

Meet the woman behind Libs of TikTok, secretly fueling the right's outrage machine

A popular Twitter account has morphed into a social media phenomenon, spreading anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment and shaping public discourse

By Taylor Lorenz, April 19, 2022 at 6:00 a.m. EDT

On March 8, a Twitter account called Libs of TikTok posted a video of a woman teaching sex education to children in Kentucky, calling the woman in the video a “predator.” The next evening, the same clip was featured on Laura Ingraham’s Fox News program, prompting the host to ask, “When did our public schools, any schools, become what are essentially grooming centers for gender identity radicals?”

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Libs of TikTok reposts a steady stream of TikTok videos and social media posts, primarily from LGBTQ+ people, often including incendiary framing designed to generate outrage. Videos shared from the account quickly find their way to the most influential names in right-wing media. The account has emerged as a powerful force on the Internet, shaping right-wing media, impacting anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and influencing millions by posting viral videos aimed at inciting outrage among the right.

The anonymous account’s impact is deep and far-reaching. Its content is amplified by high-profile media figures, politicians and right-wing influencers. Its tweets reach millions, with influence spreading far beyond its more than 648,000 Twitter followers. Libs of TikTok has become an agenda-setter in right-wing online discourse, and the content it surfaces shows a direct correlation with the recent push in legislation and rhetoric directly targeting the LGBTQ+ community.

“Libs of TikTok is basically acting as a wire service for the broader right-wing media ecosystem,” said Ari Drennen, LGBTQ program director for Media Matters, the progressive media watchdog group. “It’s been shaping public policy in a real way, and affecting teachers’ ability to feel safe in their classrooms.”

The account has been promoted by podcast host Joe Rogan, and it’s been featured in the New York Post, the Federalist, the Post Millennial and a slew of other right-wing news sites. Meghan McCain has retweeted it. The online influencer Glenn Greenwald has amplified it to his 1.8 million Twitter followers while calling himself the account’s “Godfather.” Last Thursday, the woman behind the account appeared anonymously on Tucker Carlson’s show to complain about being temporarily suspended for violating Twitter’s community guidelines. Fox News often creates news packages around the content that Libs of TikTok has surfaced.

“The role I’ve seen this account playing is finding new characters for right-wing propaganda,” said Gillian Branstetter, a media strategist for the ACLU. “It’s relying on the endless stream of content from TikTok and the Internet to cast any individual trans person as a new villain in their story.”

Throughout its increasingly popular posts and despite numerous media appearances, the account has remained anonymous. But the identity of the operator of Libs of TikTok is traceable through a complex online history and reveals someone who has been plugged into right-wing discourse for two years and is now helping to drive it.

An account in search of a voice — and a big break from Joe Rogan

Chaya Raichik had been working as a real estate salesperson in Brooklyn when, in early November 2020, she created the account that would eventually become Libs of TikTok.

Under her first handle @shaya69830552, she minimized covid, cast doubt on the election results and promoted a dubious story about a child sex trafficking ring. On Nov. 23, 2020, Raichik changed handles, this time going by @shaya_ray and identifying herself publicly as a real estate investor in Brooklyn. She began doubling down on election fraud conspiracies using QAnon-related language. Early that December, she joked about launching a clothing line titled “voter fraud is real.”

In January 2021, Raichik started talking about traveling to D.C. to support Trump on Jan. 6 at the Stop the Steal rally. When violence broke out at the Capitol that day, she tweeted a play-by-play account claiming to be on the ground. “They were rubber bullets from law enforcement. 1 hit right next to me,” she said. She posted videos from the crowd and spoke of tear gas being deployed nearby. After saying she left the riot, she used Twitter to downplay the event, claiming that it was peaceful compared to a “BLM protest.”

Later that month, Raichik cycled through two more Twitter names, this time focusing on state politicians. First under the handle @ChayaRaichik and the display name “Chaya Raichik,” and then under the new handle, @cuomomustgo, she railed against New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo (D), calling for him to resign. She promoted the efforts to recall California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D). She also began posting about Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R), calling him “actually brilliant.”

By early last March, she pivoted to a parody account titled @houseplantpotus, pretending to tweet as if she was a houseplant living with President Biden. She revamped her avatar to look like a small shrub with Biden’s face on the leaves. At that point in time she also claimed to be proudly Orthodox Jewish, live in Brooklyn and work in real estate in her Twitter bio.

But the house plant parody never took off. On April 19, 2021, she pivoted her account once again, this time to Libs of TikTok.

Just four months after getting started, Libs of TikTok got its big break: Joe Rogan started promoting the account to the millions of listeners of his hit podcast. He mentioned it several times on the show in August, then again in late September. “Libs of TikTok is one of the greatest f---ing accounts of all time,” he said. With his seal of approval, Raichik’s following skyrocketed.

Libs of TikTok gained more prominence throughout the end of last year, cementing its spot in the right-wing media outrage cycle. Its attacks on the LGBTQ+ community also escalated. By January, Raichik’s page was leaning hard into “groomer” discourse, calling for any teacher who comes out as gay to their students to be “fired on the spot.”

Her anti-trans tweets went especially viral. She called on her followers to contact schools that were allowing “boys in the girls bathrooms” and pushed the false conspiracy theory that schools were installing litter boxes in bathrooms for children who identify as cats. She also purported that adults who teach children about LGBTQ+ identities are “abusive,” that being gender-nonconforming or an ally to the LGBTQ+ community is a “mental illness,” and referred to schools as “government run indoctrination camps” for the LGBTQ+ community.

“Libs of TikTok is shaping our entire political conversation about the rights of LGBTQ people to participate in society,” Drennen said. “It feels like they’re single-handedly taking us back a decade in terms of the public discourse around LGBTQ rights. It’s been like nothing we’ve ever really seen.”

By March, Libs of TikTok was directly impacting legislation. DeSantis’s press secretary Christina Pushaw credited the account with “opening her eyes” and informing her views on the state’s restrictive legislation that bans discussion of sexuality or gender identity in kindergarten through third grade, referred to by critics as the “don’t say gay” bill. She and Libs of TikTok have interacted with each other at least 138 times publicly, according to a report by Media Matters. When asked by The Post about her relationship with the account, Pushaw wrote, “I follow, like and retweet libsoftiktok. My interactions with that account are public,” and added that she’s a strong supporter of its mission.

As the legislation progressed before eventually being signed into law on March 28, Libs of TikTok ramped up attacks, flooding its feed with accusations of “grooming.” The right-wing media and influential conservative figureheads used anti-LGBTQ content from Libs of TikTok as fuel for their arguments.

Fox News hosts Jesse Watters and Tucker Carlson began featuring content straight from Libs of TikTok on air, with Carlson urging his viewers to follow it “before it’s banned if you want to know what may be happening in your child’s school.” (Fox News did not respond to a request for comment.)

From the Internet to school boards

As the account has grown in prominence, Raichik has taken steps to obscure her identity. Though she has done numerous high-profile media appearances, she’s appeared anonymously. However, when registering the domain LibsofTikTok.us last October, she used her full name and cellphone number linked to her real estate salesperson contact information.

On Saturday, software developer Travis Brown (who is working on a project with support from Prototype Fund, an organization that backs open-source projects) unearthed the account’s Twitter history and posted a thread detailing information about its profile changes.

When a reporter called the phone number registered to Raichik’s real estate profile and LibofTikTok.us, the woman who answered hung up after the reporter identified herself as calling from The Washington Post. A woman at the address listed to Raichik’s name in Los Angeles declined to identify herself. On Monday night, a tweet from Glenn Greenwald confirmed the house that was visited belonged to Raichik’s family.

Though Raichik has claimed to run the account alone, last August Grant Lally, a lawyer and Republican operative, filed a trademark for Libs of TikTok as a “news reporter service.” Lally said he is “not at liberty” to comment when reached by The Post.

“I don’t do this for money or fame,” Raichik told the New York Post (which, like all other outlets interviewing her, allowed her to speak on the condition of anonymity) in February while comparing herself to Project Veritas. “I’m not some politician or blue-check journalist. I feel like there are so many small stories that are so important that aren’t getting out — and that’s what I’m here for.” In other anonymous interviews she claims to have left New York for somewhere in California, recently turning the account into a full-time job. For a while she was soliciting donations through Venmo.

While Libs of TikTok briefly had a TikTok account of its own, it was suspended for violating community guidelines. Last week, the account was briefly suspended from Twitter for a second time for violating the platform's rules on targeted harassment.

But Libs of TikTok continues to amass followers across the Internet. It has more than 65,000 followers on Instagram, nearly 10,000 on YouTube and a robust presence on right-wing YouTube competitor Rumble, along with other right-wing apps like Gab and GETTR. It's also building out an email database through newsletter platform Revue.

Raichik has said in interviews that she crowdsources the content for the feed from a flood of messages she receives every day. In that sense, Libs of TikTok is a collective, molded to the hive mind of the right-wing Internet. She views her account as giving a voice and platform to concerned parents and ordinary citizens.

"I see a shared spirit in Libs of TikTok, and the appetite for it in right-wing media more broadly, which is turning neighbor against neighbor and turning any individual into an enforcer of this very strict gender regime," Branstetter said. "There's a deep sense of paranoia this rhetoric inspires and is extremely volatile, it's more than playing with fire. It inspires a vigilante spirit."

Raichik boasts that several teachers have been fired as a result of being featured on the account.

Tyler Wrynn, a former English teacher in Oklahoma, posted a video telling LGBTQ kids shunned by their parents that Wrynn was "proud of them" and loved them; it was featured on Libs of TikTok last week. Since being featured on the page Wrynn has been barraged with harassment and death threats.

"I've always seen myself as the type of teacher to stand up for marginalized voices," Wrynn said. "I see fellow teachers on TikTok speak out for our disenfranchised students and they're getting the same sort of harassment too."

The popularity of Libs of TikTok comes at a time when far-right communities across the Internet have begun doxing school officials and calling for their execution. Parents of LGBTQ+ youth have been driven out of their towns. Local school board members have reported death threats.

On a recent podcast, Raichik said that as her following continues to grow, the fullest extent of her impact may not be realized until the elections this fall. She has encouraged her audience to overtake school boards and run in local elections. "These people," she said, referring to members of LGBTQ+ community, "some of them are literally evil and grooming kids, they should not be in schools, they should not be teachers."

Members of the LGBTQ+ community who still attempt to use platforms like TikTok to educate people on gay or trans issues are subject to intense online abuse, causing a chilling effect. "[Libs of TikTok] is playing on fears and misunderstandings of who trans people are, while amping up extreme rhetoric and normalizing portraying queer people as inherently dangerous to children," Branstetter said. "It's hard to stoke moral panic without main characters, and the role Libs of TikTok is playing is finding those characters."