has found](#) that counter-narratives that provide alternative explanations of the problems with the status quo—that help people understand how systems are actually rigged against most people, including people of color, white people experiencing poverty, immigrants, and others—can be highly effective in inoculating against scapegoating while building support for systemic change. While, in our media sample, we did not see counter-narratives about gender, families, and care at the scale of the *War on Western Civilization*, we know such narratives exist within movement spaces and communities. Advancing such counter-narratives is essential to displace the *War on Western Civilization* narrative. We need to offer narratives that situate gender, family, and care within a coherent story about what's wrong with society that provides an alternative way of making sense of the shared lived experience that systems aren't working. Such narratives can combat harmful ideas that pathologize marginalized communities and the “white replacement” myth, and at the same time they can help people expand their imagination about what care, family, and gender can look like.

FINDING #2:

The *War on Western Civilization* narrative is spread through specific narratives about masculinity and the family.

In our media sample, the *War on Western Civilization* emerged through a few specific forms – through a narrative about masculinity that frames feminists, LGBTQ people, Democrats, and the left as villains who intentionally disadvantage men and a narrative that frames the white nuclear family as under attack. These narratives both carry the broader narrative and have specific strategic implications of their own.

While these narratives appeared in all types of media, they were most prevalent in podcast episodes. This reflects the conservative character of top podcasts from 2025 (see Appendix A). For instance, the conservative podcast *The Joe Rogan Experience* ranked first on both Apple and Spotify charts. Other conservative podcasts, such as *The Megyn Kelly Show*, *The Tucker Carlson Show*, and *The Shawn Ryan Show*, were also in the top 10 for Spotify and Apple.

These narratives provide simple explanations for the hardships most people are experiencing around care and day-to-day life. They clearly demarcate villains and victims and have simple, linear plots. While distorting reality in critical ways, these narratives carry weight and emotional resonance as they tap into deeply entrenched racist, homophobic, and transphobic ideas.

The *War on Masculinity* narrative

Typical plot: In the last few decades, young men have been systematically disadvantaged and emasculated in key sectors of society, especially education and the workplace, by feminists and the left.

In this narrative, women, feminists, Democrats, or the left are portrayed as villains who, over the past few decades, have slowly taken over key institutions like education and the workplace. These purported villains act in their own self-interest, running institutions in ways that systematically exclude, disadvantage, or feminize men, robbing them of their masculinity. While the content we analyzed did not always explicitly identify cis, straight, white men as victims, that characterization is heavily implied (see Example 1 below for a more explicit case).

We found this narrative in stories on social media, TV, and podcasts but found its strongest expressions in YouTube videos and on podcasts hosted by conservative commentators. YouTube videos carrying this narrative tended to be long-form political video essays or livestreamed discussions (see Example 1). Podcast episodes carrying this narrative typically feature famous conservative commentators and guests, riffing on the purported excesses of the left (see Example 2).

Example 1, YouTube:

In this YouTube video, titled [How Democrats LOST THE WAR on Masculinity | Democrats Spending \\$20 Million to win over Men](#) by [FBE Capital](#)—a channel that features videos about masculinity, dating, and feminism, often from a conservative perspective—the narrator tells a story of how men have allegedly been marginalized and are universally hated by Democrats or “the left” in the past few years. Using clips and images of politicians, celebrities, and other public figures, together with the narrator’s commentary, he tells a story about how Democrats lost the male vote after years of prioritizing women and queer and trans people over and above cis men, especially cis straight white men. He says Democrats, having realized their mistake, are now attempting to win back male voters. Yet, he frames these efforts as disingenuous:

“Democrats look at men as just a tool for them to get back into power, even taking it one step further by enacting laws and policies that actively discriminate against men, and, again, specifically, against straight white men.”

Democrats are described as manipulative elites who have allegedly marginalized cis straight white men through discriminatory policies. The narrator ends the video with a call for men to address the crisis by voting for Republicans at every level of government. While he says that Republicans are imperfect, he argues that men can “at least [get] a seat at the table to discuss and solve real issues, and your son gets to keep his dick,” if Republicans are elected.

Example 2, Podcast:

In an episode of *The Tucker Carlson Show* titled “Chris Williamson’s Advice to Men: How to Survive a Woman’s World,” Carlson and his guest Chris Williamson claim that, in the last 50 years, the US education system has been set up to privilege women and girls and disadvantage men:

Chris Williamson: So, education and employment are the two big ones for men. In education, it seems like the current education system was always set up in a manner that women, girls, were going to overperform in. [...] Girls are better to sit down, they’re good highlighter people, and they’re more conscientious than boys are on average. They’re less rambunctious. They’re good for—if you need to sit quietly in a classroom for six hours a day, they crush it. They absolutely crush it.

Tucker Carlson: More obedience, less creativity.

Chris Williamson: And less disruption as well, which is a huge—big deal. [...] What this has resulted in is girls starting to outstrip, in terms of performance, boys. So, since Title IX was introduced 50 years ago, just to get more girls into higher education, the gender gap between men and women then is smaller than it is now, but it was in the other direction.

This story uses gender essentialist ideas to explain the alleged marginalization of men and boys in education: Girls are naturally more obedient and docile, while boys are innately more rambunctious. Williamson claims that the government has designed the education system to accommodate girls' natural traits while disadvantaging boys.

Implications

The *War on Masculinity* narrative undermines the cross-gender and cross-racial solidarity we need to build a society that truly cares for everyone. It does so by positioning cis straight white men as victims of women's advancement and by excluding the possibility of masculinities that are not defined by dominance, provision, or authority (framed in biologically deterministic ways as "innate" masculine traits). The narrative also advances white supremacy. By framing contemporary progress in racial and gender equality as "reverse discrimination," the narrative romanticizes a more patriarchal and racially segregated society characterized by unquestioned white male authority. The *War on Masculinity* offers men two options: restore and maintain traditional patriarchy and white supremacy or lose their masculinity and their place in the world. The narrative pits cis straight white men against cis women, LGBTQ people, and people of color, undercutting the solidarity needed to address the systemic issues that create hardships for most people—from an economy designed to promote stagnant wages and unstable employment to an unresponsive government.

The *War on the Family* narrative

Typical plot: The white nuclear family is under attack from the left.

In this narrative, people on the left are villains attacking the nuclear family, idealized as white. They do this by eschewing traditional gender roles and heterosexuality. In many stories carrying this narrative, storytellers suggest that these attacks are tantamount to a deliberate dismantling of the social order.

We found this narrative in stories told across all the media we analyzed, but it was particularly prevalent in our YouTube and podcast samples. Like the *War on Masculinity* narrative, podcasts carrying this narrative featured long discussions between popular conservative political

commentators and their guests (see Example 1). Example 2 features a story that does not spell out this narrative's typical plot but nevertheless invokes it through language and imagery.

Example 1, Podcast:

In an episode of *Candace* called “Candace x Milo: The Rise of the Gaytriarchy,” Milo Yiannapolous portrays Black and Jewish people and the left as villains who are sabotaging the nuclear family. For him, nuclear families are the cornerstone of society, the only thing standing between white people and left-wing “enslavement.”

Milo Yiannapolous: So you know that there's a higher self-reported incidence of homosexuality among Black and Jewish Americans. [...] Black kids experience a steady drip of poison from their own mothers about the male role models they should have had who made them. [...] Think about the Jewish marriages you know. Think about the couples. You have, exclusively, larger-than-life, raucous women with nebbish, scholarly, quiet men. And the women, who are so unbearably exhausting, exasperating, that husbands just let them make all the decisions about how the house goes, right? [...] So overbearing mothers and absent, inadequate, or neglectful fathers, that's a recipe for homosexuality. I think the biggest question you can ask anyone is what the relationship is like with their mother and their father because you—this is the reason why they're [the left] attacking family, because when you come from a nuclear family, a healthy family dynamic, a mother and father are vulnerable to 90 percent of the warfare [against the family]. Yeah, that they're trying—think about the Catholic family. They [the left] want to enslave us. So it's like the easiest way they can enslave any people is destroy their families.

Example 2, YouTube:

This YouTube [video](#), titled “The BEST Ad For Parenthood,” shows how storytellers can invoke the *War on the Family* narrative without spelling out its typical plot. The video, which is formatted as a YouTube short, begins with channel host Benny Johnson calling for “more pro-parenthood propaganda on this site.” It then cuts to a clip of a white, blonde woman sitting with her baby in a car. She moves the camera from herself to her baby, gushing about how “cute” he is; expresses joy and excitement that she's “only 20” and already has a “mini-me”; feeds her baby a french fry; and tells the audience about her plan to go shopping for her husband. To conclude the video, she addresses pregnant women who might be afraid, telling them that they have a wonderful life to look forward to.

By framing the video as “pro-parenthood propaganda,” both through the video's title and its opening section, Benny Johnson invokes the *War on the Family* narrative. Unlike the example from Candace Owens's podcast above, Benny Johnson does not outright say that the nuclear family is under attack. Nevertheless, his story carries the War on Family narrative through implication. He suggests that there exists “anti-parenthood propaganda” and then shows the clip of a white mother and her baby to frame the white nuclear family as desirable and aspirational. This framing makes sense only in a context where parenthood or the nuclear family is under attack.

Implications

This narrative is powerful because it contains kernels of truth: Many families are struggling, and many people do feel that the world has changed in unsettling ways. But by attributing these struggles to a deliberate attack from the left, this narrative offers a diagnosis that serves the wealthy and powerful and attempts to redirect anger away from systemic inequality while scapegoating Black people, Jewish people, and LGBTQ people. Finally, like the *War on Masculinity* narrative, it undermines the solidarity we need to push for structural change that will allow families of all forms to thrive.

FINDING #3:

Narratives that individualize care are widespread, effectively concealing the structural inequities in caregiving.

Many narratives we analyzed situate caregiving within domestic or private spaces. They feature individuals and family members—especially women—who are responsible for taking care of themselves or their loved ones, often under difficult or challenging circumstances. In these narratives, children are primarily cared for by their parents, while elderly and disabled people are cared for by their adult children or siblings. These narratives are widespread across all media we analyzed and varied greatly in genre and form.

These narratives take for granted and, in turn, reinforce a status quo in which care is privatized. In these narratives, failures of care are seen as personal rather than collective, and structural inequities are rendered invisible. These narratives emphasize the ethic of self-reliance and personal responsibility, obscuring the structural factors, such as stagnant wages, lack of affordable housing, lack of access to health care, and inadequate childcare, that contribute to making caregiving so difficult.

As some of the narratives discussed below show, women are often portrayed as caregivers, but this is framed as natural, unremarkable, or expected. The reality—that the gendered and racialized distribution of caregiving responsibilities is a product of socially designed structures and the social construction of gender and race—is wholly obscured.

For example, the reality that immigrant women of color often occupy the most essential but poorly compensated and low-status caregiving jobs is absent from the media we analyzed. Instead, women of color, specifically Black mothers experiencing poverty, are pathologized for their caregiving choices and behaviors in a context where they are systematically and disproportionately deprived of adequate social support and resources.

These narratives naturalize inequality by rendering structural violence invisible, privatize collective responsibility, and position the government as an observer rather than a guarantor of care. In doing so, they preclude more collective visions of care rooted in equity and social justice.

The *Bootstraps* narrative

Typical plot: A person overcomes obstacles and finds success through hard work and perseverance.

In this narrative, people experience struggles that can be overcome only through individual effort and personal responsibility. Characters in this narrative rise above their circumstances through hard work and determination, with no expectation of support from a broader collective. In this way, individuals are cast as both heroes and villains of their own stories: Either they persevere and succeed, or they succumb and are blamed for their failure.

This narrative was most prevalent among the TV and podcast episodes we analyzed. On TV, stories carrying this narrative are typically fictionalized, while podcasts feature personal stories or hypothetical tellings of the narrative.

Example, Podcast:

In the following excerpt from *The Mel Robbins Podcast*, podcast guest Morgan Housel tells the story of a hypothetical ordinary person without a “good education” who thrives because of good planning and proper financial choices. Housel emphasizes that anyone listening could do the same by cultivating the proper attitude and spending habits:

Morgan Housel: I've seen it time and time again, and there are so many examples of it. Let me give you this example here. An ordinary person doesn't have a good education. Maybe they didn't even graduate high school, let's say, but they have good financial behavior. They can think long term. They can keep their expectations in check. They're patient. They have those behavioral qualities. That person can do very well. But the person who went to Harvard and got an MBA and went to work on Wall Street has the best education, the best connections, the best experience, that person can easily go broke, and they do. Not uncommon for that to happen, and that is not true in other fields. It is impossible to think of an ordinary person who didn't go to high school, didn't go to college, performing open-heart surgery better than a Harvard-trained doctor. That's impossible. That will never happen, but it does happen with money, because it's not about what you know. You don't need to know the secret formulas. You don't need to have secret connections. If you just get your behavior right and your thinking right, you can do well: patience, keeping your expectations in check, not comparing yourself to other people, using money as a tool to live a better life, instead of a yardstick to measure yourself against others by. It's very simple stuff, and it's all in your head. And it's, I think it's, it's 99 percent of what people need to know. To do well with money is in your control.

Implications

This narrative obscures structural inequities that affect most people in the United States but disproportionately affect people of color, LGBTQ people, and cis women. The idea that living a good life is solely a matter of effort or the “correct” frame of mind renders people’s struggles as personal failings rather than the predictable outcomes of historical oppression, pervasive structural inequities, and an economic system designed to extract from them to benefit the powerful and wealthy elite. By focusing solely on individuals and placing history and context out of view, this narrative makes it hard to recognize the need for collective action to address systemic sources of problems.

The *Self-Care for Caregivers* narrative

Typical plot: A person experiences the toll of caregiving and takes time to address their own physical, emotional, or mental health needs.

This narrative involves people taking time away from caregiving to address their own physical or emotional health needs. Like other narratives that locate care within private and domestic spaces, characters in this narrative are family members who act as primary caregivers for their loved ones. Typically, caregivers experience some form of fatigue, burnout, or stress from the physical and emotional demands of caregiving and address these issues by taking time to care for themselves.

We found this narrative only in the podcast episodes we analyzed. Stories carrying this narrative typically took the form of personal stories, which are common in the podcast ecosystem.

Example, Podcast:

The example below is from the episode “Caretakers Need to Care for Themselves with Seth and Lauren Rogen,” from the podcast *IMO with Michelle Obama and Craig Robinson*:

Seth Rogen: I was so happy on days when Lauren made the choice that she didn’t have to go see her mother. Because I was like, that’s her prioritizing her own mental health. And she’s not abandoning her mother. She sees them all the time. We move them, you know, six blocks away from where we live. They were very close, but those days where I could just see, she was like, I don’t need to do this today, and I’m gonna actually maybe try to enjoy myself. Well, and if you talk about brain health, your brain health, you know, when there is a genetic, you know, predisposition, it becomes increasingly more important for the family members of people with Alzheimer’s to focus on self-care for their longevity.

Implications

This narrative conveys some positive and important ideas, as it acknowledges that caregiving is hard, caregivers have needs, and caregivers themselves are deserving of rest and care. However, the narrative takes for granted that caregiving is an individual responsibility—typically for family members. As a result, it places out of sight the reality that caregiver fatigue, stress, and burnout stem from the absence of adequate care infrastructure (e.g., affordable and accessible childcare and elder care, paid family and medical leave, a health care system that does not shift the responsibility of long-term care entirely onto families).

The *Family Cares for Family* narrative

Typical plot: A family member, typically a woman, cares for their loved one(s).

This narrative features a family member—usually a mother, a sister, or a wife—clothing, bathing, or showing affection for their loved one(s). Unlike most narratives discussed in this report, the *Family Cares for Family* narrative does not have villains, tension, or conflict to resolve. Instead, the narrative remains open-ended, highlighting the mundane and ongoing quality of caregiving.

The open-ended quality of this narrative is due, at least in part, to platform norms. We found stories that carry this narrative mostly in our TikTok sample, and TikTok users value authenticity, niche communities, and shared emotional experiences over high-production content. This means that mundane activities, such as quietly feeding a family member, feature prominently on the platform.

Example 1, TikTok:

In [this](#) example, a son feeds his elderly mother, while his voiceover narration recounts an interaction with a person who told him that she doesn't think it should be a child's responsibility to care for their parents. He refutes this person's argument in two ways: verbally, by saying that he believes it is his God-given duty to care for his mother, and visually, by showing himself providing care.

Example 2, TikTok:

In [another TikTok](#), a woman cleans her disabled brother's ear.

Example 3, TikTok:

[Here](#), a woman cooks two separate taco night dinners for her family in this example. Using voiceover narration, she explains that one dinner is for her mother-in-law, who requires a low-sodium diet, while the other dinner is for herself and the rest of her family.

Implications

This narrative captures the attention and dedication that people put into caring for their loved one(s) and family members. On their own, any of these stories could be understood as merely sharing personal experiences. However, taken together and in combination with the other narratives present in these media, these stories have the effect of normalizing caregiving as private and individual, reserved for domestic spaces rather than something that requires support from the collective. Given that most caregivers featured in the stories that carry this narrative are women, this narrative also has the effect of reinforcing the essentialist idea that women—a category that typically excludes trans women—are particularly, and perhaps innately, well equipped to care for others.

The *Unfit Mothers* narrative

Typical plot: A working-class mother, typically a Black woman, makes bad decisions that negatively impact her children.

This narrative frames working-class mothers, especially Black mothers, as villains whose irresponsible choices hurt their children. Mothers in this narrative are featured violating the standards of white middle-class respectability by engaging in behaviors such as drinking, getting arrested by police, and purchasing “junk food” for their children.

This narrative is particularly prevalent in the YouTube videos we analyzed. Strikingly, two of the videos carrying this narrative are posted on channels that share police body cam footage. In these examples, both recorded from police officers’ point of view, mothers are arrested for child neglect and abuse. The third example is posted on a conservative YouTube channel.

Example 1, YouTube:

Here, a woman who appears intoxicated is confronted and arrested by police. The title, “Mother Leaves 3 Toddlers Unattended to Get Drunk, Doesn’t End Well,” coupled with a brief introduction, conveys the evaluative component of the narrative.

Example 2, YouTube:

In [this](#) video, police question and arrest a woman who they suspect physically harmed her 1-year-old child. Like the first video, the title steers interpretation in a straightforward way: “Cops Rescue Baby from the Most Terrifying Mom EVER!”

Example 3, YouTube:

In [this](#) video, the channel's host, a white man, plays clips of a TikTok featuring two Black mothers showing audiences their grocery haul purchased with SNAP. The host calls these women "EBT influencers" and claims that they epitomize the alleged abuse of government assistance. Finally, he suggests that the women are bad mothers, commenting that the food they purchased is "unhealthy" and criticizing their "choice" to feed their children "junk food." Through this portrayal, the host evokes the racist stereotype of the "welfare queen": a single Black mother who lazily lives off government funds and has children for the sole purpose of collecting more government assistance.

Implications

This narrative draws on misogynistic, classist, and racist tropes about mothers, especially Black women. The narrative draws on a long history of pathologizing Black mothers and criminalizing Black parenting more broadly. It frames Black mothers as inherently deficient, neglectful, or dangerous.

By focusing on individual mothers' behaviors, the narrative locates the problem within the mother herself. Her and her children's struggles are attributed to her personal failings rather than the systemic inequalities shaping her life. This erases the structural factors that produce poverty and stress and constrain working-class mothers' choices, such as the lack of affordable housing, inadequate childcare, and food apartheid.

This narrative promotes the idea that some people experiencing poverty are more "deserving" while some are "undeserving." Under this framework, people experiencing poverty who are "deserving" make choices in line with the norms of white middle-class respectability. The "undeserving," meanwhile, are those who make bad choices, violate norms of respectability, and are thus beyond help. This false dichotomy justifies austerity policies that make it difficult for people experiencing poverty to access jobs and the government assistance they need to survive. It also fractures solidarity among people experiencing poverty, encouraging some to distance themselves from others deemed "irresponsible."

The Modern Parents Are Failing Kids narrative

Typical plot: Parents who are unwilling to do the difficult work of parenting hamper their children's development.

In this narrative, contemporary parents are framed as villains who are unwilling to make the personal sacrifices that are purportedly essential to their children's development. This allegedly affects their children negatively, contributing to developmental issues and a perceived decline in children's resilience and mental health at the societal level.

We found this narrative primarily in the podcast episodes we analyzed. Stories that carry this narrative typically take the form of hypothetical scenarios posed by podcast hosts or guests, who are usually experts in fields like psychology or child development.

Example 1, Podcast:

In the following example, Dr. Becky Kennedy, a psychologist who owns and runs a parenting advice business, attributes parenting stress to this adult generation's supposedly reduced capacity to tolerate frustration. This not only frames childcare as the province of the nuclear family but also does not take into consideration the structural factors that make childcare difficult. The excerpt comes from an episode of *On Purpose with Jay Shetty*.

Dr. Becky Kennedy: So much of parenting is inconvenient. It's just the word that's not talked about enough for parenting, when you have to get out your door to go to Aunt Sally's 50th luncheon, which my guess is maybe you're not really even dying to do either. There's a lot of frustration, like your kid is whining, your kid is saying why they shouldn't go. And if I think about where parenting is today versus decades ago, I think us adults, we've become less and less tolerant of frustration. We have our phones, we have our dopamine, we have so much more ease in our life, and one of the things I always think about is, our kids can't learn to tolerate feelings we don't tolerate in them.

Example 2, Podcast:

Diary of a CEO guest Erica Komisar, a child attachment expert, similarly attributes parenting difficulties and children's mental health struggles to parents' alleged inability to accept that parenting requires sacrifice, discomfort, and frustration.

Erica Komisar: [...] you have to sacrifice time and money and freedom. That if you want to raise healthy children, it's going to require discomfort and frustration and sacrifice. And what's interesting is that—what's also happened is, because we're raising our children in such a selfish, self-centered environment, young people are more fragile. They are more emotionally fragile. More of them have attachment disorders. They can't bear frustration. They can't bear pain. They can't bear sleeplessness. You know, the idea that you have to get a baby nurse because you can't get up in the middle of the night with your own baby. And that's become the norm in certain socioeconomic circles.

Implications

This narrative locates the problem in individual parents' character: their selfishness, laziness, or lack of discipline. In focusing on the character of parents, the narrative obscures the structural factors that shape children's mental health and development, such as poverty,

the erosion of social programs, structural racism, and growing up in an increasingly volatile political and economic context. It directs anger toward individuals and away from the systemic factors that have made parenting more difficult over time.

FINDING #4:

Gender is sometimes discussed as a site of creative self-creation and expression. But for cis men, gender is circumscribed.

We found two types of narratives about gender through our analysis. In the first type—prevalent among the TikToks and Reddit posts we analyzed—gender is characterized as a site of creative self-creation and expression, especially for LGBTQ people. In the second type of narrative, masculinity is narrowly defined in terms of provision and personal success, offering a rigid and static vision of gender for cis men.

Narratives that reimagine gender beyond the static, essentialist binary advance more inclusive understandings of gender that reflect the lived experiences of people of all genders. By highlighting the various ways in which people come to know and express their gender, these narratives can help decouple gender from traditional roles, which disproportionately place the responsibility for care on women and girls.

Yet these narratives coexist with those that narrowly define the parameters of gender in general, and masculinity in particular. Such narratives leave little room for cis men to develop and express forms of masculinity outside of the heteronormative norm, constraining cis men within a framework that equates masculinity with dominance, stoicism, and provision.

The Gender Is Fluid narrative

Typical plot: People, typically from the LGBTQ community, creatively subvert traditional gender norms and expectations.

This narrative features LGBTQ people performing masculinity and femininity—sometimes simultaneously—in ways that challenge essentialist and binary notions of gender. They do so through their clothing, grooming, and gestures, and by deliberately cultivating a gender presentation that refuses easy categorization.

This narrative was most prevalent among the TikToks we analyzed, although we also found stories carrying this narrative on Reddit. TikToks carrying this narrative are typically short and, much like other narratives we found on TikTok, feature mundane activities like getting ready for the day or driving to a clinic for gender-affirming care (see Examples 1 and 2). On Reddit, stories carrying this narrative usually recount personal experiences and share observations and reflections (see Example 3).

Example 1, TikTok:

In [this](#) example, a person with physical characteristics that most might read as masculine films themselves putting on makeup.

Example 2, TikTok:

[Another example](#) features a creator in drag narrating how sapphic and gender-nonconforming people in the early 1900s donned a mustache to play with and subvert norms of masculinity.

Example 3, Reddit:

In the following post from a Reddit thread in the subreddit r/gaymers, a user comments on how author Yuhki Kamatani plays with the main character's gender in the manga *Our Dreams at Dusk*:

"I haven't got that far into it yet but it's clearly playing with gender themes, what with the sensitive boy soprano on the verge of moving into a new phase of life RE: puberty.

"I mean this boy freely bursts into tears upon hearing something beautiful and doesn't give a shit who sees, so I'm pretty confident the author is playing with gender roles in society and such."

Implications

This narrative challenges gender essentialism and the gender binary by featuring mundane, everyday acts of gender performance such as trying on clothes, adjusting grooming, moving through public spaces, and making more permanent alterations to the body. In this way, this narrative makes gender diversity feel ordinary, not extraordinary. Here, gender is not a spectacle, a threat, or a clinical condition. While this narrative focuses on gender presentation, in challenging and disrupting gender norms, it indirectly challenges gender roles as well, including norms around domestic and emotional labor.

The *Bootstraps Masculinity* narrative

Typical plot: A cis man achieves success by making the right decisions, working hard, and providing for his family.

This narrative features a cis man as a protagonist who becomes successful through hard work, participating in stereotypically masculine activities, and providing for his family. In this narrative, women and children are secondary characters who are framed as dependent on the man's ability to perform the role of breadwinner and protector.

This narrative was most prevalent among the TV episodes and TikToks we analyzed. As is true for most of the TV episodes discussed in this report, stories carrying this narrative are fictional. Interestingly, TikToks carrying this narrative differ from the mundane and intimate care and gender narratives we found elsewhere on the platform. Instead, these TikToks feature aspirational content like relationship advice, career coaching, and other tips for building success.

Example 1, TV:

In *Georgie and Mandy's First Marriage*, Georgie, the husband, is portrayed as the sole provider and breadwinner. In one scene he aptly says, "I'm bringing home the bacon, and the sausage, and the pepperoni."

Example 2, TikTok:

[This](#) example features a cis man who claims that the epitome of a "masculine man" is a provider who slaughters animals to feed his family. As he says this, an image flashes on the screen of a hunter with a rifle, in front of a cabin in which a woman and child are standing. He contrasts this image with another story of a hypothetical man who gets killed by a lion, because he attempts to reason with it—understood as the "feminine" approach—rather than fighting it.

Implications

This narrative blends self-reliance with gendered expectations to define who counts as a "good" man. In doing so, it narrowly defines masculinity, reinforcing the idea that men are only "successful" if they conform to stereotypically masculine roles. This leaves no room for men who are caregivers, who are emotionally vulnerable, or who define success outside of work and provision.

Moreover, the narrative circumscribes women's agency, portraying them as dependent on or supporters of men rather than autonomous human beings with their own skills, desires, and interests outside of their husbands and family. And by reinscribing stereotypical gender roles, it reinforces the gendered division of labor under which women are expected to do domestic work and caregiving.

Finally, like any *Bootstraps* narrative, by portraying success as a product of personal effort and determination, the narrative obscures the structures that tend to privilege white cis men and disadvantage Black and Brown people, women, and LGBTQ people.

The *Caring Masculinity* narrative

Typical plot: A cis man performs caregiving duties, expresses emotional vulnerability, or participates in activities normatively understood as “feminine.”

This narrative features a cis man as a protagonist, acting in ways that are stereotypically “feminine.” Specifically, he performs caregiving duties like playing with, feeding, and showing affection to his children. In some tellings, he openly expresses difficult emotions. There is no villain, conflict, or tension in this narrative; just a man giving care and receiving affection from his children and other family members.

The TikTok posts we analyzed carried this narrative most frequently. Like most TikToks (and unlike TikToks carrying the *Bootstraps Masculinity* narrative), this narrative features characters going about their daily activities with music playing in the background.

Example 1, TikTok:

In [this](#) TikTok, a father cares for his sons and performs a variety of household tasks. The video's text overlay reads, “The universe gave you 4 sons because the world needs good men.”

Example 2, TikTok:

In [another](#) TikTok, a young girl paints her father's fingernails with highlighters. The text overlay reads “peak masculinity,” while the image caption reads “anything for her.”

Implications

This narrative straddles the line between the two types of narratives discussed under this finding. On one hand, this narrative expands the boundaries of masculinity and normalizes men's participation in care work. It shows caregiving as an ordinary part of men's lives, undermining the idea that care is “naturally” women's work and the gendered division of labor that keeps women responsible for caregiving. On the other hand, some of the stories that carry the narrative treat men taking on caregiving as notable or exceptional, rather than a normal and expected part of their lives. By treating men's caregiving as going above and beyond, these stories stop short of fully disrupting gender stereotypes.

In addition, like the narratives of care discussed under finding #3, it individualizes care and locates it within the nuclear family. In doing so, it places out of view the structural changes necessary to make caregiving truly possible for all men, across race and socioeconomic status.

FINDING #5:

Among progressive narratives we identified across media, only one—highlighting structural factors shaping health care—offered a societal-level critique.

While conservative sources offered a big-picture narrative—the *War on Western Civilization*—that offers a general explanation and critique of contemporary society, only one of the progressive narratives we identified offered a critique operating at the level of society as a whole. This narrative, described in the following section, concerns the unequal treatment that women, especially women of color, experience in medical settings.

Advocates and activists have been crafting and circulating big-picture critiques of the role of gender, family, and care in society for decades. The dearth of such narratives in our sample suggests that they have not saturated media ecosystems. This indicates a gap between the narratives circulating in activist, advocacy, and policy circles and those appearing in mainstream social media.

The *Medicine Fails Women* narrative

Typical plot: Medical institutions exclude women, especially women of color.

This narrative suggests that women, especially women of color, have been systematically excluded from medical research to their detriment. According to this narrative, for decades, medical research has focused on studying how conditions present in men, and researchers have operated under the assumption that women's bodies would respond similarly. This assumption has led to misdiagnoses, undertreatment, and the systematic neglect of conditions that disproportionately affect women, particularly women of color.

We found this narrative in two of the podcasts we analyzed. These podcasts are interviews with medical experts who are trying to change a status quo in which women are systematically neglected in medical settings. As a result, the stories carrying this narrative are either historical in nature (as is the case with the example below) or draw from the personal experiences of medical professionals who have noticed the ongoing exclusion of women from medical research.

Example, Podcast:

In the following excerpt from an episode of *The School of Greatness* titled “Has the Medical System Betrayed Women?,” Dr. Mary Claire Haver argues that the medical system's failure to adequately care for women is a structural problem rooted in the treatment of cis men's bodies as default:

Dr. Haver: The medical system—I don't think the individual doctor goes out in the world and thinks, I'm going to fail a woman. I think the way we've built the system was for the basic white guy. You know, like, and at least in the US. And so, all of the studies, you know, more women were not even required legally to be in studies until 1993 from the NIH. Okay, so we have an entire generation, now, that happened because thalidomide was being used in pregnant women for nausea and it ended up causing birth defects and that freaked everyone out understandably, but they removed all women from studies after that just in case they might get pregnant. Then when you talk to researchers, it's much more expensive and harder to study women because of their cycles or because of peri- or post-menopause. And men are just predictable. So, they just study mostly men. And just take those things and infer them to women when we don't really understand the gender differences and the sex differences.

Implications

This narrative brings to light one of the many effects of structural sexism. It is promising because it highlights how the disparities women, particularly women of color, experience in health care do not operate only through explicit bias or ill intent, but through cumulative, systemic processes of exclusion and neglect.

More research is needed to clarify how widespread this narrative is. But its apparent presence in mainstream media could offer a starting point for disseminating big-picture, societal-level narratives, either by widening its focus beyond the medical system or supplementing it with narratives that touch on other structural issues related to gender, family, and care.

FINDING #6:

Conservative narratives sometimes frame claims about gender, care, and family as “scientific,” lending a false sense of credibility and authority to regressive ideas.

In the podcast episodes we analyzed, conservative narratives often use scientific language and framing. This includes the use of statistics, claims about historical periods, and references to research findings.

Consider the following excerpt from a podcast episode called “Hidden Dangers of Daycare, It Might Be Causing Future Issues For Your Kid!” from *The Diary of a CEO*. In this excerpt, Erica Komisar, a parenting expert and psychoanalyst, argues that more children are experiencing mental health crises today because mothers, due to feminism, have strayed from their biological responsibility to be primary caregivers for their babies.

Komisar: You know, everybody cheered and said, great, you know, women have the same rights as men and now everybody can be in the workforce and be independent and make money and do their own thing. Me, me, me, me. The problem is that children were dropped. They were abandoned. And their needs, which are not needs that are going to shift because society shifts, because they have irreducible, neurological emotional needs. So we know that babies are born neurologically and emotionally fragile. And so what that means is they're not born resilient. And today, what's being projected onto babies is [that] they can handle a lot. They can handle stress, they can handle separation, they can handle you going back to work after six weeks or three months and leaving them in daycare with strangers or, you know, and from an evolutionary perspective, babies have always needed the physical skin-to-skin contact with their mothers for the first year. [In] most parts of the world, babies are worn on their mother's bodies, because mothers perform a number of really important functions for babies that are biological functions based on our [mothers'] evolutionary need to provide our babies with what we call attachment security. So, you know, society took a turn, and it's caused a lot of damage. I mean, this mental health crisis in children I saw coming 30 years ago.

Implications

Given the high status people ascribe to scientific language in our society, its use can serve to legitimize conservative claims about gender, care, and family. Using scientific language can frame narratives as objective, evidence-based, and rational in ways that lend a veneer of political neutrality, even when claims are ideologically laden. This framing tactic may make claims about the value of traditional gender roles and the (white) nuclear family more persuasive, especially to audiences that value expertise, objectivity, and scientific authority. And because science is a mainstream social institution, this tactic may undercut critics' attempts to position these views as extreme.

Narrative Obstacles and Opportunities

In this section, we summarize strategic takeaways from the research findings discussed in the previous section. Specifically, we outline the obstacles that stand in the way of more expansive visions of care, gender, and family, as well as the opportunities to advance narratives that support those visions.

OBSTACLE #1:

None of the progressive narratives we found match the scale and cohesiveness of the big-picture, conservative narratives about gender, care, and family.

The *War on Western Civilization* narrative is an attempt to shift people's attention away from the structural problems that are actually at the root of most people's struggles by vilifying the LGBTQ community, people of color, immigrants, and people experiencing poverty. While many progressive organizations and activists have cohesive frameworks that offer alternative, big-picture ways of understanding gender, care, and family within a broad societal context, such narratives do not seem to have saturated social media and popular TV and podcasts.

People share an experience that the system is rigged against them, and they're looking for ways to make sense of and respond to this problem. The lack of popular progressive narratives that explain this experience and connect it to gender, care, and family means that the only narratives that people see and hear tying this all together are actively harmful. Finding ways to spread cohesive, big-picture progressive narratives is critical to avoid ceding this terrain to conservatives.

OPPORTUNITY: There is a demand for big-picture narratives that explain current realities. We can fill this void with narratives that connect more expansive approaches to gender, care, and family with systemic solutions that help everyone.

People are looking for ways to make sense of problems with society today. They feel that society doesn't work for them, including the ways our society navigates gender, family, and care, yet they don't always have a clear sense of how things are going wrong. This is a clear opening: People are looking for big-picture narratives that can explain their struggles, without blaming them for their own suffering. We need to connect audiences with already-existing big-picture progressive counternarratives that identify the structural factors producing inequalities and social tensions and that make clear that people's struggles are the outcome of political failures, not personal failings. Nurturing and investing in narrative infrastructure, distribution ecosystems, and intervention strategies would get these narratives to audiences at the scale we intend. Given the popularity of conservative narratives in our podcast sample, the podcast ecosystem could be a fruitful place to start.

OBSTACLE #2:

Popular narratives on masculinity limit gender possibilities for cis men.

Narratives like *Bootstraps Masculinity* and *Caring Masculinity* constrain cis men by reinforcing narrow, stereotypical, and sometimes contradictory gender expectations. At times, as in the case of the *Bootstraps Masculinity* narrative, men are told to limit their full range of human expression and focus on becoming self-reliant providers for their families or themselves. Not only does this make it hard for men to explore their full emotional and social potential, it individualizes structural problems, positioning men as responsible for solving issues that can be addressed only at the societal level. This mismatch between problem and solution can leave some men—especially those invested in traditional notions of masculinity—feeling aimless and unmoored.

OPPORTUNITY: Online engagement around hypermasculinity is fulfilling men's desire for purpose and connection.² We can create a new sense of belonging for cis men based on shared experiences.

An opportunity exists to offer counternarratives that address cis men's desire for connection and expand their gender possibilities by leaning into shared experiences of care and common economic struggles. Building on existing work by activists and advocates in the fields of gender, care, and family, we can build a sense of belonging grounded in alternative visions of masculinity and the shared fight for a different future.

OBSTACLE #3:

Care narratives typically confine care to individuals or nuclear families.

Individuals and families cannot shoulder the responsibility of care by themselves, but most care narratives reinforce the expectation that they can. This expectation is especially unreasonable in a society where wages have remained stagnant and the prices of basic necessities have risen sharply. When most narratives about care remain focused on individuals and families, it becomes harder for people to see or recognize the need for a stronger care infrastructure.

OPPORTUNITY: The severe strain of caregiving has become a shared experience across a wide swath of the socioeconomic spectrum.

As a society, we are at a collective breaking point when it comes to caregiving. Most of the population is struggling, and people are looking for big changes that can make a real difference in their lives.³ This creates an opening for counternarratives that broaden how people think about caregiving, including who should be responsible for it. United voices that reframe care as a systemic reality, requiring systemic solutions, could have long-term implications for how people think about care and how our society provides it.

OBSTACLE #4:

Racism underpins conservative narratives that blame social “problems” on marginalized communities, yet we found few progressive narratives that challenge structural racism.

The narrative architecture of structural racism has been refined over decades. Dog whistles and explicitly racist rhetoric show up in conservative narratives about gender, family, and care, from villainous portrayals of people of color as responsible for the decline of traditional values, in the *War on Western Civilization* narrative, to the familiar racist stereotypes of Black mothers in the *Unfit Mothers* narratives. But in the media we analyzed, we found few progressive narratives that explicitly acknowledged or challenged the role of structural racism.

We know that narratives that counter structural racism exist in social media and entertainment, yet the absence of these narratives in our sample suggests that they are not as widely present as is necessary.

OPPORTUNITY: We already have effective narratives for challenging structural racism.

While narratives that challenge structural racism need wider circulation on social media and in TV and podcasts, these narratives have been developed. Grounded in a long tradition dating back to the abolitionist movement, these narratives are in wide use in movement spaces, with different versions available for different contexts and audiences. From the Movement for Black Lives to the BLIS Collective's recent work to weave together narratives on Black liberation and indigenous sovereignty, a deep well of knowledge exists around narratives countering white supremacy.⁴ Activists and advocates working on gender, care, and family contribute to and draw from these narratives in their own work. The only challenge is to continue to broaden the reach of these narratives across media.

Conclusion

Studying the media narratives that circulate about gender, care, and family reveals both obstacles and opportunities. The Moving Mindsets Innovation Lab will spend the next two years developing and testing counter-narratives capable of advancing expansive visions of care, gender, and family and leveraging the opportunity areas identified in our research. Ultimately, this work is aimed at changing how people in the US think about care, gender, and the family to support movements dedicated to building a society where everyone is cared for.

Appendix A: Top 50 Podcasts 2025

Ranking	Apple	Spotify
1	The Joe Rogan Experience	The Joe Rogan Experience
2	The Daily	This Past Weekend w/ Theo Von
3	The Mel Robbins Podcast	The Mel Robbins Podcast
4	Crime Junkie	Alex Cooper's Call Her Daddy
5	Dateline NBC	Crime Junkie
6	Up First from NPR	The Shawn Ryan Show
7	Morbid	The Tucker Carlson Show
8	Pod Save America	New York Times' The Daily
9	The Megyn Kelly Show	Huberman Lab
10	The Shawn Ryan Show	Good Hang With Amy Poehler
11	Good Hang with Amy Poehler	The Diary of a CEO With Steven Bartlett
12	Mick Unplugged	Up First from NPR
13	The Tucker Carlson Show	NPR News Now
14	SmartLess	Wall Street Journal's The Journal
15	Stuff You Should Know	Rotten Mango
16	The Ezra Klein Show	Candace
17	48 Hours	Modern Wisdom
18	The Rest Is History	Bad Friends
19	The MeidasTouch Podcast	New Heights With Jason & Travis Kelce
20	This Past Weekend w/ Theo Von	Armchair Expert With Dax Shepard
21	The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett	Matt and Shane's Secret Podcast
22	Pardon My Take	SmartLess
23	REAL AF with Andy Frisella	Morbid
24	Call Her Daddy	On Purpose With Jay Shetty
25	20/20	Anything Goes With Emma Chamberlain
26	The Ben Shapiro Show	Stuff You Should Know
27	The Weekly Show with Jon Stewart	Dateline NBC
28	The Level Up Podcast w/ Paul Alex	The Charlie Kirk Show
29	Huberman Lab	Lex Fridman Podcast
30	The Telepathy Tapes	Andrew Schulz's Flagrant With Akaash Singh
31	Money Rehab with Nicole Lapin	2 Bears, 1 Cave With Tom Segura & Bert Kreischer

Ranking	Apple	Spotify
32	My Favorite Murder with Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark	MrBallen Podcast: Strange, Dark & Mysterious Stories
33	The School of Greatness	Smosh Reads Reddit Stories
34	Candace	Serial Killers
35	The Bill Simmons Podcast	Crime, Conspiracy, Cults and Murder
36	Armchair Expert with Dax Shepard	The Ben Shapiro Show
37	Exit Paradox	Today, Explained
38	The Jamie Kern Lima Show	Rotten Mango Video
39	On Purpose with Jay Shetty	The Tim Dillon Show
40	The Charlie Kirk Show	Pod Save America
41	Proven Podcast	The Telepathy Tapes
42	The Bible in a Year (with Fr. Mike Schmitz)	Conspiracy Theories
43	Blink Jake Haendel's Story	Distractible
44	Habits and Hustle	Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend
45	MrBallen Podcast: Strange, Dark & Mysterious Stories	PBD Podcast
46	Young and Profiting with Hala Taha (Entrepreneurship, Sales, Marketing)	Giggly Squad
47	All-In with Chamath, Jason, Sacks & Friedberg	Kill Tony
48	The Bulwark Podcast	What Now? With Trevor Noah
49	IMO with Michelle Obama and Craig Robinson	Just Creepy: Scary Stories
50	Right About Now - Legendary Business Advice	Unseen

Source: Podchaser

Appendix B: Top 100 TV Shows in Viewers 2024–2025

Ranking	Show	Network or Platform	Viewers (35-Day; in Millions)
1	Squid Game	Netflix	27.1M
2	Adolescence	Netflix	19M
3	Tracker	CBS	17.4M
4	Reacher	Prime Video	17.3M
5	High Potential	ABC	16.1M
6	Matlock	CBS	16M
7	Landman	Paramount+	15.8M
8	Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story	Netflix	15.7M
	Zero Day	Netflix	15.7M
10	Nobody Wants This	Netflix	15.2M
11	The Night Agent	Netflix	14.8M
12	American Primeval	Netflix	13.8M
13	Running Point	Netflix	13.1M
14	The Residence	Netflix	12.8M
15	A Man on the Inside	Netflix	12.4M
16	Georgie & Mandy's First Marriage	CBS	12.1M
	Ghosts	CBS	12.1M
	Yellowstone	Paramount Network/CBS	12.1M
19	1923	Paramount+	11.9M
20	The White Lotus	HBO	11.6M
21	Elsbeth	CBS	11.5M
	Ms. Rachel	Netflix/YouTube	11.5M
23	La Palma	Netflix	11.4M
	Will Trent	ABC	11.4M
25	911	ABC	11.1M
26	Watson	CBS	11M
	The Madness	Netflix	11M
	Mobland	Paramount+	11M
29	No Good Deed	Netflix	10.9M
	Shifting Gears	ABC	10.9M

Ranking	Show	Network or Platform	Viewers (35-Day; in Millions)
31	The Rookie	ABC	10.8M
32	NCIS	CBS	10.6M
	FBI	CBS	10.6M
34	The Lincoln Lawyer	Netflix	10.5M
35	Black Doves	Netflix	10.4M
36	Chicago Fire	NBC	10.3M
37	Missing You	Netflix	10.2M
38	Blue Bloods	CBS	10.1M
	Virgin River	Netflix	10.1M
40	Chicago PD	NBC	9.8M
41	Chicago Med	NBC	9.7M
42	Fire Country	CBS	9.6M
	Cross	Prime Video	9.6M
44	NCIS: Origins	CBS	9.3M
45	Agatha All Along	Disney+	9M
46	Abbott Elementary	ABC	8.8M
47	60 Minutes	CBS	8.7M
	Law & Order: SVU	NBC	8.7M
49	Paradise	Hulu	8.5M
50	Tulsa King	Paramount+	8.4M
	FBI: Most Wanted	CBS	8.4M
52	Survivor (Season 48)	CBS	8.3M
	The Voice	NBC	8.3M
	The Diplomat	Netflix	8.3M
55	FBI: International	CBS	8.2M
	The Equalizer	CBS	8.2M
	Only Murders in the Building	Hulu	8.2M
58	Cobra Kai	Netflix	8.1M
59	Survivor (Season 47)	CBS	7.9M
	The Penguin	HBO	7.9M
61	Special Ops: Lioness	Paramount+	7.8M
62	Doctor Odyssey	ABC	7.7M
63	Doc	Fox	7.6M
64	The Voice (Tuesday)	NBC	7.5M
	Brilliant Minds	NBC	7.5M
66	Outer Banks	Netflix	7.4M

Ranking	Show	Network or Platform	Viewers (35-Day; in Millions)
67	American Idol	ABC	7.3M
68	S.W.A.T.	CBS	7.2M
69	NCIS: Sydney	CBS	7.1M
	Is It Cake? Holiday	Netflix	7.1M
	Dancing With the Stars	ABC	7.1M
	9-1-1: Lone Star	Fox	7.1M
73	The Americas	NBC	7M
	Beast Games	Prime Video	7M
	The Hunting Party	NBC	7M
76	Happy's Place	NBC	6.9M
	Grey's Anatomy	ABC	6.9M
78	Love on the Spectrum U.S.	Netflix	6.8M
	Severance	Apple TV+	6.8M
80	Law & Order	NBC	6.7M
	Good American Family	Hulu	6.7M
82	The Irrational	NBC	6.6M
83	The Neighborhood	CBS	6.4M
84	Star Wars Skeleton Crew	Disney+	6.3M
	Dream Productions	Disney+	6.3M
86	The Recruit	Netflix	6.2M
	Win or Lose	Disney+	6.2M
89	St. Denis Medical	NBC	6.1M
90	The Bondsman	Prime Video	6M
	Found	NBC	6M
92	Daredevil: Born Again	Disney+	5.8M
	Love Is Blind	Netflix	5.8M
94	The Floor	Fox	5.7M
	On Call	Prime Video	5.7M
96	The Amazing Race	CBS	5.6M
	Pulse	Netflix	5.6M
	Beauty in Black	Netflix	5.6M
	American Manhunt: O.J. Simpson	Netflix	5.6M
	The Conners	ABC	5.6M

Source: Variety

Appendix C: Podcasts and TV Shows Analyzed

Table 1: Podcasts Analyzed

Ranking Range	Podcast Name	Episode Name	Ranking 2025
1–10	The Joe Rogan Experience	#2361-Graham Linehan	#1 Spotify, #1 Apple
	The Daily	Parenting a Kid in Trump's America	#8 Spotify , #2 Apple
	The Mel Robbins Podcast	The Best Financial Advice You'll Ever Hear	#3 Spotify, #1 Apple
	The Shawn Ryan Show	#182 King Randall, I - Rescuing a Lost Generation from Gangs, Crime and Chaos	#6 Spotify, #31 Apple
	The Megyn Kelly Show	Brown Shooting and MIT Murder Suspect Dead, HHS Takes on Child "Trans" Procedures: AM Update 12/19	>50 Spotify, #9 Apple
11–20	Up First	Best Friends and Life Partners	#12 Spotify, #6 Apple
	Candace	Candace x Milo: The Rise of the Gaytriarchy	#16 Spotify, #34 Apple
	The Tucker Carlson Show	Chris Williamson's Advice to Men: How to Survive a World of OnlyFans and AI Girlfriends	#7 Spotify, #13 Apple
	Ezra Klein Show	The Disaster That Just Passed the Senate	>50 Spotify, #20 Apple
21–30	On Purpose with Jay Shetty	Dr. Becky Kennedy: #1 Parenting Mistake Fueling Your Kid's Anxiety! Follow THIS Proven Framework to Raise Emotionally Strong Adults	#24 Spotify, #111 Apple
	The Diary of a CEO	Child Attachment Expert: Hidden Dangers of Daycare, It Might Be Causing Future Issues For Your Kid! Birth Rates Are Plummeting & Its Terrifying! Dr. Erica Komisar	#11 Spotify, #21 Apple
	Call Her Daddy	Kate Hudson: A Year Without Men (FBF)	>50 Spotify, #24 Apple

Ranking Range	Podcast Name	Episode Name	Ranking 2025
31–40	The Ben Shapiro Show	Ep. 2333 - Gavin Newsom Wants to Trans The Kids	#36 Spotify, #26 Apple
	Today, Explained	Make America Uninsured Again	#37 Spotify, >50 Apple
	The School of Greatness	Has The Medical System Betrayed Women? How To Take Back Control of Your Health	>50 Spotify, #33 Apple
	Armchair Expert with Dax Shepard	Mary Claire Haver (on menopause)	#20 Spotify, #36 Apple
41–50	What Now? With Trevor Noah	You're Not a Bad Parent, You're Overwhelmed with Dr. Becky	#48 Spotify, >50 Apple
	Proven Podcast	The Art of Billionaire Parenting the Counter Intuitive Method - Naveen Jain	>50 Spotify, #41 Apple
	IMO with Michelle Obama and Craig Robinson	Caretakers Need to Care for Themselves with Seth and Lauren Rogen	>50 Spotify, #49 Apple
	PBD Podcast	Minnesota Daycare Fraud, Iran WARNS Total War, Trump Hosts Zelenskyy + Musk vs. Mamdani PBD Podcast Ep. 709	#45 Spotify, >50 Apple

Table 2: TV Shows Analyzed

Ranking	Show	Season & Episode	Episode Title	Streaming Platform or Network
2	Adolescence	s01e3	N/A	Netflix
3	Tracker	s02e12	Monster	CBS
5	High Potential	s01e12	Partners	ABC
6	Matlock	s01e10	Crash Helmets On	CBS
10	Nobody Wants This	s02e06	Anything Can Happen	Netflix
12	American Primeval	s01e01	N/A	Netflix
13	Running Point	s01e04	Doljanchi	Netflix
16	Georgie & Mandy's First Marriage	s01e08	Diet Crap	CBS
16	Ghosts	s05e05	T-Daddy	CBS
19	1923	s02e01	The Killing Season	Paramount+
20	The White Lotus	s03e01	Same Spirits, New Forms	HBO
23	Will Trent	s03e18	Listening to a Heartbeat	ABC
24	A Man on the Inside	s02e05	Thanksgiving Break	Netflix

Ranking	Show	Season & Episode	Episode Title	Streaming Platform or Network
25	9-1-1	s08e13	Invisible	ABC
29	No Good Deed	s01e03	Letters of Intent	Netflix
37	Missing You	s01e01	Every Breath You Take	Netflix
46	Abbott Elementary	s04e11	Strike	ABC
47	Law & Order: Special Victims Unit	s26e10	Master Key	NBC
49	Paradise	s01e01	Wildcat Is Down	Hulu
NR	Monster: The Ed Gein Story	s03e01	Mother!	Netflix

Endnotes

1. Volmert, A., & Lindholm, C. B. (2026). *From protecting the status quo to a vision for change: Framing democracy in a time of authoritarianism*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2026/05/From-Protecting-the-Status-Quo-to-a-Vision-for-Change-Framing-Democracy-in-a-Time-of-Authoritarianism.pdf>
2. Equimundo. (2026). *Equimundo's state of American men 2025*. <https://www.equimundo.org/resources/state-of-american-men-2025/>
3. FrameWorks Institute (n.d.) *Quick-start guide: Tapping into Americans' desire for change*. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2025/09/Quick-Start-Guide-Tapping-into-Americans-Desire-for-Change.pdf>
4. We know from our own research, which builds on this knowledge, that we can move a wide audience by framing racism as a rigged system. Volmert, A., Lindholm, C. B. (2025). *Filling in the blanks: Contesting what “the system is rigged” means*. FrameWorks Institute. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2025/01/FWI-System-Is-Rigged-1.29.25-2.pdf>

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Authors: Rae Jereza, Andrew Volmert

Research Contributors: Rae Jereza, Luis Hestres

Additional Contributors: Ishita Srivastava, Janelle Treibitz, Clara Blustein Lindholm, Melinda Weekes-Laidlow, Nayantara Sen, Sheridan Coomer, Diana Lugo-Martinez, Suzette Gardner

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Media Narratives of Care, Gender, and Family

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FrameWorks Institute. (2026). *Media narratives of care, gender, and family*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

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