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Jess McIntosh [00:00:00] This limited series podcast is based on the book, "The Lie that Binds" by NARAL Pro-Choice America president Ilyse Hogue with Ellie Langford. Each episode builds on the history terminology and figureheads established in the last. So we strongly recommend that you start from episode one before jumping ahead.

Brianna Wu [00:00:18] The truth is, GamerGate is less of an event and more of a playbook to use against someone you don't like.

Jess McIntosh [00:00:26] This is Brianna Wu, co-founder of independent videogame studio Giant SpaceKat.

Brianna Wu [00:00:32] This is the GamerGate playbook. Find someone you want to shut up. Go to their entire life. Go through all their social media posts. Investigate them and find something to attack them with. And then get an army of people online to scream from the hills about this fact which may or may not be true and destroyed their reputation. The idea is to make the cost of speaking out so high that it's easier to just remain silent.

Jess McIntosh [00:00:59] The GamerGate controversy started in August 2014.

Brianna Wu [00:01:01] All through 2014 my women colleagues were being basically bullied out of the industry.

Jess McIntosh [00:01:09] It was set off after game developer Zoe Quinn was falsely accused by their ex-boyfriend of sleeping with a videogame journalist to garner positive reviews for their company's new game. This led to an avalanche of rape threats, doxing and death threats against Quinn, as well as women who criticized sexism in the game industry in general.

Archive [00:01:28] Anita Sarkeesian was forced to cancel a planned lecture in Utah after threats of a shooting massacre. The e-mail sender wrote, "Feminists have ruined my life and I will have my revenge."

Jess McIntosh [00:01:43] Along with women who spoke out in their defense.

Archive [00:01:45] Women like Brianna Wu, an independent game developer, was even driven out of her home, all for simply tweeting her opinion.

Brianna Wu [00:01:53] There's not a good way to have a law and order episode made about your life.

Archive [00:01:58] Do they know.

Archive [00:01:58] Do we know about what I.

Archive [00:02:01] Tell them or I will.

Archive [00:02:02] Stephen Stop.

Archive [00:02:03] They sent her a threatening message earlier today, saying they wanted to see her on her knees in front of the whole world. She'd gotten doxxed an hour ago.

Archive [00:02:11] And where where was that posted?

Archive [00:02:12] A subthread on Red Chan, we're tracking it. it's vile.

Archive [00:02:16] I told you not to read it. I knew you'd overreact. So I got doxxed, changed my passwords.

Brianna Wu [00:02:23] They doxxed me said, guess what. Beep I know where you live. They listed my address. They told me they were going to murder me. My husband. They said if I had children, they were going to die. And they said my dad mutilated corpse would be on the front page of Jezebel. It would have been much easier for me to just say nothing, but I had asked all the men in our field to speak up about what was happening to women all through 2014. Why are you saying something? It cost you nothing to speak out. Why are you being silent as your women colleagues are leaving? So I realized if they weren't going to get that done, I had to.

[00:03:01] So when The Boston Globe started calling with The Washington Post, New York Times, CNN, MSNBC, when they called, I reached inside myself and found the strength to tell people what was happening in the game industry. Before then people really did think GamerGate was about ethics in game journalism.

Jess McIntosh [00:03:23] By now, you may be wondering why is a podcast about the anti-choice movement talking about trolls in the gaming industry? Here's Ilyse Hogue, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America.

Ilyse Hogue [00:03:31] Where they sought to sort of terrorize women through things like GamerGate, that was a direct correlation to where predominantly men and the anti-choice movement sought to terrorize women outside of clinics. Right? There, there's a lot of tactical alignment and a lot of ideological alignment.

Brianna Wu [00:03:52] What I think is so interesting is that the anti-choice movement works with the exact same tools of GamerGate. The truth is, it was a really insidious way to radicalize an entire generation of very, very young men against women.

Jess McIntosh [00:04:10] Welcome to The Lie That Binds. I'm your host, Jess McIntosh. The GamerGate playbook isn't very different than the anti-choice playbook. It's the natural next chapter in the Radical Right's storied history of mobilizing disaffected communities. Since their inception, the Radical Right has always had a so-called fringe element within their base, and that fringe has repeatedly used threats, intimidation and violence to silence their opponents. The players have changed, but the tactics have stayed the same. Mainstream conservatives have tried to maintain a distance from the fringe. But this week we'll see how they've encouraged the extremism every step of the way. Supplying a constant stream of carefully tailored propaganda and misogynistic ideologies. And all of this paved the way for Trump's America, where today's fringe has been welcomed into the Radical Right's coalition with open arms and their violent tactics are guaranteed to amplify throughout the 2020 race.

[00:05:15] To understand today's climate, let's consider an early target of Radical Right intimidation. The abortion clinic. Have you ever thought to ask why stand alone abortion clinics exist in the first place? To answer that, we spoke with David S. Cohen, associate professor at Drexel University and author of the new book "Obstacle Course The Everyday Struggle to Get an Abortion in America."

David S. Cohen [00:05:36] You know, after Roe, the convergence of many different factors led to abortion being provided more and more in a standalone clinic setting rather than the hospital setting for some good reasons.

Jess McIntosh [00:05:50] Through the feminist movement of the 60s and 70s, people realized that they could provide abortions in a feminist woman-centered environment rather than a sterile, male dominated hospital.

David S. Cohen [00:06:00] So people started their own clinics that were very much feminist oriented clinics or people wanted to start their own clinics because you could ensure at a clinic that everyone working there supported abortion. You can guarantee that everyone there supports the work that's being done.

Jess McIntosh [00:06:18] These spaces embody the newly recognized freedoms of American women. But there were downsides to the standalone clinic model.

David S. Cohen [00:06:26] One, it makes the procedure feel separate from normal medical care because you have these specialized clinics. And so there's stigma that becomes attached. Two, It creates a very easy target for anti-abortion extremists.

Jess McIntosh [00:06:41] At a standard hospital, you have no way to know what treatment any of the patients are receiving or what procedures any of the doctors are performing. Standalone clinics meant that every employee in some way worked on abortion, that every patient had access to abortion services, and that all of this was happening in a building with a public address that anti-choices could easily pinpoint on a map.

David S. Cohen [00:07:02] So there's a real downside to the standalone clinic movement, which really started expanding in the mid to late 70s. And we saw that with the attacks on clinics.

Jess McIntosh [00:07:12] There were clinic invasions, bombings and providers were being personally targeted.

David S. Cohen [00:07:17] Anti-abortion extremists find out their names. They find out personal information about them and start screaming their names at them when they're coming to and from work, learning where they live, sending them hate mail or phone calls at home with death threats. These are not what we think are within the normal bounds of debate in a democratic society.

Jess McIntosh [00:07:42] The goal here is the same that Brianna laid out in the GamerGate strategy. Silence and shut down the people you disagree with.

David S. Cohen [00:07:48] And they're doing it, A) to try and stop people from providing abortion, but also B) to try and scare other people from getting into or staying in the field and thinking that that's a way for them to stop or eliminate abortion.

Jess McIntosh [00:08:03] Why are they so convinced that they need to silence their enemies? Because not only are they fighting against popular opinion, but they've also been told that it's a matter of life and death. Remember, John Willke from Episode 2.

Archive [00:08:16] We'll be known as pioneer pro-life people. What we did helped to fuel it to become ultimately successful.

Jess McIntosh [00:08:24] Willke carefully manufactured an entire mythology around fetal development and abortion, none of which was founded in medical science. But that didn't matter because what it lacked in factual evidence, it made up for in visceral impact. The Radical Right saw the effectiveness of his grassroots messaging. As the Moral Majority ascended alongside Ronald Reagan, John Willkie became a leader in the growing network of anti-choice think tanks. Here's Ellie Langford, director of research at NARAL Pro-Choice America.

Ellie Langford [00:08:55] Willke became president of National Right to Life in 1980, and he really professionalized the organization.

Jess McIntosh [00:09:02] Today, National Right to Life is still one of the most well-known organizations in the anti-choice movement. But their most significant period of growth coincided with the rise of Reagan.

Ellie Langford [00:09:12] In the early 1980s, just as the anti-choice movement was really getting underway. National Right to Life was an organization of four people working out of D.C. that pulled in \$400,000 a year. After Reagan and after he worked with the conservative movement to really build anti-choice ideology into the political powerhouse that it would go on to become, he built his organization to fifty five employees with a budget well over \$15 million per year.

Jess McIntosh [00:09:45] Wilkie and other conservative leaders had a reptilian understanding of how to push people's buttons, package disinformation inside emotionally charged rhetoric that speaks directly to the fears, anxieties and religious values of their base. But national right to life didn't just supply the disinformation. They built an infrastructure to effectively spread it.

Angelo Carusone [00:10:06] They sort of have this amplification imperative, right, which is that you have to spread this idea. You get to spread whatever it is you're advocating for because somehow it's not getting out there.

Jess McIntosh [00:10:14] Angelo Carusone, president and CEO of Media Matters.

Angelo Carusone [00:10:18] Within the right wing ecosystem, no community actually better represents and reflects the amplification imperative than the anti-choice movement. That has been a through line for decades. So what is the right wing see? Well, let's see. Decades ago, instead of being sharing Facebook posts, sharing content, it was phone trees.

Jess McIntosh [00:10:36] Telephone tree is very low cost strategy to spread information quickly and efficiently to a huge group of people. Phyllis Schlafly pioneered this tactic during her stop ERA days. She'd draft a message, share it with her allies, then one woman would call five women. Each of them would call five more. And within hours, hundreds of women were notified and mobilized.

Angelo Carusone [00:10:56] They were organized and engaged and could amplify a message better than any other community that was out there. They had a network and not just a network, but a culture of learned behavior that was really built on this amplification imperative.

Jess McIntosh [00:11:11] National Right to Life was a propaganda powerhouse. They published books, launched speaking tours, released newsletters. Willke even hosted a daily radio address broadcasting anti-choice disinformation across over 300 stations. These communication efforts all shared the same dangerous message. They said abortion is murder and something has to be done about it.

Ilyse Hogue [00:11:34] What happened through the Reagan years is that the anti-choice movement was so successful in centering this really new narrative about abortion and that abortion was murder that they unleashed an entire movement of radicals whose slogan was actually, if abortion is murder, then act like it.

Jess McIntosh [00:11:59] That message had consequences. Two years into Reagan's presidency, anti-choice extremists up the ante.

David S. Cohen [00:12:06] In 1982, we had a doctor and his wife, who were the two owners of a clinic in southern Illinois who were kidnaped. And they were held for eight days in a bunker forced to make a video to Ronald Reagan, the president at the time explaining the evils of abortion. They were freed after eight days. You know, it pretty quickly took on very serious safety and well-being considerations because the extremists were out there attacking people, attacking clinics and really scaring people.

Jess McIntosh [00:12:43] Reagan denounced the kidnaping as violent, anarchistic activities, but he only intensified his extreme messaging even as the following year saw a terrifying rise in anti-choice attacks. Here he is speaking to the Association of National Religious Broadcasters in 1984.

Archive [00:13:01] I know what I'm about to say now is controversial, but I have to say it. This nation cannot continue turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the taking of some 4000 unborn children's lives every day. That's one every 21 seconds.

Jess McIntosh [00:13:20] In this speech to Christian broadcasters, Reagan spread lies and pseudoscience about fetal pain. The speech was condemned by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Nonetheless, it inspired the filmmakers behind the 1984 propaganda film *The Silent Scream*.

Archive [00:13:37] Now, for the first time, we have the technology to see abortion from the victim's vantage point. Ultrasound imaging has allowed us to see this.

Jess McIntosh [00:13:53] *A Silent Scream* was produced in partnership with Willke's National Right to Life, and the organization played a key role in disseminating it into the

mainstream. They did so in direct collaboration with President Reagan, who invited the film's spokesperson to speak at the White House. Here's Jerry Falwell promoting the event.

Archive [00:14:09] He is presenting a copy of the silent scream to the president. And the president challenged us at the Ellipse to give one copy to every member of Congress. The National Right to Life Committee is doing that today. All 535 members.

Jess McIntosh [00:14:26] Together, Reagan, a national right to life, amplified the silent scream through the biggest telephone tree in the country, Congress.

Archive [00:14:33] I doubt you'll ever see it on the networks, except I'm going to show it on the old time gospel hour and we will do our very best to get the information out to the public.

Jess McIntosh [00:14:44] Jerry Falwell aired the film on his TV program, The Old Time Gospel Hour, which propelled it further into public consciousness. It was aired on major networks and distributed to high schools and colleges across the country. The film doctored gruesome imagery to portray abortion as murder. That message was received loud and clear.

David S. Cohen [00:15:03] When people talk about abortion providers as murderers or as killing people and they talk about the fetus as a person, and those are things that mainstream politicians say, it's not that far of a leap to go from believing that to believing that you have to protect someone who's about to be murdered or you have to protect people from a murder. So you take things into your own hands to do that. The rhetoric of the mainstream movement gets in the minds of people who believe the same thing but just don't have any restraints when it comes to societal norms about how you deal with something you disagree with. And they violate laws, they kidnap, they bomb, they set things on fire. They stock, they harass. It's all part of a strategy to try and stop abortion through any means they can.

Jess McIntosh [00:16:02] Any means necessary increasingly, men organized terrorism. A wide array of radical groups formed among them was Operation Rescue.

Ilyse Hogue [00:16:11] So you had the growth of Operation Rescue. Randall Terry, who chose Direct Action.

David S. Cohen [00:16:17] Operation Rescue really started in the 80s and focused on blockades, clinic blockades, and they were very successful at it.

Archive [00:16:26] One woman told of her apprehension as she arrived at a local clinic for an abortion and found it surrounded by picketers.

Archive [00:16:32] I just couldn't believe that it was legal for them to be right out there in front of the clinic where I was supposed to be allowed the right to choose to have an abortion.

Archive [00:16:40] Taylor said the protesters screamed insults and held pictures of dead fetuses in front of her face in an attempt to get her to change her mind.

Ilyse Hogue [00:16:49] Their entire role within the movement is to incite the most extreme and violent wings. Knowing that there will be consequences and being perfectly OK with that.

Jess McIntosh [00:17:02] Operation Rescue maintained a public stance against violence, but not all anti-choice groups bothered to adopt the facade of peaceful protest.

David S. Cohen [00:17:10] The organization that comes up again and again as being the closest to the violence is Army of God an organization that is associated with the manual that floated around extremist circles in the 1980s with really violent tactics.

Jess McIntosh [00:17:24] This manual is essentially a how-to guide for committing violence against abortion providers. It incites terrorism so overtly that federal law prohibits them from publishing whole chapters on the Internet.

David S. Cohen [00:17:35] They believe in justifiable homicide, that killing one abortion provider will prevent the deaths of thousands of people. So it's worth. It's Justified. And that's sort of one of their core beliefs. And a lot of the people who've engaged in the most extremist anti-abortion acts have said they're a part of Army of God.

Jess McIntosh [00:17:54] The kidnapers from 1982, they called themselves Army of God members. The violent extremism effectively caught the attention of the American public. But it didn't look good for the so-called pro-life movement.

Ellie Langford [00:18:07] They had succeeded in making abortion a political issue and rallying some people around this idea that abortion is something to be fought with everything they've got. And honestly, I think that kind of went off the rails. They started to lose control of the movement that they created.

Jess McIntosh [00:18:28] The mainstream media finally started to portray the anti-choice movement as a coalition of violent religious zealots. Wilke and his allies realized it was time for a messaging shift. In 1991, he left National Right to Life to establish the Life Issues Institute, a think tank specifically designed to combat the growing pro-choice majority.

Ellie Langford [00:18:48] The group said that they were dedicated to changing hearts and minds through pro-life education and that they were specifically focused on targeting people who were uncertain or confused regarding their position on abortion.

Jess McIntosh [00:19:02] To turn the tide they knew they had to answer the powerful questions being posed by the women's rights movement. They test marketed various slogans to convince the public that they were compassionate towards women and landed on love them both.

Archive [00:19:15] We would like to save the life and the health and the concern of both of you. Why can't we simply now begin to say we want to love you both.

Ilyse Hogue [00:19:27] They needed these radicals in their ranks, right? But how do you rest just enough control back for them. And then also remind people that you're caring individuals. You know, this goes hand-in-hand with the idea of promoting pro-life feminism. We are about the women. We don't just hate women. We're not just out there yelling at

them in front of clinics. We actually are the ones who truly care about them. Those those strategies had to go hand-in-hand.

Jess McIntosh [00:19:52] Love them both. Was the slogan of the kinder, gentler wing of the movement. They continue to claim that abortion was murder. But the new PR move provided enough cover to distance themselves from the organized violence. During the summer of 1991 in Wichita, Kansas that violence was mounting into what would be known as the summer of mercy.

Ilyse Hogue [00:20:12] The Summer of Mercy in Wichita was sort of an early attempt to model a course of direct action that was sustained presence at these clinics, harassing, intimidating, bullying and really upping the ante about not only what was permissible, but what was required.

Ellie Langford [00:20:33] There are lots of accounts of what the Summer of Mercy protests look like, but they involve some of the most aggressive tactics that we see from the anti-choice movement. That was where people were physically blocking clinics, where people were chaining themselves to doors and entry ways, where they were blocking, targeting, physically intercepting women and making it so that they would be unable to access an abortion clinic.

Jess McIntosh [00:20:59] The Summer of Mercy protests were not just in general opposition to the medical procedure of abortion. They targeted an individual, Dr. George Tiller.

Ilyse Hogue [00:21:08] George Tiller was a doctor who provided abortions to women all through their pregnancy. He ran a clinic in Kansas, which was the sort of last refuge for a lot of women facing really difficult, almost unimaginable situations.

David S. Cohen [00:21:27] If you put a pin in the middle of the contiguous United States, you pretty much get Wichita, Kansas. For difficult cases into the third trimester, he was one of a small number of doctors who provided that care in the entire country. I think it was the combination of him being a third trimester provider in the deep red state who was outspoken about it and proud of his work. So he he did not back down. He was shot in 1991 and survived the shooting. It just made him more convinced of the work that he did.

Archive [00:22:03] You know, I'm just like my patients. You know, last night I got shot and I was scared, but there was somebody there to take care of me.

Jess McIntosh [00:22:10] Abortion providers throughout the country faced a near constant stream of death threats.

Ilyse Hogue [00:22:15] What started to happen is people inspired by this rhetoric started killing doctors.

Archive [00:22:21] Dr. David Gunn was shot after getting out of his car as he came to work at a Pensacola abortion clinic.

David S. Cohen [00:22:27] We saw our first murder in nineteen ninety three and then several more in 1994 and then a couple more in 1998.

Archive [00:22:33] Barnett Slepian, an Amherst, New York doctor well-known to anti-abortion protesters, was shot dead by a sniper last night while at home with his wife and four children.

Jess McIntosh [00:22:43] Even as the consequences of their violent rhetoric became clear, the Radical Right continued zeroing in on Tiller.

David S. Cohen [00:22:50] He became the center of attention for the right wing in a way that I think other individual doctors never really did. Fox News Bill O'Reilly really focused on him. This man, Dr. George Tiller, known as Tiller, the baby killer, and made him into this evil figure that really, I think, focused the anti-abortion movement on George Tiller.

Jess McIntosh [00:23:15] He stood up to the right-wing media machine in a way that made him even more of a target for anti-choice rage. From the day his clinic was first bombed in 1986, up until his murder in 2009,.

Archive [00:23:28] Dr. Tiller was murdered ten days ago during Sunday services at his Wichita church. He was 67 years old.

Ilyse Hogue [00:23:36] George was a Christian. He was a faithful man, was a wonderful husband, wonderful father, dearly loved by his family, his community and his church where he was ultimately murdered.

Archive [00:23:50] Tiller was serving as an usher. His wife of 45 years singing in the choir.

Ilyse Hogue [00:23:55] He he knew the risks that he was facing. And he was he was compelled he was called, almost, some would say, to continue to provide care because he saw suffering and needed to alleviate it.

Jess McIntosh [00:24:16] The loss of this titan did not go unnoticed by conservative leaders. Here is Operation Rescue President Randall Terry responding to George Tiller's death.

Archive [00:24:26] Pro-life leaders in the pro-life movement are not responsible for George Tiller's death. George Tiller was a mass murderer. And horrifically, he reaped what he sowed.

Jess McIntosh [00:24:39] This statement embodies the insincerity of the anti-choice movement. Even while distancing themselves from violence, they're still shamelessly advancing their violent narrative.

David S. Cohen [00:24:49] The mainstream movement tried to treat the extremists and they still to this day as that's not who we are. That's just a fringe movement. We have nothing to do with the violence that is separate from what we do. We do not rely on it. We do not support it. We do not condone it. But they really do work hand in hand.

Jess McIntosh [00:25:07] Randall Terry followed up this public appearance with a video addressing so-called pro-life leaders directly.

Archive [00:25:13] We in the pro-life movement must not flinch. Here's what's going to happen. The pro-abortion groups, the Obama administration, are going to try and take this

moment and browbeat us into surrendering our best weapons of rhetoric, our best weapons of our actions, protests and our most effective images, those of the dead babies. We must not surrender a single inch.

Jess McIntosh [00:25:40] He literally lays out all the tactics of the Radical Right propaganda playbook. And while he appears to speak only for the most extreme wing of the movement, mainstream leaders are listening.

Ellie Langford [00:25:52] There were a lot of leaders who identified as anti-choice leaders who tried to disavow some of the extremists in the movement. But the reality was that a lot of those extremists and the terrorists who perpetrated violence against clinics and doctors were deeply connected to their networks and inherently a part of that structure that they'd built.

David S. Cohen [00:26:17] No one should think that they are not benefiting from it. They are benefiting from it. They get to point to the extremists and say, oh, we're not that bad. Let's just cut off Medicaid funding and make people wait 72 hours and restrict abortion at 20 weeks. But, hey, we're not killing people. We're not killing abortion providers. I'm not saying there's a conspiracy where they get together in a back room and come up with how who's going to do what. But there is this tacit benefit that the mainstream anti-abortion movement gets from the extremists.

Jess McIntosh [00:26:51] With the rise of the Internet in the 90s, the entire world moved online. The Internet provided some things that in-person protesters never had: a global audience and the protection of anonymity. The fringe right adapted accordingly.

David S. Cohen [00:27:05] After the blockade era, we started seeing the Internet era and we're still in the internet era now, obviously, of using the Internet to harass and target abortion providers.

Jess McIntosh [00:27:17] The term doxing may not have appeared until the 2000s, but the concept of publicly sharing private contact information in order to encourage harassment is not new. The Internet gave it global implications and exponentially increased the chances that an extremist would use that information to hurt someone.

David S. Cohen [00:27:34] The Nurnberg Files is a Web site that was a list of abortion providers around the country. What made it so menacing was that it listed doctors who had been murdered with a strikethrough font, so a line through their name. Doctors who had been hurt but not murdered, their names were great out. And then the rest was just a list. It was a hitless. It was basically here's a list of abortion providers. Here's the ones we've taken care of already. Here's the ones that we've mamed but not eliminated here are all the others. Go at 'em.

Jess McIntosh [00:28:11] After being credibly connected to multiple attacks and at least one murder, the original Nuremberg Files site was taken down in 2002, but the threat online is still very real.

David S. Cohen [00:28:22] And we still see similar types of Internet based attacks now where there are websites devoted to particular providers, where information is there for one to find out about them. They sort of do the dance of saying on the front page that we do not support violence. We do not support threats. But it's information that make very

easy for the people who will use illegal methods to get information and find out things and then harm people.

Jess McIntosh [00:28:49] The Internet led to frightening new ways to spread hateful ideas. With the advent of blogs and message boards, anti-choicers established themselves online. So too did white supremacists with sites like Stormfront. It became easier to share propaganda across extreme platforms, inciting rage that could easily be directed at new targets, like women.

Melissa Ryan [00:29:11] I'm a woman on the Internet, so harassment has always been part of it.

Jess McIntosh [00:29:15] This is Melissa Ryan, the writer and digital strategist behind Ctrl Alt-right Delete, a newsletter combating online toxicity and extremism.

Melissa Ryan [00:29:23] It's so funny. In the earliest political blog I ever wrote, which was about Connecticut politics and I was the only female contributor, the other contributors of the blog would get so freaked out just by the comments. And emails I received just every day and we actually would joke about it and we would test it. We would say maybe the exact same things in different parts of a common section. And the reaction I got was always so much worse. It was more harrassy. I would get threats that the guys wouldn't get. So it was always part of my experience. And certainly, you know, working at Emily's List and working on the Obama campaign and you have a pretty public profile. You just sort of accept that harassment and threats and weird things in the mail are going to be part of that.

Jess McIntosh [00:30:06] For as long as there have been women on the Internet, there have been men ready to attack them.

Melissa Ryan [00:30:10] You know, blogging was a very male space. There were some notable folks who hid the fact that they were a woman for a long time. I think about Digby is probably the most notable one. But you also had this growing feminist blogosphere. You had all all these amazing feminist blogs that were coming out, in addition, who were saying, you know, this is part of the political blogosphere, too.

Jess McIntosh [00:30:32] In some ways, the early feminist blogging movement has a lot in common with the early stand alone abortion clinics. Both seemed initially like an empowering, safe space for women to come together with like minded allies to exercise their liberty without fear of harassment or backlash.

Melissa Ryan [00:30:46] The great thing I think about the early blogosphere and the early feminist blogosphere is that you realize that you were not alone for the first time, that there were other people that had the same political opinions, the same concerns that you had. And blogs gave people a space to kind of hang out and start to have those conversations and mobilize. We also saw it definitely like it became cool to be a feminist online for the first time. Cool to be cool to be a feminist, period. But, you know, remember, you saw a lot of celebrities and influencers proudly come out as feminists. And, you know, it was so helpful, I think, in terms of that moment when we got to, you know, 2012 and Akin, there was like this galvanized force of women who were ready to speak out, who are ready to call themselves feminists, who've been calling themselves feminists online for years and just became more public and more emboldened.

Jess McIntosh [00:31:38] But what provides a safe space for women also provides a target for men who hate women. Rape threats and violent messages started flooding into the comments section. Here's Amanda Marcotte, politics writer for Salon and author of the book "Troll Nation."

Amanda Marcotte [00:31:53] You know, I had a little blog online that I write about feminism and music and politics. And I started to get this surge of just angry, furious men that were obsessive about following me, about stalking me even. And they just couldn't believe that women were allowed to have opinions online, I guess. I ended up kind of following them, sort of backtracking and realizing that they were organizing in their own fledgling blogs and forums online. I think at the time there was a lot of pressure, especially from liberal men, to feel like this was not a big deal, that it was just a few fringe characters. But, you know, I along with a lot of other feminist bloggers right from the beginning, were like, no, this is this is something big.

Jess McIntosh [00:32:45] The blogosphere of the late 90s and early 2000s gave way to an even bigger online phenomenon, social media. With it came new promise and new threats. Melissa Ryan, again.

Melissa Ryan [00:32:56] I really thought for the longest time of like, oh, you know, that the Internet is a new public square. Eventually, people are going to figure out how to behave themselves. And I almost hold myself like, oh, you don't even have to. You know, this is the kind of thing that will work itself out. And of course, we now know by letting GamerGate, by letting other harassment campaigns go on for as long as they did, both with the trolls and the tech companies, that that was, you know, the wrong response, frankly, because we have empowered and emboldened these folks.

Jess McIntosh [00:33:26] Social media provided even more infrastructure for misogynists to disseminate hate. But one especially underhanded Twitter campaign encapsulates this era, under the hashtag #endfathersday.

Archive [00:33:38] The hashtag #endfathersday is picking up steam with feminists online and with others and social media.

Archive [00:33:44] Tweets like #endfathersday, because it's a celebration of patriarchy and oppression, have been popping up all over the place.

Jess McIntosh [00:33:51] #endfathersday started trending in the summer of 2014, mere months before GamerGate. The tweets were allegedly written by black feminists calling for the eradication of Father's Day.

Archive [00:34:01] Tweets here from Tasha, she wrote, "And everyone knows we only need mothers. Why do we even need Fathers' Day? Fathers are useless. #endfathersday."

Archive [00:34:10] Oh, come on. Just your incessant, nasty feminist rhetoric that they're not just interested in ending Father's Day, they're interested in ending, men. That's really what they want.

Jess McIntosh [00:34:18] The entire thing was a hoax perpetrated by men's rights activists using fake accounts. It was a trap set for conservatives and liberals alike. They

were intentionally trying to push the narrative that p.c. culture was stripping men of basic rights while also playing on preexisting tensions in the online feminist space. Despite many black women on Twitter clearly calling out the organized nature of this harassment, most people dismissed it as a one off Internet prank.

Melissa Ryan [00:34:45] There, frankly, should have been a bigger response. I think there were a lot of women, particularly women of color, who had been trying to make these changes and pressure the tech companies for a long time. But there just wasn't the groundswell. And frankly, a lot of us didn't support them enough.

Jess McIntosh [00:34:59] A few months later, an even larger group of Internet trolls set its sights on women in the gaming industry. Which brings us back to where we started. GamerGate.

Archive [00:35:08] GamerGate, an online culture war on one side, mostly female critics and their supporters asking for more diverse representation of women in games. On the other traditionalist gamers who oppose major changes.

Jess McIntosh [00:35:20] Brianna Wu again.

Brianna Wu [00:35:23] So I want to tell you a story about a medium post. And someone became so obsessed with me that they went and basically stalked me and found the house I lived in and found the cars that I drove. And then from pictures, in interviews I'd done at my home, managed to put together a layout of my house. I later found out that this basically stalking had been used by people on 4chan and 8chan, and they put together a plan to come into my house and how they were to come in and sneak in and slaughter my entire family, moving from room to room with guns. This is serious stuff. You could not read something like that and not take it very seriously. I, I, for a period have people writing fanfic of basically torturing me slowly to death. And they would send it to me with these lurid sexual fantasies about basically butchering me like a horror movie. You can't read stuff like that and not have it damage you.

Jess McIntosh [00:36:31] Coordinated attacks, overt threats of rape or murder, stalking, doxing abortion providers have lived with these same harassment tactics since the 1980s. In fact, pretty much every conservative group whose goal has been to silence women and feminist allies have used these very tools from Army of God to Nuremberg Files to GamerGate.

Brianna Wu [00:36:53] I did develop a clinical case of PTSD. You've got to understand this was a nonstop onslaught of this. Everywhere I looked, every single digital outlet 24 hours a day. Death threats, rape threats, murder threats, videos being shot of people threatening to kill me. It was it was really, really extreme. And, you know, it's a formula that works because it's it makes the cost of speaking up so high. It's just not worth it.

Jess McIntosh [00:37:23] It's easy to trace the origin of terrorist groups like Army of God back to the lies promoted by mainstream anti-choice leaders. They had a shared political mythology and an issue around which they could organize. Unlike those early groups, the trolls of the GamerGate era weren't explicitly anti-choice. They didn't have anything resembling an issue based agenda. So who were they? What did they share?

Brianna Wu [00:37:45] It was overwhelmingly men. Most of them have been under 25 when they've talked to me all white. One of the things that's really struck me, particularly with the men, is how under socialized they were. And they struck me honestly as very sad figures. So do you see them and they're in pain. And they're obviously lonely and they're trying to make sense of the world and they've received all these messages. That the reason they are so lonely is because of feminists. And it's really challenging to find that empathy for that in the moment. But I I've tried to do that because it's about me. It's about me not poisoning myself with anger all of the time. So I think there's a larger conversation to be had about what's happening to young men in this country. Why are they such easy prey for this kind of extreme right wing radicalization?

Jess McIntosh [00:38:41] This is a good question. Why were they such an easy mark for the Radical Right? Here's Angelo Carusone of Media Matters again.

Angelo Carusone [00:38:49] It all relates down to one question of control. So at the center of the men's rights movement, you know, at its very, very earliest days before it became like a super destructive, horrible, toxic, masculine force, it was actually like a support thread on Reddit. You know, 15 years ago, for men going through divorces. And it was really sad, true and sad. And like it was actually people being like, this is terrible. I'm having a bad divorce and I'm getting like the raw of the stick here. And it would actually wasn't like I hate women. It was like I hate my life. And how are you dealing with this? But it was a a connection or whereas a there was a lot of horror stories at the center of that. Right. And sort of grew around that was misogynists being like, wow, look at all these horrible stories. This is women and feminism taking over and subjugating men. And this is just the tip of the iceberg, these poor like saps on this Reddit thread. And so if you pull that thread through one where there's an intersection as it relates to reproductive health is in the question of control and what a man's right is.

Ilyse Hogue [00:39:49] The MRA came out of this idea that masculinity was being eviscerated. But along with that was fathers' rights. Right. And that the judicial system was disproportionately biased towards women. Well, the fathers' rights piece has become really central to the modern day anti-choice movement, right? This informed consent. Oh, the father has to sign off. There is no father because there is no child.

Angelo Carusone [00:40:14] And just think about what you validate by getting a young man to go through that exercise of 'should you have the right to veto a woman's abortion if you got her pregnant?' One you have to think about that, that fetus as a baby and then you have to start thinking about abortion in a very personalized way. So even if you're pro-choice and believe that abortion should be legal, that's a way where you can reconcile both. Right. To be a young man and be pro-choice, to not, you know, not be like one those crazy right wingers that thinks abortion should be illegal. But just think that you should have a say in it. And that's how it starts. Right. And so the intersection there is really one of misogyny. They understood that there's an alignment that can be created by making that strain an argument, which is we're out here advocating for you. And if you if you have abortion on demand, you certainly don't have any rights as a father. And the moment that that became a thing for the pro-life movement was right after GamerGate. And, you know, they saw the power of the energy of this new movement and was like, well, how do we get to those kids? You know, because they are just they're a force and they hate women. So, like, how do we get them?

Jess McIntosh [00:41:18] Getting the men's rights activists meant condoning a much harsher level of language about women than the Radical Right had historically adopted.

Ilyse Hogue [00:41:27] Men's rights movement was much more open about the idea that empowered women are a threat to the natural order of things than the Kellyanne Conways or their traditional anti-choice movement.

Jess McIntosh [00:41:41] In the years since GamerGate, the men's rights activists have turned to spouting some of the most venomous anti-choice rhetoric on the Internet. They may not have started from the same issue as Army of God or Operation Rescue, but they got there. Amanda Marcotte, again.

Amanda Marcotte [00:41:55] If you want to understand why the right has sort of shifted away from this kind of condescending, we need to ban women's rights to protect women's, you know, precious, fragile state. Right. That kind of argument to this kind of, you know, nasty, misogynist Trumpian kind of approach, I would say, look at these statistics. You know, PRI, Pew Research, places like that have been tracking the decline of religion in American society, especially among young people. And something like 40 percent of millennials don't have religious faith anymore. And so organizing the anti-feminist movement around Christianity that works for the older people, like those are the people you still see at abortion clinic protests and things like that. But for that, under-40 set it wasn't working anymore. And I think that the only way to sort of appeal to them is to appeal to a lot of young men's resentments about women's growing equality.

Jess McIntosh [00:43:04] This resentment had been largely siloed online, directed at individuals who dared to encroach on white male spaces. For the most part. They weren't politicized.

Amanda Marcotte [00:43:14] What was interesting was when I was starting off as a feminist blogger, I didn't really see a lot of what you'd call the men's rights activists and the pickup artists and all these other little groups of, I would say secular misogynists online, talking about abortion rights, very much or reproductive rights at all. I don't think they saw it as in their interest to restrict women's reproductive rights at all.

Jess McIntosh [00:43:39] Phyllis Schlafly got enormous attention in the 1970s when she was able to fire up white women to vote against equality to uphold the patriarchy. The men's rights movement demonstrated for a modern era that misogyny was still a mobilizing force. Much like when Paul Weyrich stepped in to build on the base that Schlafly had unearthed. Someone stepped up early to capitalize on the potential of this new online group.

Amanda Marcotte [00:44:03] Well, a lot of credit goes to first Andrew Breitbart, who passed away shortly after he started the Breitbart site. And then Steve Bannon, who inherited the mantle of running the site. Bannon and Breitbart saw disaffected angry men online and realized that this was an audience and that they could be whipped into a more organized form,.

Angelo Carusone [00:44:25] Literally at the same time as Steve Bannon was like, 'hey, those guys could be useful from a political context,' the pro-life movement was say, hey, those guys could be helpful from a political context. They're scary. And we have always

relied on fear as one of our tactics. And they also hate women. And so that is where there was this weird moment where they started to think about ways to cross pollinate.

Amanda Marcotte [00:44:48] Bannon started really gearing Breitbart's coverage towards appealing to these men's worst instincts.

Jess McIntosh [00:44:56] In 2014, Steve Bannon assigned Milo Yiannopoulos to tap into the rising movement exposed by GamerGate.

Amanda Marcotte [00:45:03] Milo kind of went in and formed them into something a little bit more coherent, a little bit more organized, and then started taking all their anger at women and pointing it in the direction of voting Republican. Of exploring white supremacy and other, you know, goals that Breitbart had as political organizers as well as a media company.

Jess McIntosh [00:45:26] As is always the case there is more inside the Trojan horse than initially meets the eye.

Ellie Langford [00:45:32] We've demonstrated that the roots of the white supremacist movement and the anti-choice movement are way more deeply intertwined than people tend to expect. And I think that's also true of men's rights activism.

Jess McIntosh [00:45:46] Breitbart built a political ideology by tapping into the toxic online slurry of racism, misogyny and fear of losing status. The result became known by some as the alt-right. Melissa Ryan again.

Melissa Ryan [00:45:59] It is a rebrand. I try to say so-called alt-right, whenever I talk about them. These ideas aren't new. The white supremacist ideas that have been around sort of in the ether for a long time, certainly in American history and in other countries, cultures and histories as well. But this new energy, this combination of young men plus Internet has given them new life and helped these ideas become mainstream.

Jess McIntosh [00:46:22] One of the fastest ways to make radical ideas mainstream, attack the mainstream.

Angelo Carusone [00:46:28] There's a thing that's really important with all of this is like think of misinformation as sort of like a virus. Right. And the best, most effective way is to sort of deal with it is not to deal with it after it spills over, but to prevent it from spreading in the first place.

Jess McIntosh [00:46:42] Quick note. We recorded this interview with Angelo back in December 2019, well before the rise of the coronavirus in the U.S. So the virus comparison was just a powerful analogy then, but it's even more startling now.

Angelo Carusone [00:46:55] The vaccines for dealing with the virus of misinformation is journalism and in particular newsrooms and how they make decisions. And so one thing about the right-wing ecosystem as a whole is that it's not all, not just when we think about their misinformation problem. It's not just that they spread it. They do something even worse in some ways is that they destroy the checks or the things that protect against the widespread spread of it. And that is they work the refs. From the very beginning, they they constantly attack the gatekeepers here in this case, think the newsrooms and the editors

complaining of liberal bias, they sort of get in their heads. So right at the beginning, it's not just that they have a headstart in terms of that they're bigger, louder and scarier. They also then facilitate the widespread distribution of it, because the thing that is needed to just stop, it's even why even greater spread, they get rid of the thing that basically protects us all.

Jess McIntosh [00:47:49] And Breitbart is not the only one. They introduced a new generation to the network of right-wing sources that had developed over decades, constantly repeating and amplifying the same old propaganda.

Angelo Carusone [00:47:59] It is terrifying to think about how good they are when it comes to staying one step ahead and adapting and and that, but that is the reality of what we're dealing with. They've been so far ahead for so long that they're now they're just cashing in on their returns, which is a massive ecosystem in terms of distribution amplification that allows them to wildly distort the conversation.

Jess McIntosh [00:48:23] Consider all the think tanks and Radical Right organizations that we've established throughout this series. Every one of them has a significant digital presence. They recognized early on the potential the Internet held for advancing their goals through creeping authoritarianism.

Melissa Ryan [00:48:38] I think they were better at manipulating the tech platforms when we switched over to social media as our main form of communication, which is easy to do. By the way, when you don't think that there are any rules and it's all about winning. They were purposely amplifying and continue to over amplify their content.

Jess McIntosh [00:48:59] They're adopting new digital strategies that rig the tech platform algorithms in their favor. But we don't actually need to get that technical to understand why it's working.

Angelo Carusone [00:49:07] It kind of masks the fact that they're essentially using the exact same strategy that they have used for four decades, which is a combination of disseminating your message and creating false or fabricated or heavily misleading stories, reports, data. If something to back it up. Right. Coming out of what sounds like a very legitimate source or site or entity when it's not.

Jess McIntosh [00:49:36] An episode 2 Imani Gandhi explained how full research institutions bypassed the peer review process by having a bunch of junk scientists review each other's junk science. This is pretty much how the right wing digital ecosystem works, too. There is a vast landscape of Radical Right pages. Some have religious viewpoints. Others are more secular. But when it comes to the actual anti-choice stories shared on these accounts, they are all coming from a very small, very active set of sources.

Angelo Carusone [00:50:02] If you look at all abortion related content, anything for websites in total make up a little more than 50 percent of all abortion content on Facebook. Three of them are extreme anti-choice groups like News, Lifestyle News and Live Action account for almost half of all of the abortion content on Facebook.

Jess McIntosh [00:50:25] This content is market researched propaganda, and it all comes with a very powerful call to action.

Angelo Carusone [00:50:31] One of the reasons why they have such high engagement on Facebook is not just the content itself. It gets back to that amplification imperative. And they only say to each other, you know, we're censored, we're banned, we're shadow band. They heard us right. They're out to get us in public. You don't get to see these things in everyday life. If you're a pro-life person, you know, you get attacked and marginalized or user voice here. Triple the amount.

Jess McIntosh [00:50:56] The anti-choice movement has demonstrated the power of the telephone tree. When they propel the message into their echo chamber, it reverberates far and wide. That's great incentive for others to try to get their content into that echo chamber.

Angelo Carusone [00:51:10] You know, whether you're a grifter or the 80s or you're a grifter now, like Ben Shapiro, who's sort of a combination of part grifter, part champion for men, what you see is that modern version of those phone trees. I mean, there's a reason why, Ben Shapiro, why his content is consistently right at the top of all these social media indexes is because the anti-choice movement is fueling a lot of that. And so it's an easy way to get a really big audience to not just consumer content, but then to share it for you. So that's honestly it. There's a good synergy.

Jess McIntosh [00:51:41] This synergy was perfectly calibrated by the time Trump entered the GOP primary. He was simply the newest grifter to take advantage of the Radical Right amplification machine.

Ellie Langford [00:51:51] Trump burst on to the Republican primary scene with the support of some conservative politicians who had seen his potential in garnering this extremist support. Trump's campaign language reflected all the components of the new so-called alt-right base. Breitbart had given them an ideology to spread. Trump gave them a figurehead to fight for.

Ellie Langford [00:52:19] We've seen how critical disinformation was to the very founding of the conservative movement and the politicization of evangelicals. But that has continued, and that disinformation remains critical to Trump's ability to maintain his coalition and his dominance in new forums like online spaces. The leading executive at Facebook who ran the company's advertising program in 2016, has admitted that they helped get Trump elected, that their platform was instrumental to his success and the way that it was set up was uniquely tailored to Trump's skills. Mostly because I think the ability to let disinformation live on that platform.

Melissa Ryan [00:53:09] They've made talking points like but turbocharged. Right? I think about this as a political strategist all the time. And you know what we liked about the Internet, what the left always liked about the Internet was that you can get your message out faster and with more volume than ever before. Unfortunately. The right has figured that out, too, and is part of the process, they have mainstreamed a lot of this racist and misogynist rhetoric. So now they have a president who who shares their ideology and is happy to use their ideology for his own political purposes. Things that you couldn't have imagined a politician saying four years ago have now become commonplace. They've managed to change the acceptable rhetoric in this country and they've managed to mainstream these horrible what would've been considered outdated ideas.

Jess McIntosh [00:53:51] The ideas themselves seem outdated. But the bigotry that drives extreme rhetoric never went away.

Melissa Ryan [00:53:57] Under President Trump this coalition has joined together with your more traditional right wing evangelical Christianity, et cetera. What you see is not only is everyone now very happily anti-choice, but there's this new rhetoric, this more openly misogynist, hateful rhetoric. So I think for a lot of these young men, anti-choice is an easy way to express misogyny and hate women.

Jess McIntosh [00:54:22] Amanda Marcotte, again.

Amanda Marcotte [00:54:24] Conservatives are very good at, like, seizing on these anxieties that something is being taken away from men by women's rising power equality. Right. And they're not exactly wrong to know that if women get more power and rights, certain things are being taken away from men. They were things that men didn't deserve in the first place, such as the right to rape somebody and get away with it. Right. But that is something that is under threat. I've seen two issues that I think a lot of people treated as separate issues, which was sexual harassment and assault issues on in one bucket and reproductive rights in another bucket. I think only a handful of us actually saw that they were the same issues. But now I think millions of people realize they're the same issue, that at the end of the day, it's about establishing male dominance over women. It's about putting women under the thumb. It's about controlling women's bodies and keeping them as second class citizens.

Jess McIntosh [00:55:32] It's unsettling, but threatening and committing rape is a morally justified tactic in the minds of some extremists. But even those who are disgusted by that idea can still be persuaded to uphold rape culture.

Amanda Marcotte [00:55:45] They're able to really pierce, I think, a lot of people's anxieties that, for instance, their son, might do something wrong. And in the past, he would have gotten away with it and maybe grown up and gotten past it. And now it might be a life derailing event that he got drunk and sexually assaulted somebody. Nobody phrases it like that. But I think that that's the underlying anxiety that they're really able to tap into. And I think that really coalesced during the hearings for Brett Kavanaugh, where on one hand, we have a Supreme Court justice that feminists are opposed to because they know he's going to overturn Roe versus Wade. Conservative support because they know is can overturn Roe versus Wade. And then the sexual assault allegations come out against him. And that didn't move anyone on either side. And in fact, I would say it entrenched both sides and it did a lot to clarify I think the fact that these are one in the same issue and a lot of ways the Brett Kavanaugh hearings rallied both sides of the old right base, indoctrinated young men who had been convinced that abortion was evil and overt misogynists who believed that women cry rape in order to take down good men.

Amanda Marcotte [00:57:04] What happened with Brett Kavanaugh, though, is that he was accused of doing this terrible thing in high school, sexually assaulting and attempting to rape somebody. And immediately you saw the Fox News pundits, you saw the organizers, you saw all these people on the right just fan out over social media and regular media spaces and say, what if it was your son? What if it was your son who is accused? And that was a fear that I think a lot of people that aren't necessarily anti-abortion or fiercely anti-abortion, but they could definitely see a situation where their teenage son does something really terrible and has to pay for it in pretty serious ways. And it helped

them rally a larger coalition around Kavanaugh's confirmation than would have happened I think if it was just on abortion rights and it helped, I think link in the mind of a lot of conservative voters, the fact that if they don't like these threats to male dominance, then whatever they specifically think about abortion rights, they have to vote against them because it's part of a larger effort to to put women back in their place.

Jess McIntosh [00:58:24] Brett Kavanaugh was confirmed in October 2018. For him, the fight was over when he assumed his lifetime position on the Supreme Court. But for Christine Blasey Ford she continues to receive threats to this day. Those threats are as much meant to intimidate her as they are to silence others. This brings us back to where we started this episode and arguably where we started this series. The anti-choice playbook and the incredibly effective strategy of harnessing resentments, stoking stigma and spreading disinformation. From the clinic blockade era to today's Internet age. Disinformation has led small but aggressive segments of the base to violently lash out. This isn't limited to the reproductive freedom space. The impact of the Radical Right amplification machine will continue to reverberate throughout the 2020 election. So what can we do? Well, we've spent the last five episodes retracing the history and breaking down the playbook. Next week we stop looking back and we start thinking about strategies for the future.

Ilyse Hogue [00:59:24] There are more of us than there are of them. So if we show up in our state legislatures, if we show up in town halls for candidates and we actually stand together and say we're here because we believe in reproductive freedom and justice and we want to know where you stand. We're here because we need you to support bills that increase access to contraception, to abortion, to the ballot, to all of the things that they're fighting. We will win.

Jess McIntosh [00:59:53] The Lie that Binds to production of NARAL Pro-Choice America and produced by Jackie Danziger. Our associate producer is James Tyson. Our music is by Hannis Brown, mixing and engineering by Kegan Zema. This series is adapted from the book "The Lie That Binds" by Ilyse Hogue with Ellie Langford, published by Strong Arm Press, currently available at TheLieThatBinds.com.