MOTLEY FRINGE: THE MORAL AND POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF THE ALT-RIGHT'S RADICALIZATION PIPELINE

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Abstract

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The alt-right, a loose association of racist think tanks, alternative media outlets and right-wing trolls, have propagated a white nationalist ideology almost entirely through online communication. Understanding the processes that continue to feed their ranks is central to any attempt to push back against the encroachment of dangerous, anti-democratic ideas into mainstream discourse. This study utilizes a unique set of theoretical and critical tools to render the machinations of the alt-right's radicalization pipeline apparent to outsiders who wish to oppose the creep of white nationalism into mainstream civil discourse. Focusing on Gamergate and Black Lives Matter, this study combines insights from moral psychology and qualitative complexity to produce a model of moral judgment and action grounded in the online environment that created the alt-right.

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Introduction

The image of the racist far right never achieved a great deal of mainstream attention throughout the 80s, 90s or early 2000s. Outside of a few television documentaries, the most salient images of Neo-Nazis and the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) in American network and cable television came largely from daytime television shows framed by outrage toward their racist guests. Jerry Springer's daytime circus featured Neo-Nazi and KKK members making outrageous and delusional pronouncements in front of an audience that shamed and demeaned them. Among the most memorable instances of righteous rage was the fist fight between Geraldo Rivera and skinheads on his talk show, resulting in Rivera's nose being broken (Rivera 1988).

The image of white supremacists for the last several decades has been overwhelmingly comprised of uneducated rural men. The absurd diatribes of white supremacists that aired on daytime talk shows proved to be a remarkably ineffective form of far-right trolling, with sincerity and satire supporting the image painted by Springer, Rivera and others. These 90s icons of daytime television used the sensational stupidity of robed men screaming racial slurs at a large audience who hated them to deter fascination with racist ideas. If the early presence of white supremacy online, like the website *Stormfront*, proves anything about the effectiveness of white supremacist propaganda it is that screaming racial slurs into a void and waiting for a response proved a much better strategy.[1]

In the wake of the contestations or temporary removals of white supremacist websites like *Stormfront* and *The Daily Stormer* in mid-2017, the public and private faces of white

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[1] At time of writing the *Stormfront* website has returned to its original domain at https://www.stormfront.org/forum/

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www.manaraa.com

supremacy continue to undergo mutations that make rejecting its moral precepts more difficult for naïve youth, antiestablishment conservatives and casual racists. The ongoing encroachment of racist ideas into online culture wars and alternative media outlets has emerged from a public relations strategy being actively practiced by white nationalists to purge the visceral hatred and explicit racism from their public face in a way that would confound those like Springer and Rivera.[2] In previous decades, both Springer and Rivera found it easy to let angry white supremacist 'rednecks' strawman themselves.

Extending a platform to the likes of Richard Spencer, the head of the National Policy Institute who coined the term "alt-right" in 2008, and Jared Taylor, a race realist who boasts a decades-long career as a prominent public figure of white separatism, is now a far more precarious endeavor considering the ways each has tried to make their ideas sound reasonable and present a more recognizable image of thoughtful conservatives suggesting reasonable policies. Racial realism, the largely debunked position that the traditional definitions of race have a detectable biological reality that differentiates races by intelligence, aggression and sex drive, has gained popularity once again. As a media persona, Taylor presents himself as a soft-spoken grandfather-type setting out to reclaim America in the name of humanity's tribal nature, biological difference and the superiority of the white (and sometimes Asian) intellect, and Spencer took the role of a young radical intellectual challenging establishment conservativism and leftist identity politics.[3] Neither of these personas ignite the kinds of vitriol presented on

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[2] The website *Hope Not Hate* features analysis derived from undercover investigations into the international alternative right. It reveals many of the obfuscating techniques of the alt-right's public face and how they behave behind the scenes: https://alternativeright.hopenothate.com/

[3] Taylor and Spencer often appear side by side at various white nationalist meetings. See Taylor (2016).

daytime television. Spencer and Taylor are effectively reifying the intellectual and academic style of right-wing racism that has always appeared in fits and starts when controversial works of academic racism would appear (Taylor 1995).[4]

Springer and Rivera may not be architypes of responsible journalism,[5] but they at least knew how to make the fringe right-wing appear foolish. The generation of journalists inspired by journalism's role in bringing down Richard Nixon, who prepared to confront corruption with research, advocacy and carefully molded questions, have been all but lost within the inconsistent application of journalist ethics created by alternative media and untrained online commentators. These journalists have been replaced with impersonal corporate calculations trying to fight the spiraling loss of revenue among mainstream newspapers. Television media suffers from the constraints of concision, making it difficult to find in-depth debunking of alt-right ideas or long adversarial interviews with its leaders. But even Fox News Host, Tucker Carlson, who indulges in xenophobic and racist dog-whistling far more than his disgraced predecessor Bill O'Reilly,[6] has yet to give the likes of Richard Spencer a public platform, much less an uncritical one. However, Carson's website, *The Daily Caller*, did feature an article by the Unite the Rally organizer, Jason Kessler, which was later removed.[7] The flirtation with alt-right ideas is present,

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[4] A prime example is Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) *The Bell Curve* which achieved a great deal of sympathetic mainstream coverage upon release. Jared Taylor's (1995) review of the book is available at https://www.amren.com/news/2017/09/charles-murray-bell-curve-race-and-iq-richard-herrnstein-jared-taylor/

[5] To be fair, Geraldo Rivera, early in his career, did help expose the Willowbrook State School's horrid conditions, which in turn help promote psychiatric reform. See Rivera (1972).

[6] See Maza (2017) for text and video.

[7] See Piggott and Amend (2017), writing for the Southern Poverty Law Center

but has not reached the level of respectability sought by some of its leaders. The real base on which white nationalists have been building a platform is alternative and social media.

The darker corners of the racist alt-right, websites like 4chan's /pol/ board, remain every bit as grotesque as the shouting Neo-Nazis of 90s daytime television, but colored with nearly impenetrable layers of irony and sarcasm. 4chan's /pol/ (politically incorrect) board has been the focal point of alt-right cultural production, including the 'meme magic' that 'memed Trump into the presidency.' Meme magic describes the ability of alt-right activists to deliver a convincing message using little more than a few lines of text pasted across a provocative image. Angela Nagle's (2017) colorful characterization of 4chan's culture demonstrates how radically distinct the cultural center of the alt-right differs from cultural conservatism:

> Chan culture's shitposting[8] and crapflooding[9] shares more with Paris '68 slogan
> "It is forbidden to forbid!" than it does with Phyllis Schlafly or William S.
> Buckley. Its dark obsessions with cruelty, rape, humiliation, suicide, murder, race,
> and genocide taboos have led chan culture to an avant-garde antimoral sensibility
> not unlike French dramatist Antonin Artaud's theater of cruelty: "There can be no
> spectacle without an element of cruelty as the basis of every show."[10]

Appropriating the methodology of transgressive leftism is nothing new to the far-right. Spencer's public relations spectacle, combining rhetorically veiled far-right political theory, white

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[8] Posting low quality, offensive, and ironic content to blogs, comment sections etc.

[9] A great deal of shitposting.

[10] To be fair to Artaud, he at least had the excuse of suffering from Schizophrenia and having undergone years of psychiatric mistreatment.

nationalism and racial realism, contrasts dramatically with the fascist inspired cultural transgression within its cultural center.

Following Bernstein's (2017) metaphor, 'hate-laundering' might best describe the tactics and adaptive processes of the white supremacist creep into antiestablishment right-wing politics in the United States, so much so that the term "alt-right" is often qualified with a distinction between those considered white supremacists and the "alt light" groups regarded, most charitably, as a transgressive antiestablishment alternative to Christian conservatism. While it is no great revelation to argue that the line between the two is blurred,[11] the reemergence of efforts to mainstream the idea of racial realism and promote policies like "peaceful ethnic cleansing" by proponents of the overtly racist alt-right is qualitatively different from the "alt light." Embedded in the larger online ideological struggle waged between straight-faced leftist identity politics and an emerging antiestablishment right-wing, the alt-right and alt-light consists largely of men under thirty that eschew the political correctness, feminism, and social justice while embracing transgression and secularism instead of the Christian morality of traditional conservatives (Cornish and Hawley, 2017).

One representative example of alt-light transgression politics and how it differs from the alt-right is exemplified by *The Rebel's* Gavin McInnes. Occasionally respectful to the alt-right, McInnes begrudgingly accepts the label "alt-light" as a way to distance himself from white nationalism. His organization, Proud Boys, encourages what he calls western chauvinism, claiming chauvinism means "aggressive loyalty,"[12] often with the qualifier "exaggerated"

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[11] Bernstein (2017) exposed the Milo Yiannopoulos' attempt to court white supremacists, including an improvised performance of America the Beautiful under Nazi salutes.

[12] https://twitter.com/gavin_mcinnes/status/831364496664965120?lang=en

missing from the definition (McInnes, 2017). The Proud Boys are not explicitly racist and accept cismen of any race, including gay men. The "alt light" title they hesitantly accept nonetheless seems appropriate. They seek to elevate the status of housewives, shun political correctness, promote closed borders; as defenders of "West" they refuse to "apologize for building the world."[13] They also utilize a four-degree commitment strategy: 1) call yourself a Proud Boy and wear Fred Perry polo shirts,[14] 2) undergo a "cereal beat-in" involving new members getting punched by current members until they name five breakfast cereals, 3) adhering to a once-a-month masturbation regimen along with a tattoo, and finally 4) fight with antifascists at public rallies (Culkin 2017). McInnes has contributed to *VDARE*, a website frequented by white nationalists that has called Asian Americans 'slopes' and 'riceballs' and is labeled as racist by the Southern Poverty Law Center (Morlin 2017).[15] Like many on the alt-light, he hints at genetic differences among races that determine differences in IQ, violence, etc. without explicitly endorsing such a view. As one might expect McInnes attracts the attention of white nationalists, a fan base he has tried to disavow. But the ideological proximity that persists among groups like the Proud Boys, far right YouTube content creators, *Info Wars* conspiracies, and older race myths common in publications like Jared Taylor's *American Renaissance* constitute the core of the alt-right radicalization pipeline. Attempts to disavow all white nationalist beliefs falls apart upon closer examination of their emergence and cultural production online.

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[13] http://officialproudboys.com/proud-boys/whoaretheproudboys/

[14] After decades of trying to distance themselves from Skinheads and discouraging any association with them, Fred Perry is now doing the same with the Proud Boys. Fred Perry polos are part of hooligan, punk, union socialist, and fascist iconography, usually worn with steel toed boots and suspenders. See Swenson (2017).

[15] https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/04/25/new-alt-right-fight-club-ready-street-violence

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Conservative talk radio could be considered the most prevalent source of alt-light talking points prior to the ascent of *Breitbart*. Conservative talk radio, a constant source of racist dog-whistling since the 1980s, shared many of the conspiracy narratives now popular on the alt-light. Alex Jones of *Info Wars* has been cited positively by Michael Savage. Both discussed a 'coming race war' during the Obama administration (Jones and Savage 2013).[16] Savage's 'borders, language, culture' rhetoric is amplified further through *Info War's* conspiratorial lens, with an even higher emphasis on shouting and hyperbole to instill outrage and self-righteous indignation in their followers. To be fair, Savage has never claimed Hillary Clinton and Barak Obama are literal hell-spawn (Jones 2016).

The term "pipeline" used in the title is intended to describe ideological shifts behind alt-right online communications: address the groups you hope to convert; dismiss, denigrate, or simply filter out those that will never accept your position, and use the vast connectivity provided by shared links, Twitterbots, word-of-mouth and online discussion. to channel new followers toward sites that promote your specific product or position. To survive the narrative must constantly shift. The alt-right produces its own false stories, seemingly out of thin air, including conspiracies related to the Unite the Right Rally Spencer hosted in Charlottesville, claiming that the story that a white nationalist ran over and killed an activist was a fabrication, a position shared by at least one Republican congressman, Rep. Paul Gosar (Mazza 2017). The most common story found claimed that the driver's car was being attacked by counter-protesters, a myth clearly debunked by available video evidence. The Charlottesville rally clearly blew up in the face of its organizers. It could have discouraged a great number of people from remaining

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[16] Also see the 2015 Jones, Savage interview embedded on *World Net Daily* at

http://www.wnd.com/2015/05/savage-obama-will-arm-u-s-gangs-for-race-war/

involved had it not been for Trump's immediate distribution of blame to both sides of the protest (Shear and Haberman 2017).

This new white nationalist professionalism practiced by Richard Spencer and others cannot always skirt the obvious association with fascist ideology and the long history of hate groups in the United States whose lineage they court, despite attempts to tamp down KKK and Neo-Nazi visibility within the movement itself. The polished semantics deployed by the alt-right's public persona make taboo topics more palatable and have effectively undermined the capacity of public discourse to challenge their ideas. Richard Spencer's interviews received two kinds of responses from the rest of the political spectrum: accusations of crypto-Nazism from the left, and a kind of baffled response from centrists and conservatives. After decades of the KKK and Neo-Nazi groups remaining far outside mainstream political discourse, these new groups have proven that the rest of the political spectrum lacks practice challenging these ideas, newly "reengineered to appeal to millennials" (Marwick and Lewis 2017, p. 11).

A key to countering the alt-right's propaganda must, therefore, include insights into their successful use of social media to recruit and the frequent failures of commentators outside the alt-right to effectively challenge the likes of Richard Spencer when confronted with the polished semantics and fascist iconography utilized by alt-right leaders. Furthermore, the overlapping and loosely organized movements from which the alt-right draws contain a unique moral and political landscape that, much like mid-20th century fascism, draws from the cultural criticism, transgressive art and political strategies often utilized by the left. Angela Nagle's book *Kill All Normies* (2017) describes the alt-right as essentially Gramscian, insofar as the movement is "almost entirely based on influencing culture and shifting the Overton window through media and culture, not just formal politics" (Nagle 2017, 49-50). Furthermore, her characterization of

the alt-right as far more transgressive, nonconforming and ironic than traditional conservatives leads Nagel to place them, strategically, alongside the left-wing Situationists, supported in part by the alt-right's misreading of Friedrich Nietzsche (itself reminiscent of Nietzsche's misappropriation by the Nazis) (Illing 2017).

The current study offers a careful analysis of the emergence of and adaptive strategies recently appropriated by the alt-right, conceptualized here as a phenomenon of moral/political psychology. Theoretical perspectives and qualitative methods developed within complexity theory are adopted for their event-focused case selection and elevation of change over stasis; organizations that are, in this sense, constantly trying to negotiate their relations with ideologically proximate organizations and opponents alike. The processes of *organizing* and the emergence of new organizational forms are defined by a morphogenetic succession of events.

The cases in the data analysis chapter are Gamergate and the Black Lives Matter protests. Emotionally intense events like these provoke responses from across the political spectrum, and in the case of the alt-right often render conspiracy theories that are quite telling when both their intellectual and cultural centers are compared. The bigger picture this study hopes to sketch is how events of concern are coopted and obfuscated by the alt-right to fit their position. How these posts are shared and the emotional states among the population they distort and harvest are the central feature of the 'radicalization pipeline' which must be sustained. As a result, the alt-right reacts and applies their ideology to events as they emerge. Cases have selected based on their thematic coding (gender, Islam, immigration, and race) and their moral-affective valence within the American population and the alt-right in particular. Discursive data and imagery from alt-right organizations themselves, the organized groups from which they recruit, and the reactions of their opponents are analyzed for their moral precepts, often expressed as metaphors. Moral

categories are largely derived from Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 1999) formulation of embodied moral metaphor. The more literal pragmatics applied to policy recommendations relate the abstract moralism of the alt right's political culture to practical actions suggested by its leaders.

Fragmentation and disorganization are already taking hold as the alt-right brand grows more toxic and I suspect, at time of writing, that articles declaring the decline of the alt-right will be appearing soon enough. Leighton Akio Woodhouse (2017) noted the disavowal of the title "alt-right" by many well-known sympathizers following the violence in Charlottesville. The greatest division falls between white nationalists and the alt-light who nonetheless "have extreme anti-immigrant views, nurture a bizarre paranoia about Islam, and even trade in pseudo-scientific theories about race and IQ, expressing sympathies with visions of ethnic cleansing" (Woodhouse 2017). One must assume not just a spectrum between the alt-right and alt-light, but an ongoing tension among proximate groups, as their subjects of interest tend to be the same, even if a member of one strongly disavows association with the other. The real risk is not the alt-right per se. The shift from "white supremacy" to "white nationalism" to "alt-right/alt-light" are qualitatively different largely in terms of rhetoric, with language and policies varying by the intended target audience.

A consistently articulated position against the alt-right is missing on the left, and may not be possible, for reasons that will be discussed later, and centrist news media too often remains dumbfounded by their transgressions, often caught up defending the alt-right for the sake of free speech or equivocating alt-right and "alt-left." If the remaining spectrum of ideology cannot effectively confront the alt-right these ideas may remain influential long after fascination with their transgressions dissipates. While the approach presented here is experimental and theoretically synthetic, a novel way to confront the alt-right is ultimately lacking and so more

speculative approaches appear justified. Experimenting with models of the alt-right derived from underutilized approaches in social science, like qualitative complexity, is one way forward, at least in terms of theory. Calls for practical action remains muddled, reasonable strategies are all but missing.

The ongoing fragmentation of the far-right can be exploited by opponents, assuming one understands where the fault lines have been drawn and how they are shifting. These ideological fragmentations can only be exploited with a strategy sufficient to the task. Recognizing that the fuel of their rage is in large part the political correct culture they attribute to the left, an attribution that often manifests by way of "cringe compilations" featuring feminists, minorities, and liberals, loosely tied together with the title "social justice warrior" or SJW, is important to recognize. It is the alt-right's dismissal by those on the left that demand public discourse on specific terms and, at worst, openly threated the alt-right and conservative's right to speak. Spreading anecdotes of feminist and leftist strawmen is central to what makes the alt-right's form of transgression "fun," having found a reliable source of mockery occasionally willing to overreact and provide more 'triggered SJW' memes. The complexity of these interactions is central to the analysis in the chapters below.

Although the pseudo-Nietzschean amoralism, political transgression, irony and purposeful ambiguity utilized by the alt-right often discourages direct confrontation with their ideas, this study seeks to account for these tendencies and articulate a distinct set of alt-right moral precepts that characterize what these transgressions aim to do. Irony, transgression and subversion can effectively deconstruct and negate opposing opinion, a tactic once widely and successfully used by the left. Combined with the more practical rhetoric and policy proposals developed by the leaders of the alt-right, these moral precepts are contested or celebrated in

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different forms by different organizations ideologically proximate or opposed to the alt-right. Approaching the data in such a way permits a more complex relational model that is not possible if researchers utilize static categories at the level of organization.

Those opposed to the crypto-fascism of this new movement will be confronting them in diverse forms, both online and through embodied interaction. Censorship and de-platforming have proven unviable, at least in terms of the media response. Many student rallies opposing alt-right speakers lost total control of the narrative they, presumably, set out to promote. One of the alt-right's most common and effective tactics involves elevating anecdotal instances of de-platforming, like protesting a Milo Yiannopoulos speech on a university campus, and claiming that those on the left hate free speech, which immediately gains them sympathy from centrists and conservatives.[17]

Background and Theory

The concerns addressed throughout this study, along with the insights it intends to bring to fore, are addressed to all outside the alt-right, with no attempt to discredit any one ideology or set of values among leftists, liberals, centrists, libertarians or conservatives despite some of these ideologies sharing a lineage with the alt-right. However, when platforms provided by journalists or popular online commentators become a conduit for white nationalist ideas by deploying an uncritical or ineffective approach to the interview, failures to challenge absurd notions like

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[17] See Dave Rubin's show on YouTube, especially his interview with Milo Yiannopoulos (Rubin 2015). The show's purpose seems to be interviewing conservative and alt-light figures Rubin believes have been unfairly censored and abused by left liberals.

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"peaceful ethnic cleansing," for example, regardless of how such proposals are watered down by alt-right leaders, should be noted and criticized.

Angela Nagle was especially astute when describing the quality of interviews conducted with Richard Spencer and other leaders of the alt-right. In her interview with Chapo Trap House, Nagle notes that she has yet to find an interview with Richard Spencer that really challenges the basic implications of his proposed policies (James 2017). With reference to the Spencer's patriarchal goal of getting women out of the workplace, something he extracts from readings of history that track civilizational decline by changes to gender roles, Nagle proposes asking Spencer "how do you plan to reduce the workforce by half and remain a geo-politically dominant force in the world?" (James 2017). Better interview methods can only head-off alt-right leaders and public commentators with whom they agree to speak. My impression is that alt-right leaders and popular commentators choose their sympathetic interviewers carefully.

Aside from a real challenge being issued during interviews by non-alt-right commentators across mainstream, alternative, and social media, there are other focal points of alt-right organizing that have not been sufficiently explored as possible schism points to be exploited by opponents. First is the ongoing incapacity of the alt-right to define itself, with alt-light groups constantly being caught up in association with white nationalism. After the Charlottesville rally Yiannopoulos and McInnes have already tried to distance themselves from these groups, despite ample evidence in favor of significant cross-fertilization between the two 'alt' factions (Woodhouse 2017). The presence or absence of white ethno-nationalism as a guiding principle for a person or group has already eroded any sense of unity. Taking account of the emergence, growth, and ongoing fracture of the alt-right now amounts to gazing into an open wound. But wounds heal. The new forms that far-right propaganda will inevitably require

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include vague and suggestive language that nonetheless gets the message across. Attempts to launder the messages constructed by alt factions is risky and has already experienced a crisis. On November 2, 2017 Breitbart financier, Robert Mercer, recently cut ties with the media outlet and Yiannopoulos, Breitbart's controversial former editor. Mercer was mentioned as the financial link to "underpaid trolls who fill [Breitbart] with provocative content, and to extremists striving to create a white ethnostate" in Berstein's (2017) article. Bernstein (2017) also provides evidence that Yiannopoulos pulled from white nationalist and other far right groups to push the narrative "about the clear threat liberal discourse poses to America." Yiannopoulos was there to provide a common enemy to any right-wing group that could be channeled into Breitbart. Mercer was especially disillusioned with Yiannopoulos, but less dismissive of Steve Bannon (Darcy 2017). Mercer's divestment represents the financial instability inherent precarious territory occupied by alt-light when a rather mainstream figure like Yiannopoulos attempts to court white nationalists. A great deal can be learned from analyzing how these groups struggle to define their ideologically distinctiveness, especially when events mark turning points in their associations with other groups and media.

The future of the alt-right/alt-light, if the remainder of the political spectrum can find a way to react appropriately, is one of isolation, fragmentation, infighting and, finally, insignificance. So far Donald Trump's administration has proven exceptionally incompetent when proposing the initial policies that ground the incremental strategy favored by politically pragmatic members of the alt-right. Trump's ongoing failures have the potential to pull less committed alt-right members back into more mainstream civil discourse, many just growing out of it, and push the committed white nationalists further to the fringe. The long-term risk ultimately rests in local and congressional elections where alt-right mobilization can seriously

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alter the ideological makeup of governing bodies throughout the United States, to say nothing of the reemergence of far-right politics in Europe. If leaders and commentators across the ideological spectrum can produce serious intellectual responses alongside strategies to transgress against the transgressors, the alt-right can be shoved back into darkness. There should be no need or desire to remove the right to free speech of objectionable groups associated with the alt-right. If this most recent reemergence of organized racism, misogyny, xenophobia, authoritarianism and violence can be made to appear intellectually untenable, toxic to associated organizations and devoid of affection (aside from a few devotees) the rest of us can start imagining the meme that will best reflect the future of the alt-right: An unflattering image of Richard Spencer screaming obscenities into an empty dumpster.

This chapter is divided into three sections: 1) Covering the relevant historical background, demographics, groups and schisms within the alt-right. 2) Explore the conundrums of transgression, insincerity, and ideology inherent in this study. 3) Demonstrate the commensurable assumptions of moral psychology, metaphor analysis and qualitative complexity methodologies.

From the old right to the alt-troll vanguard: A brief history of divisive proximity

The history of the alt-right has been most comprehensively traced by George Hawley (2017) in his book *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*. He tracks the growth of the alt-right to Richard Spencer's leadership at *Taki's Magazine*, where the term 'alt-right' was coined, and *Alternative Right*, where the term was popularized (Hawley, 2017, p. 31-32). While mainstream conservatives have long denied the support of white nationalist groups, a situation which has denied them access to wealthy benefactors and fundraising, one benefactor in particular has kept these groups afloat and continues to do the same for the alt-right - William Regnery II. Regnery

founded Charles Martel Society, which launched the white nationalist publication *Occidental Quarterly*, as well as two of Richard Spencer's operations, *Alternative Right* and the *National Policy Institute* (NPI) (Hawley, 2017, p. 57). As an online forum, *Alternative Right* stood apart from websites like *Stormfront* and *The Daily Stormer* in that it was not as crude and it included articles, at least early on, that reflected a wide range of views. It also did not share the traditional conservative admiration for the Founding Fathers and patriotic orientation that helped define other racist groups like the KKK. Diluted references to German philosophers like Nietzsche and Heidegger proliferate in place of patriotism.

After *Alternative Right* shut down in 2013 the term 'alt-right' "retreated into 4chan and Reddit" (Hawley, 2017, p. 66). It was in this new transgressive cultural venue where the alt-right would reemerge. The academic jargon of Spencer now coupled with the caricatures and iconography of neo-Nazis, however 'ironically' utilized they may be. Spencer's ideas, Nazi flags and the euphemism '1488'[18] now appeared alongside 4chan and *The Daily Stormer's* ubiquitous meme character Pepe the Frog.[19] Spencer may have coined the term but was hardly responsible for the resurgence of the term or the more explicit use of Nazi iconography and low-brow memes. The Charlottesville rally demonstrated the ongoing tension between Spencer and the online neo-Nazi trolls. The term alt-right, according to an interview conducted by Hawley with alt-right blogger Lawrence Murray, reappeared as a means to "adopt a label that signaled the

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[18] '88' corresponds to the eighth letter of the alphabet, or HH (Heil Hitler) whereas '14' represents white supremacist David Lane's "Fourteen Word"- "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children" (Hawley 2017, p. 68).

[19] Pepe first appeared in a politically unassociated online cartoon Boy's Club and has been coopted by white nationalist (O'Connor 2016).

movement was opposed to both the mainline left and right, but intellectually proximate to the latter" during the 2016 Republican primaries (Hawley, 2017, p. 69).

Hawley (2017) found that the intellectual premise and culture of irony of the alt-right first converged and became popularized on a blog and podcast publishing website *The Right Stuff* (*TRS*). *TRS* combined seemingly sincere discussions of white nationalism alongside racial slurs, jokes, and pranks, many of which were invented, initiated or discussed on *TRS* (Hawley, 2017, p. 71).

As difficult as it is to study the demographics of an anonymous movement like the alt-right, in Hawley's interview with Spencer he confirms much of the speculation about the age, religion and reading habits of alt-right devotees. Spencer said:

[Alt-right adherents] were willing to get their philosophy from unusual sources, nonauthoritative sources in the sense of books that are given the imprimatur of a university press or something like that. If I were to sum up the average Alt-Righter…I would probably say someone who is thirty years old, who is a tech professional, who is an atheist, and who lives on one of the coasts (Hawley, 2017, p. 77-78).

Hawley suggest that, in his interviews with young alt-right supporters, a pattern did emerge. The Obama administration's racial polarization and the Black Lives Matter movement were responsible for pushing them to the right. Financial insecurity and high rates of underemployed college graduates seem to have played their parts as well. The younger demographic present in the alt-right further differentiates it from earlier manifestations of white nationalism and paleoconservatism, namely the death of nostalgia for the pre-Civil Rights era. The result has been a mindset "willing to reject America- openly desiring the collapse of the

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country or the creation of a new white-nationalist regime that has nothing in common with the constitutional government the nation has known since its inception" (Hawley, 2016, p. 80).

The 2016 election of Donald Trump, while certainly not at all the *result* of alt-right support, provoked the interest of the alt-right. Trump became the only candidate they supported. Both the alt-right and alt-lite were responsible for spreading false news stories and suggestive memes that addressed anything from Hillary Clinton's poor health to her involvement in a pizza restaurant-based pedophile ring (Fisher, Cox, and Hermann 2016). Alt-lite adherents like Mike Cernovich and Milo Yiannopoulos helped to feed the 'troll army' with a constant flow of false information, soundbites and memes, some of which turned viral on sites like 4chan and Reddit. At least a few were retweeted by Trump and his associates (Stack 2017).

Hawley (2017) notes a disturbing trend created by the alt-right's troll army. In an interview he conducted with August J. Rush, the editor of the alt-right website *Dissident Right*, Rush discusses journalists' role in popularizing the alt-right:

> We essentially created a false reality for [journalists] where they were drowned in responses by our Great Troll Army, to the point where journalists began to become afraid to write anti-White content out of fear of the online backlash…The Alt-Right literally did not have a physical presence until recently; we practically memed ourselves into existence through hijacking the OODA [observe, orient, decide, and act] loop of journalists, getting them to write about this scary, secretive, mean online group, and drawing more and more eyes & convers when people began to tune in to see what our platforms were (Hawley, 2017, p. 89)

The accidental promotion of the alt-right gave them move visibility, a pattern that leaders like Spencer and Taylor have continued by speaking through mainstream media and, perhaps more

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importantly, interviews with gullible YouTube content producers trying to increase their watch numbers or creators who share their views.

Mainstream and paleo-conservatives were also targeted as they share very little in terms of intellectual legacy.[20] But Hawley points out that early manifestations of the alt-right did notice certain contradictions in how conservatives used the 'southern strategy'. Republicans had used the racial tensions in the South after the Civil Rights Movements to win elections by promising cuts to welfare and other social services with the implication that black people would be hurt worse than whites (Perlstein, 2012).[21] Their actual intent was to shrink government services for everyone, but whites needed a reason to vote for it. Mass immigration, amnesty, and civil rights organizations remained in place despite the rhetoric. While promoting racist rhetoric, according to Hawley, Republicans were critiqued by the alt-right as not promoting white interests (Hawley, 2017).

Trump's election is perhaps the main reason why Republicans have not been able to shake the association with the alt-right and ultimately purge them from their ranks. As Hawley (2017) notes, figures like William F. Buckley were instrumental in keeping the conservative brand free of explicit racism and anti-Semitism by using his power at the *National Review* to expose Pat Buchanan and the *John Birch Society*. But with Trump as the default head of the

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[20] For example, segments of alt-right 'intelligentsia' were influenced by a small intellectual movement, Neo-Reactionary or NRx. Epitomized by philosopher Nick Land, a formerly left-wing Deleuze scholar, and Mencius Moldbug, NRx rejects the Enlightenment, egalitarianism and democracy in favor of a nihilistically framed embrace of monarchy, racial segregation and an intellectual elite.

[21] Republican campaign advisor Lee Atwater's 1981 interview that exposed the Southern Strategy in all of its explicitly racist intention is available in its entirety at https://www.thenation.com/article/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy/

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Republican Party the choice for Republican politicians is either 'work with him' or refuse and 'become irrelevant' (Hawley, 2017, p. 109-111). The lack of ideological gatekeepers online makes a counter-narrative even more difficult to wage against Trump and the alt-right, who have created neologisms to dismiss mainstream conservatism altogether. The alt-right seeks no seat at the table and "rejects the religious right, is skeptical of global capitalism, and has zero interest in early conservative classic texts" (Hawley, 2016, p. 113). Considering how little the alt-right resembles the Republican Party it might be unfair to expect them to purge them from their ranks, as Buckley did to racists and anti-Semites. As Hawley says, it would be "akin to asking the United Methodist Church to purge the homophobic Westboro Baptist Church from American life" (Hawley, 2016, p. 113).

With respect to the 2016 election and the alt-right's involvement, Hawley created a word-cloud which represent the most used words in the alt-right tweets he followed. The three largest, in order, are 'white,' 'Trump,' and 'supremacists' with 'black,' 'Jew,' 'Arabic,' 'decapitate,' 'Nero,' and 'Milo' occupying prominent frequency of use (Hawley 2017, p. 120).

Trump's victory was viewed as an overwhelmingly positive sign of their imminent ascent to power. The combined factors of Trump's border wall, Muslim immigration ban, scapegoating Mexicans and appointment of Steve Bannon as Chief of Staff were certainly encouraging signs of white nationalist policy preferences occupying the highest seat of power in America. That Bannon had promoted his new outlet, *Breitbart*, as the mouthpiece of the alt-right[22] helped clarify the genealogy of these policies and for whose sake they were being proposed.

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[22] See Posner (2016) for Bannon's initial statement. See Sinclair (2017) for a discussion of Breitbart and Bannon's attempt to backtrack following the Charlottesville rally.

The Trump/alt-right honeymoon soon turned sour. The Nazi salute initiated by Richard Spencer under the 2016 National Policy Institute conference just after Trump's election in November tarnished his image and began the process of separating alt-right from alt-light and, more peculiarly, the crypto-fascist alt-right from the explicitly neo-Nazi forums like the *Daily Stormer*. Andrew Anglin of *The Daily Stormer* praised Spencer, while others feared this was the beginning of the end (Hawley, 2017, p. 135). The Charlottesville rally in August of 2017 and firing of Steve Bannon and Trump's Chief of Staff seemed to drive the alt-right back to the online culture wars that produced it. But with Bannon returning to promote other candidates that skirt the edges of alt-right and alt-light time will now determine how far the alt-right can extend its influence (May 2017).

The Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville reflects, in its name no less, a shared understanding that the fringes of the right-wing were quite disparate. Websites like *Stormfront* and *The Daily Stormer* had gathered white supremacists but, as one might expect, their PR was never going to get a large portion of the population to wave Nazi flags. While Richard Spencer was trying to tie the public discourses of right-wing groups together, a much different form of transgressive politics had developed online.

Angela Nagle's (2017) *Kill All Normies* remains the most comprehensive single source describing the alt-right's growth in popularity amidst the online culture wars. She describes the emergence of a defensive stance against "earnestness and moral self-flattery of what felt like a tired liberal intellectual conformity running right through from establishment liberal politics to the more militant enforcers of new sensitivities from the wackiest corners of Tumblr to campus politics" (Nagle, 2017, p. 2). Hilary Clinton's 'basket of deplorables' line during the 2016 campaign launched a backlash among an overwhelmingly male vanguard of "teenage gamers,

pseudonymous swastika-posting anime lovers, ironic *South Park* conservatives, anti-feminist pranksters, nerdish harassers and meme-making trolls whose dark humor and love of transgression for its own sake made it hard to know what political views were genuinely held and what were merely, as they used to say, for the lulz" (Nagle 2017, p. 2).

Nagel's (2017) work acts as an appropriate reaction to the cyber-utopianism rampant in the early 2010s among the left when the hacker collective Anonymous, which shares with the alt-right an origin on the image board 4chan, were seen as a force for freedom. The utopian image of cyberspace embraced by Anonymous, media outlets and scholars alike originated with John Peter Barlow's (1996) *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*, a hyperbolic metaphor-laden paper about the ineffectiveness of government to control the internet. It portrays a world where the floating disembodied minds on the internet, free as they were to associate without institutional regulation, creating a civilization of their own. The government of "flesh and steel," as Barlow would have it, are not welcome. This kind of ethos, largely practiced by Anonymous during its peak influence, has had its political influence shrink away from the spotlight. Barlow, for one, continues to work for the Electronic Frontier Foundation which advocates for internet freedom, embracing practical politics alongside more whimsical musings about online civilization.

Few could have predicted that the same spaces that birthed Barlow's cyber-libertarian ethos would start to take a turn toward a new kind of right-wing politics. One reason for this change was the attraction of right-wing internet users to 4chan's infamous /pol/ (politically incorrect) board. Over the last three years the impenetrably ironic use of every form of racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and violent imagery on 4chan began to appear less ironic, to the

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point that leftists on 4chan /pol/ began congregating on 8chan's /leftypol/ board (Lain 2017). The culture center of the alt-right was now more insulated.

Donald Trump's election inspired this online community to, as /pol/ says, 'meme Trump into the presidency.' An uprising of Pepe the frog memes, sexist diatribes, trolling of political opponents and false stories followed in the wake of Hilary Clinton's win in the Democratic primaries. For lonely male gamers and trolls, many of whom admit to 'involuntary celibacy' to describe their lack of success with women, Clinton's constant evocation of her gender whenever possible only proved to alt-right trolls that identity politics had taken over mainstream Democratic politics. Clinton's approach stood in stark contrast to Sander's disparaging of identity politics when it causes ruptures in the Democratic base, a proposition that proved true enough. The image of Bernie Sanders supporters as 'Bernie Bros' and 'Brocialists' did real damage to Clinton's campaign, especially among disaffected white men who, largely for economic reasons, could not abide the idea that their lives were fine, and it was women and minorities who, supposedly, deserve justice against the interest of white men in a kind of zero-sum interpretation of rights. Some young men embraced Donald Trump's irreverent language, racism and sexism in a time where they could identify Clinton as the center of a politically correct culture that had embraced every form of identity as legitimate and deserving of justice except their own. The omnipresence of YouTube 'SJW (social justice warrior) cringe compilations' featuring anecdotal, often embarrassingly exaggerated or overly emotional, public outcries by feminists, racial justice and immigration advocates proved convenient strawmen to ground the formation of online communities explicitly opposed to social justice and identity politics.

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The image of the left compiled into the videos mocking liberal strawmen are largely meant to attack the positions of identity politics as represented on the left's favorite social media platform, Tumblr, a microblogging website. Nagle positions herself on the (older) left but does not write disparagingly of social justice turn of the 'new left' of the 1960s. However, she takes real issue with how certain users of Tumblr provided the anecdotes of leftist insulation that media reported.

Attempts to conform to the growing interest in transgender rights proved a source of fuel to the irreverent fire burning on 4chan, YouTube, Reddit and Twitter. That Facebook offered more than 50 gender options only proved to conservatives, the alt-right and others that identity politics had devolved people's sense humor and capacity to stand up for themselves. Terms like SJW, 'hug box' and 'snowflake' also served to make the left (socialist and liberal) appear disreputably irrational, requiring safe spaces and codling by their universities and colleges. The launching of stereotypes in both directions took hold. To the social justice left on Tumblr the right were irreverent insincere fascists crypto-Nazis. To the conservatives and the growing alt-right on 4chan, it was now the left, not traditional conservatives, that took itself too seriously. The ideological conflict between 4chan and Tumblr reached a peak in mid-2014 when the two websites spammed each other (Alfonso 2014).

Tumblr ultimately does good for people exploring issues of "mental ill-health, physical disability, race, cultural identity and 'intersectionality'" (Nagle 2017, p. 78). As Nagle describes, a subculture emerged primarily on this platform. Like 4chan, it too has had an unexpected cultural influence as it moved the postmodern brand of feminism into more mainstream public discourses. That people on these websites sincerely identify as vulnerable continues to fuel the irreverence of the alt-right and antifeminists. The able-bodied, white, male and/or wealthy

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members of Tumblr adopted privilege checking convention, often disparaging aspects of their own identity. The word 'cuck,' an abbreviation of cuckholding,[23] has been used by the alt-right and opponents of identity politics to describe someone who has subjected themselves to the shame of checking their privilege while their 'culture' (read as something like 'white heteronormative Western' culture) is being destroyed by 'cultural Marxists,' immigrants, SJW, and feminists asking white men to be as aware of their privileges as others are of their disadvantages. For conservatives who the alt-right alleges participate in 'allowing *others* to fuck the country while they watch' the term 'cuckservative' was coined.[24]

A few high-profile losses of tact propelled centrist and conservative views further aloft of the kind of politics present on Tumblr. One of the largest public forums of leftist politics provided evidence of the callousness of leftist identity politics, even if it happens less often than the other way around. As Nagle writes, the "combination of performative vulnerability, self-righteous wokeness[25] and bullying" was the strangest feature of a call-out culture focused on the expression of virtue (Nagle, 2017, p. 85). When Tumblr user 'Brienne of Snark' accused the father of a child killed by an alligator in Florida of exercising 'white privilege' to get attention, the internet exploded, with most people finding it horrible alongside Tumblr users defending her. Other examples Nagle (2017) cites include instances of leftist infighting, a confirmation of the

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[23] Cuckholding is a sex act in which a woman has sex with another man in front of her partner as a form of humiliation.

[24] John Red Eagle and Vox Day's (2015) book Cuckservative: How "Conservatives" Betrayed America popularized the term.

[25] 'Woke' is a neologism meaning aware of one's own privilege and sympathetic to the experiences and disadvantages of people different from yourself.

oft-present accusation that the left is sympathetic to Islamic terrorism when the Orlando shooting was blamed on the perpetrator's mental illness, not allegiances to ISIS. The incident lead to arguments on Tumblr over whether other users who blamed his mental health were being 'ableist'.[26] The pattern of adherents to leftist identity politics getting defensive for the sake of groups to which they do not belong proved damaging to the capacity of leftist ideas (or even transgressive expressions) to counter the infections nihilism of the alt-right. The devaluing of leftist virtues by an incapacity to sort out priorities of political action through demonization of leftist cultural figures like Germain Greer, Mark Fisher and Fran Cowling for insufficient commitment to current thinking on the most insulated corners of social media has proven disastrously limiting to the left's ability to wage the online culture war in the first place.

The alt-light, especially Milo Yiannopoulos, came to new prominence largely by attracting these attacks by leftists. He often blames this form of leftist politics for the perpetuation of the alt-right on 4chan. If you search '(popular conservative figure) censored by triggered SJW college students' intoYouTube you see the kind of publicity the shouting down or restrictions on speakers for being insufficiently virtuous ultimately achieves: students make no attempt to challenge the speaker's ideas, behave recklessly, and accomplish nothing beyond a complete loss of a counter-narrative (assuming they had one) that could effectively 'debunk' a speaker's position. If one audience member uploads a video to the internet all the political impotence of the left is laid bare.

Nagle (2017) goes on to develop a history of what she calls the 'manosphere,' a loose cluster of phallocentric organizations that have developed their own language and culture. Many participants hold political beliefs proximate to those of the alt-right, particularly the belief in the

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[26] Another neologism meaning discriminatory practices by nondisabled people against disabled people.

cultural decline of West from feminism's cultural influence. Communities like Men Going Their

Own Way (MGTOW), Meninism, and Gamergaters make up the core of this growing

phenomenon. MGTOWs eschew all relationships with women to extent it does not interfere with

their basic livelihood, believing they are destined to fail in a gynocentric culture that has rejected

them.[27] Meninists are a satirical outgrown of the Men's Rights Movement mostly arguing for

equality and mocking radical feminists. Gamergate was a major event in the discussion of

women's role in the gaming industry and will receive further examination in the data analysis

chapter. Gamergate, as the manosphere's organizing event, propelled these misogynistic

positions into a broad audience.

The political goals that converge between the anti-feminist manosphere and the anti-

feminist alt-right is best represented by the term 'red-pill.'[28] Originally representing an attitude

of intellectual independence among atheists and other contrarians, the 'red pill/blue pill'

distinction marks the difference between those who live in ignorance have taken the 'blue pill'

whereas those that have awakened to the real world have taken the 'red pill,' in reference to the

first *The Matrix* movie. It gained popularity as far back as 2000 among men's rights advocates as

a personal signifier (getting red-pilled) of waking up to the lies of feminism.[29] The alt-right

proposes policies that go so far as to insist that women leave the workplace and, despite their

overlap, the manosphere nonetheless includes moderates who want paternal rights and some

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[27] See https://www.mgtow.com/

[28] A term derived from the Matrix movies, all of which were written by two transgender women. Left-leaning icons and figures appropriated by the alt-right in a similar way include George Orwell and Hunter S. Thompson.

[29] See knowyourmeme.com's entry here: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/red-pill

disgruntled Sanders supporters. With left and right segregating themselves to different platforms, coupled with the sheer nastiness of the ongoing culture wars, each has taken to using vile methods of 'calling-out' the other. How the alt-right uses the manosphere's misogynistic inclinations will be covered in the Gamergate section of the data analysis.

The growth of pick-up artists in the manosphere, who promise to turn 'beta' males into 'alphas,' has taken the double standard of male and female sexual promiscuity to an extreme (Roosh V 2007).[30] The double standard that persist between male and female sexual promiscuity is nothing new, but a directed attack on feminism as the source of men's *failure* to have sex with many different women. This pattern persists despite the fact that no other general area of thought has empowered women to find their sexual destiny, including discussion of and tolerance for female promiscuity, than feminism.

A potential repercussion of women's' ongoing, occasionally backsliding, progress against patriarchal control of women's sexuality is that sexual choice among women does appear to have checked some men out of the dating market all together, or at least that is what some in the manosphere have taken to believe. Angela Nagel's (2016) article "The new man of 4chan" discusses the 'beta-uprising' on 4chan's /r9k/ board. It would appear as though some of the violent fantasies developed on /r9k/ are being acted out. So far two mass shootings and a murder, images of which were posted on /r9k/, have been linked to this misogynist community who often use violent and inflammatory language. Chris Harper-Mercer, who killed nine classmates in Roseburg, Oregon, used the email ironcross45@gmail.com, ostensibly a reference to Nazi iconography, on his dating profile while, like much of the alt-right, also being anti-religion. The

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[30] See Roosh V's website (http://www.rooshv.com/) or large collection of 'Bang' books that claim to teach followers how to pick up women from around the world. Roosh is also viciously antifeminist (Roosh V 2015).

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'virgin killer' Elliot Rodger, who murdered people outside a sorority house at the University of California before killing himself, is still featured in memes on /r9k/, in many cases having had his face photoshopped over paintings of Catholic saints. Many of these men hate, rather than aspire to be, alpha males, often blaming alpha brutishness for their own comparatively 'beta' status. Nagle (2016) cites a post on /r9k/ addressing Rodger's killing: "He was an incel [involuntary celibate] and extreme sexual deprivation can have extremely serious psychological effects on some people…this kind of shit breaks a young man's spirit."

The alt-right's willingness to suggest racial inferiority is accepted as possible by much of the alt-light whereas a 'peaceful ethnic cleansing' ostensibly remains among the strongest indicators of alt-right adherence. A belief that crime follows black people from neighborhood to neighborhood is also widely accepted by the alt-light, along with subtle suggestions of a natural inclination for such actions. The alt-right, of course, virulently swears off violence when addressing a 'normie' audience. Spencer argues that non-whites will be paid to move to another country, while others, like Taylor, seem to imagine some form of racial Balkanization within the United States.[31]

While rejecting feminism can require little than a presentation of ethical considerations, arguing that race is a real and natural distinction among humans requires hard science, or long rejected pseudo-science with a clear right-wing agenda, to be exact. As one might expect, leftist resistance to these ideas has largely been met with condemnation and accusations of censorship by centrists and conservatives.

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[31] *American Renaissance* features a list of articles that address Balkanization that can be found here:

https://www.amren.com/tag/balkanization/

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The ongoing mainstream defense of Charles Murray after he was shouted down and de-platformed at Middleton College in mid-March, 2017 reveals this exact problem. It seems that whenever a controversial figure is de-platformed at a university, centrist and conservative commentators find it necessary to defend his right to speak and often end up implicitly defending their work. Instead of doing research that would allow them to carefully challenge Murray's ideas with the huge number of findings that have discredited his account of race and IQ, or pressing him on his dubiously racist associations, the students at Middleton College afforded Murray more far reaching platforms than previously available. One example is an interview with Murray conducted by Sam Harris (2017) for his *Waking Up* podcast a few weeks after the Middleton incident. Harris came to prominence during the New Atheist movement and can be most charitably described as a centrist with highly divisive positions on Islam. Harris immediately praises Murray's work, presents him as a scapegoat, and does not once bring up the obvious issues with Murray's personal and professional associations (Harris 2017).[32] And the alt-right loves Murray's work, with much of alt-light seemingly accepting its accuracy.

The role of *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray 1994) in far right, libertarian and more recently alt-right circles is a kind of perverse just world fallacy.[33] It suggests, however calmly and subtly, that racial differences, among others, have sorted populations according to IQ and therefore welfare and other attempts to improve populations are destined to be ineffective.

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[32] Harris, for his part, delivers the individualist apologetics so common among libertarians in issues about group differences, simply pointing out the ecological fallacy inherent in applying aggregated data to individuals. Precisely the same point Murray makes to skirt the subtle racism he promotes.

[33] Scientific American columnist Eric Siegel (2017) lamented the return of *The Bell Curve*, emphasizing how the book encodes prejudice as particularly problematic.

The assumption it renders is thus 'the world should not be unjust, and seeing no evidence to the contrary in my insulated community, the world is just.' Jason DeParle's (1994) coverage of Murray noted a particularly damning quote from Murray while proposing another book: "…a huge number of well-meaning whites fear that they are closet racists, and this book tells them they are not. It's going to make them feel better about things they already think but do not know how to say."

Murray is nowhere near as nefarious as the statistically dubious practices of Jared Taylor and other white nationalist groups. It is easier to see Harris as merely sympathizing with another target of leftist antagonism, having himself been called a Nazi repeatedly on different occasions without justification. The resurgence of the popularity of *The Bell Curve* is a small part of a much bigger picture and leftist hyperbole appears to have only raised the stature of Murray's work.

The market-centric just world fallacy perpetuated by Murray remains central to American libertarian ideology, only occasionally taking the form of outright racism. But Murray is, in many ways, an example of modest libertarianism when compared to the fringes of the libertarian movement that overlap significantly with paleoconservatism, white nationalist, and white supremacist circles. Despite the fact that libertarians often support open borders, conflating free movement of people and free market demands, an unusual number of leaders in the alt-right considered, or continue to consider, themselves libertarians. These members of the alt-light and alt-right include Spencer (who was thrown out of the International Students for Liberty), McInnes and Yiannopoulos as well as online commentators and trolls like Time Gionet (aka Baked Alaska), YouTuber Stefan Molyneux (Lewis 2017) and Unite the Right organizer and famed 'Crying Nazi' Christopher Cantwell.

How exactly libertarians fit into the alt-right's radicalization pipeline has undergone a closer analysis more recently, but the genealogy of relationships between libertarian figures, white supremacists and fascists goes back to Europe during World War II and runs through Ron Paul's 2008 run for president of the United States. Famed libertarian economist Ludwig von Mises of the Austrian School worked as an economic advisor to Austrian Chancellor Englebert Dollfuss. While Dollfuss was a fascist he took an anti-Nazi stance, a pattern which continued in von Mises work *Liberalism*. Published in 1927, prior to the ascent of the Nazi party in Germany, *Liberalism* reveals von Mises' commitment to classic liberal ideas of markets alongside a defense of fascism as a kind of anti-Vanguard to the Bolshevik's total rejection of liberalism. Mises writes:

> Fascism can triumph today because universal indignation at the infamies committed by the socialists and communists has obtained for it the sympathies of wide circles…Fascism does nothing to combat it except to suppress socialist ideas and to persecute the people who spread them…
>
> It cannot be denied that Fascism and similar movements aiming at the establishment of dictatorships are full of the best intentions and that their intervention has, for the moment, saved European civilization. The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history. But though its policy has brought salvation for the moment, it is not of the kind which could promise continued success. Fascism was an emergency makeshift. To view it as something more would be a fatal error (von Mises and Raico, 1985, p. -51)

Libertarians and fascist share a common enemy in socialism. Indeed, Yiannopoulos still blames the left for much of vitriol and radicalism emerging as the alt-right.

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One of von Mises' students, and a friend of Ayn Rand, Murray Rothbard took the white supremacist-libertarian link quite a bit further than any major libertarian economist before or since. As Anderson (2011) points out, flirtation with the repeal of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is nothing new for libertarians, but Rothbard's support for then-candidate David Duke, former KKK Grand Wizard, was a farther reach to the right than normal. Writing during Duke's 1992 campaign, Rothbard wrote that "there was nothing in Duke's current program or campaign that could not also be embraced by paleoconservatives or paleo-libertarians; lower taxes, dismantling the bureaucracy, slashing the welfare system, attacking affirmative action and racial set-asides, calling for equal rights for all Americans, including whites: what's wrong with that?" (Rothbard 1992). Rothbard continues, in his piece on Duke, to utilize imagery that is simultaneously reminiscent of both leftists and Trump's treatment of other Republican candidates. Rothbard (1992) writes of the importance of going beyond ideas and instead expose the corruption of "ruling elites and how they benefit from the existing system, more specifically how they are ripping us off. Ripping the mask off elites is 'negative campaigning' at its finest and most fundamental." He goes on to list the topics across which libertarians and right-wing populists agree: "slash taxes, slash welfare, abolish affirmative action, crush criminals, get rid of bums, abolish the Fed, attack the bankers, America first, defend family values (Rothbard 1992)."

Two libertarian economists, F.A. Hayek and Milton Friedman, were likewise willing to support dictatorship to achieve free market liberalism. During the reign of Augusto Pinochet in Chile during the 1970s and 1980s it was the threat of Latin American socialism that ultimately sustained their tentative embrace of dictatorship (Walker 2012). Centrist and left-leaning media have dedicated more effort to understanding this link and where it originated in recent history.

Most commentary seems to suggest Ron Paul's 2008 candidacy for president as ground zero for the emerging libertarian-alt-right connection (Sheffield 2016).

Ron Paul's 2008 campaign solidified factional relations among libertarians, right-wing conspiracy theorists, white supremacists, and paleoconservatives. The term alt-right was coined around this time and Paul became the preferred candidate of Spencer and Taylor. Conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, who does not want to be identified with the alt-right, also endorsed both Ron Paul and Trump. According to Sheffield (2016), Ron Paul was also the preferred candidate of 4chan's infamous /pol/ board and has now become a major cultural center of alt-right activity. There remains a controversy as to how close Ron Paul was to white supremacists.

When Ron Paul's son and fellow libertarian Rand Paul ran against Donald Trump in the 2016 primaries the racist libertarian cohort formed by his father during the 2008 election fell apart. The younger Paul had recently made statements warning Republicans that they would continue to lose if they could not welcome minority groups. Unlike his father, Rand Paul never suggested repealing the Civil Right Act of 1964. According to one of the younger Paul's aides, during the 2016 election, "Trump got in, Trump zoomed ahead, we collapsed, and he had a massive impact in caging our people from us" (Goldmacher, Isendtadt and Strauss 2016). Sheffield (2016) suggests that it was the loss of the white nationalist vote in Iowa. At the very least, if race motivated a commitment to libertarianism Trump was the only candidate that clearly spoke the language of the racist far right.

The younger Paul did not maintain the 'paleolibertarian' rhetoric against civil rights of his father or the total rejection of the New Deal shared by paleoconservatives. Paleolibertariansm, like Rothbard imagined, did not transcend the left-right divide (Sheffield 2016). There were socialists and communists on the left and capitalists on the right, and

libertarians were the most committed to capitalism and, against the state, to the point of anarchism. The term 'paleo' usually means that conservative cultural values reign, including religion, and Rothbard's libertarianism embraces anarcho-capitalism at its most idealistic. However contradictory a commitment to economic nationalism and anarchism might be, paleolibertarianism nonetheless attracted conservatives that rejected globalization and the neoliberal commitments shared by Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

Taking the leap to anti-Semitism by associating Jews with communism requires accepting the same conspiratorial logic that bigoted anti-communists have long entertained. Since the emergence of the alt-right strange attempts at ideological speculation has emerged on YouTube, completely unironic reflections on the theory of 'libertarian-fascism' are becoming more commonplace. It is here that the kind of vanguardism that libertarians like von Mises, Hayek, and Milton embraced intersects with 'cleansing' impulse of fascist utopianism.

The individualism and anti-state positions of libertarianism, and the anarcho-capitalists in particular, tends toward a brand of anti-politics built on contracts among individuals without state-sponsored empathy. Societies built on individuals and their property would effectively end the need for democracy. For anarcho-capitalists and libertarians, democracy also poses the danger of 'mob rule' and the removal of liberties via democratic voting and public institutions. The large number people who rely on public institutions will have to be dealt with somehow and libertarians often remain too idealistic to dig into this problem. But the alt-right seems to have a solution: target undesirables with a fascist vanguard to purge society of those deemed unworthy leaving a libertarian utopia composed only of libertarians. This vanguardism solution marks perhaps the central intersection of libertarians and the alt-right; a kind of perverse realism meant to make libertarian idealism appear possible.

The notion that a libertarian society can only be composed of people who agree with libertarianism is a fundamentally anti-political stance. While libertarians of all stripes see the state and democratic institutions as a threat to liberty, the alt-right tends to promote the idea that the people standing in the way are globalists, African Americans, Jews, immigrants, and feminists. Alt-right activist and self-proclaimed libertarian James Allsup, in a conversation with YouTuber That Guy T, who ostensibly invented the term, encourages 'everyone' to see That Guy T's video by saying:

> There are so many people out there who want this libertarian society. They want to be left alone. They want low taxes. But they are realizing that, given the current political climate, given some of the voting demographics and some of the changes that are happening demographically in the US, that goal is slipping away… We can have liberty and democracy if you want, but we have a democratic state that votes to take away your liberties and that is not really liberty, right? Its liberty with an asterisks…To have a libertarian state we need to physically remove communists and other people who would pose a threat to that.

Allsup (2017) suggests that the genealogy of this idea originated with Austrian School economist and right-libertarian Hans-Hermann Hoppe, who has been criticized by fellow libertarians for being too socially conservative and recommending the removal of homosexuals and communists from society (Hartwich 2005).

The belief that enemies from within defy an imminent libertarian utopia is utilized rhetorically alongside the belief that immigrants lack the capacity to adapt to American or European culture, much less to a libertarian or white nationalist ideology. One tweet from Trump retreaded the popular belief among alt-right adherents that America and Europe were facing

'white genocide' through non-European immigration and higher birth rates among non-Europeans (Kopan 2016). The term 'white genocide' is sometimes referred to as the 'great replacement,' as popularized by French writer Renaud Camus. The chant 'you will not replace us' heard at the Charlottesville rally is largely derived from Camus' concept (Wildman 2017). Despite originating as a practice in statistical illiteracy and white supremacist myths, a *cultural* 'great replacement' appeals to right-wing populist and paleoconservatism's focus on nationalism, traditional culture and skepticism toward possibilities of immigrant assimilation. Trump's tweet was celebrated by white nationalists and white supremacists and was among many other instances of Trump's inept, but effective, courting of the alt-right.

It is in this intersection between racist myth and a candidate uninterested in facts or reasonable public policy that the dreams of alt-right leaders grew stronger. The wall that was promised by Trump guaranteed the insulation from other cultures. Jared Taylor, a white nationalist and racial realist, who leads the organization *American Renaissance*, promoted a new edition of Edwin Rubenstein's (1994) *The Color of Crime* in 2016. Rubenstein (2016) attempts to justify the fear of black crime among whites, a position thoroughly debunked by Time Wise (2004) twelve years before this new edition. Alt-right organizations found only a single candidate, in Donald Trump, that dared be 'honest' about the 'real threat' of minorities and immigrants that race realist works promote.

After all of this 'professional' pseudo-science from the alt-right has entered online communities, amateur racist commentators take up the discourse. The social media audience is younger, larger and less ideologically grounded than the core audience of racist think tanks like American Renaissance and the National Policy Institute. One particularly infamous YouTuber named Tara McCarthy helped produce a long diatribe recorded over her drawing the shape of

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European and African skulls, all the time arguing that blacks and whites are two subspecies due to their having interbred with different hominid species.[34] And who provided the research for her videos on race? None other than J. Philippe Rushton, the disgraced Canadian psychologist who once proposed that the penis sizes of men in different races reflected their race's overall character (McGreal, 2012). In modest contrast to her alt-light associates, McCarthy is among the most overtly racist alt-right commentators on YouTube and Twitter. She has interviewed Jared Taylor, Andrew Anglin (of the neo-Nazi *The Daily Stormer*), and Richard Spencer, among others.[35] She has been banned from several social media sites already.

More ominous than the explicitly racist minority of conservative commentators on YouTube are the number of interviews conducted my conservatives and centrists with Richard Spencer that fail to challenge his perspective despite stated differences between Spencer and whomever is interviewing him. In the name of free speech and educating her audience, a YouTube commentator that goes by the name Roaming Millennial (RM) interviewed Richard Spencer. RM's channel[36] features a list of standard fair topics among conservatives, the alt-light, and the alt-right, herself identifying as a conservative civic nationalist. Titles include "Dear college snowflakes, no one takes you seriously," "College student triggered by Trump support," "I enable hate?" in which she attempts to address her uncritical stance and occasional embrace of racist commentators (McCarthy included), "Should we blame white people?: Debunking white guilt," "Feminism hates femininity," and "5 things you should know about social justice and

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[34] See Drake and McCarthy (2017).

[35] McCarthy's YouTube channel, which shares her name, can be found at

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9vwJXx7DR-3zSub4mwQNFg

[36] Find channel page here https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLUrVTVTA3PnUFpYvpfMcpg

universities," among others. The titles are normal conservative 'click-bait,' at worst bordering on alt-light talking points.

RM's channel appears to be the exact kind of venue Richard Spencer would seek out to appeal to mainstream audiences.[37] Over the hour that he dominated the conversation she never sufficiently challenged his talking points on peaceful ethnic cleansing, race and IQ or anything that would provide evidence of sufficient background research on her part. At one point near the middle of the third video RM agrees that she is *more* conservative than Spencer due to his 'concerns' about the environment and healthcare. Spencer then repeated the line 'Roaming Millennial is more conservative than Richard Spencer!' effectively illustrating the new pragmatic veil draped over white supremacy that defines the alt-right. The danger of these kinds of interviews and YouTube content in general is that YouTube content creators are not held accountable by advertisers, as advertisers often cannot choose before which videos they would like their advertisements to appear. This problem has led YouTube to change its algorithm, under pressure from advertisers, which in turn blocked a great deal of content and demonetized channels with political leanings, whether objectionable or not (Hess 2017).

YouTube has proven an exceptionally good means of indoctrinating new followers. Hermann (2017) claims that YouTube is outright dominated by the right-wing. Exley's (2017) investigation of the alt-right on YouTube insists that the alt-right is truly a collection of movements and not as distinct as those that organized under the banner of 'white supremacy'. To a millennial on YouTube these loosely connected movements appear as links between channels

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[37] Retrieved, in three parts, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlOv3BXSyJM, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhicdpt9Q0U, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSefByrjXzY

provided by YouTube's algorithm. Hermann (2017) notes that YouTube and conservative talk radio share similarities:

> The value it places on personalities; its reliance on monologue and repetition; its insolation and immunity from direct challenge, its promise to let listeners in on the real, secret story. Both are obsessed with persuasion and conversion, combined with a giddy disbelief at the sheer *stupidity* of liberals, who-and this is the fun part- aren't listening." Exley noted that the minority of strongly committed alt-right ideologues whip up fear and anger in a similar way as Trump's campaign, conspiracy theories and all. And YouTube has proven, at least in terms of messaging, the superior organization capabilities of the alt-right when compared to the left. Comparing Youtube to talk radio is also a useful reminder of how potent a medium can become while still appearing marginal to those who don't care for it or know much about it.

The preceding history of the online culture wars and emergence of the alt-right demonstrates the blurred borders among conservative factions categorized as alt-right, alt-light, antiestablishment conservative, libertarian, and the neoliberal conservatives exemplified by most Republican congressmen. Furthermore, groups in the manosphere often share the segregation impulse with their feminist leftist counterparts on Tumblr, therein placing them in ideological proximity to alt-right misogyny. The process whereby the manosphere, libertarians, and conservatives negotiate this proximity has produced a wealth of data available online. Organizations strongly opposed to the growing popularity of the alt-right include members of these groups and those on the left, but often for very different reasons among them. The alt-right emerged from large variety of political orientations and remains relationally embedded among ideologically differentiated online organizations. Understanding complex affective and cognitive

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forces that link and segregate different groups hold the potential to dissipate the popularity of the alt-right by the same means they achieved it.

The fanged frog men of Kekistan: Transgression, ambivalence, and conspiracy

The preceding section of this chapter largely focused on articulated position and policies of the alt-right and proximate groups. But before the primary theoretical assumptions can be fully developed, the pathos reflected in the transgressive aesthetics and moral pronouncements of the alt-right must be addressed as psychological phenomenon. Moral psychology and coded language are the central focus of this study but the psychological reality that allows the bizarre beliefs of the alt-right to find new conduits among proximate online organizations requires more than attention to figurative language and far-right policy. This section reviews the communications and psychological literature on the transgressive play, ambivalence and conspiracy theorizing. Recognizing the importance of these three psychological realities will help refine the theory of crypto-moralism developed later.

Transgression has been a mainstay of the left since the French Revolution invented the directional metaphor of left-right in the first place. Transgressive art was central to left-wing politics, from desecrating religious symbols to mocking politicians. Right-wing transgression gets much less attention, but it resembles leftist transgression as it remains a matter of breaking taboos. The adage that, over the last half century, 'the left won culture, the right won economics' means that the left has run low on accessible targets of transgression considering so many cultural taboos have been undermined through just this kind of tactic. At the same time all ideologies outside the far-right agreed that the horrors of fascism be recognized from an early age in successive generations. Identifying as a neo-Nazi or white supremacist guaranteed social isolation and near-complete exclusion from the political process, with some exceptions in the

Southern United States and rural mid-West. For some the culturally reinforced political taboos against fascism and Nazism have begun to lose their valence and impact.

Eugenics has also found renewed popularity as race realists like Jared Taylor attempt to reintroduce a pseudo-science with nefariously authoritarian connections. Taylor does not mince words. He uploaded a video to American Renaissance in October 2017 called 'Let's Break a Taboo' that features typical race realist reflection of selective breeding in agriculture and livestock as a thinly veiled way to introduce the idea of eliminating 'inferior' genes from the human genepool (Taylor 2017). Taylor goes on to endorse abortion, sterilization of the handicapped and sperm donation as forms of eugenics instead of engaging with current debates in bioethics. Citing fellow race realist Richard Lynn, Taylor finally arrives at the real point of his video. After a backhanded 'positive' assessment of black women's higher likelihood of receiving higher education degrees than black men, Taylor begins the (most) racist aspect of his eugenics proposal. A scree about 'undesirable traits' leads him to conclude that (black) women on welfare should be put on birth control or by offering money for every point of IQ lower than normal if they get sterilized. He finishes by endorsing the Chinese method of embryo screening to increase 'desirable traits' and asking "are we going to take modern science seriously or are we going to keep pretending that preschool programs can turn every ghetto child into a nuclear physicist? Do you or don't you care if our population continues to decline while other countries take a different course? If you don't care I have some advice. Make sure your grandchildren learn Chinese" (Taylor 2017).

Taylor's rhetoric is clearly loaded with hyperbole but is presented intellectually. Post-WWII intellectual taboos like eugenics have always been challenged by the far-right, often rehashing the same tired talking points and pseudo-scientific misappropriation of biology. What

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makes the alt-right unique among far-right movements is its transgressive aesthetics and the online media from which it emerged. A central feature of this transgression is the use of irony, horror, disgust and humor to make the actual ideas of alt-right leaders more palatable, or at least make the other side appear toxic.

The sometimes-ironic, sometimes-sincere appropriation of fascist iconography among the alt-right is often dwarfed by the near constant appropriation of once neutral symbols like Pepe the Frog and the 'okay' hand gesture, a symbol they appropriated when Trump repeatedly used it when describing the violence of alt-right opponents (the 'alt-left') during the Charlottesville rally, an event the alt-right viewed as evidence of Trump's alignment with them. Among the most esoteric configurations of this new symbolism is the 'Republic of Kekistan,' a "sovereign nation of shitposters" at war with 'Cuckistan' and 'Normistan.' Pepe is the prophet of the meme magic frog-headed god of chaos and darkness Kek. Kek is also an acronym for 'laugh out loud,' a reference to the notion that trolling is 'for the lulz.' 4chan has also deified Convfefe, a tentacle monster named after Trump's misspelled incomplete tweet. The flag of Kekistan is a green Nazi battle flag with the swastika replaced with K's (kekistan.wikia.com).

Recognizing the absurdity of alt-right cultural production should not detract from a recognition of its communicative potency. While leftists have long spoken of the importance of transgression it is disheartening to read their works with the alt-right in mind. Reading Christina Foust's (2010) *Transgression as a Mode of Resistance*, while ignoring the focus on the leftist cases she cites, it appears parts can be reasonably be appropriated as a theory of 'Kekistan' resistance:

Transgression generally refers to discursive actions which cross boundaries or violate limits. As Michel Foucault develops, transgression illuminates limits even as it attempts

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to destroy them: For instance, it highlights those discursive and material lines which separate, and thus define, the normal and abnormal, the healthy and diseased, the domestic and foreign. Transgressions which are permitted, or escape the notice and discipline of boundary-policing authorities, push the boundaries further…In other words, transgression redefines lines of distinction, giving new meaning to identities and social practices. Transgression thus shares a deep conceptual relationship to immanence, as that volatile force which ceaselessly attempts to consume, break down divisions, hybridize, or couple those elements which had been divided transcendently (Foust 2010, pp. 3).

The alt-right's consummation, division breaking, hybridization, and coupling of far-right identities, against 'hegemonic' liberalism, is something new and might be the reason that it lacks a central ideology. Its goal is to draw from others and 'unite the right,' as the Charlottesville rally suggested. The recognition of a shared enemy in liberals, socialists, feminists, SJWs, immigrants and 'cuckservatives' enacts the outraged trolling of alt-right and alt-light, with or without a unifying vision of white identity between them.

The use of fascist iconography, pornography, violent images and racist stereotypes can always be chalked up to the impetus to disrupt, humiliate or frighten others through insincere use of politically incorrect images and language, an intent at the center of trolling activity. Poe's law, or the inability to detect sarcasm or other forms of insincerity in online communication, can be attributed to the ambivalence of networked text and imagery in general (Ellis 2017). A particularly dense set of arguments surrounding the use Nazi imagery among the alt-right is to whom they are directed. Using Nazi imagery, holding fascist beliefs but nonetheless gaslighting anyone who points out the obvious connection between their imagery and beliefs with claims of irony, sarcasm, or satire grew as a cultural tendency among alt-right trolls.

Amelia Tait (2017) discussed the intersection of insincerity, serious fascist beliefs and the use of imagery to troll opponents. She also quotes an alt-right adherent throughout:

We can't possibly hope to understand the difference between someone on 4chan who holds sincere Nazi beliefs and someone who is shouting "Death to all Jews" for the keks…, like a toddler who has just learnt the word "poo"…

…Angry at liberals labelling everything (most notably, the alt-right) "Nazis", fringe internet communities decided to fight back. The logic- if it can be called that – went like this: "Let's dress like Nazis and act like Nazis so that liberals call us Nazis when we're not! That will show just how stupid these liberals are! The press, the media, does not deserve to have a consistent picture of reality presented to them."

The ambivalence of online communication was the focus of the work of Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner (2017). Their work is particularly helpful because, as communications scholars, they focus on what is being communicated online and ignore the intent or, as they put it:

Online, if something appears to signal bigotry, it's bigotry. Because that is, quite literally, the message being communicated. And when only the message is the message, what the creator might really mean in their heart of hearts is moot…[T]ext exists in its destinations, not in its origin (Phillips and Milner 2017, p. 197-198).

Online identity play, backed by folkloric expressions, stories, and humor, underlie the "often inelegant, uncomfortable, or otherwise fumbling attempt to construct the appropriate mask for the appropriate audience" (Phillips and Milner 2017, p. 63). For the alt-right the division between adherents and 'normies' poses a dilemma as to how 'crypto' to perform one's bigotry, relying in part on the ambivalence of intent discussed above and the ease of denying one's actual

adherence to bigoted ideas. Against this ambivalence, Phillips and Milner (2017) present a perspective relevant to this study. They suggest focusing on targeted identity play, or "who and what a person rejects…these antipathies help construct identity *via negativa.* Who someone is, based on who they're not, who they hate, and who they mess with" [emphasis in original] (p. 65). The alt-right, lacking a distinct ideological identity, can nonetheless be decoded by their targeting during identity play, and events reveal their origin, not individuals and their intent.

That the alt-right largely attracts straight white men to venerate them for doing very little outside of being straight, white and male means that their targets could include anything perceived as a threat to this identity and triggers enough outrage to warrant their attention and effort. Alt-right leaders applaud adherents for their European heritage and being part of the central forces that built the modern world. Pseudo-science in the study of race is supplemented by a pseudo-history of Europe and veneration of European civilization. Combining the threats that feminists, non-whites, and liberals allegedly pose to this heritage with the pathos and paranoia over how different audiences receive their content has given birth to brand new conspiracy theories alongside typical fascist conspiracies.

Jan-Willem van Pooijen and Nils Jostmann's (2013) article on conspiracy theories and moral psychology concludes that "uncertainty leads people to make inferences about the plausibility or implausibility of conspiracy theories by attending to moral information" (p. 109). Motivated reasoning does not attend to facts alone and, in the absence of direct evidence, the conspiracy theorist's assumption is that the best evidence is held by conspirators keeping that evidence secret. But it is nonetheless easy to believe that Dick Cheney has a secret personal military police force if you already hate Dick Cheney.

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Pseudo-science, pseudo-history and a moral conviction about the inferiority of blacks or the nefarious personality of Jews combine to ascribe intent to these and other groups where none exists. Among the most egregiously inaccurate conspiracies among the alt-right are the beliefs that Islam is a world conquering religion based on civilizational character or that Jews have, for centuries, infiltrated power structures for their own gain through a community-wide cabal of nefarious world manipulators.

Attending to moral outrage via conspiratorial thinking is made all the more acceptable in online spaces that are insulated and skeptical of outside information. On *Stormfront*, the oldest white supremacist website still in operation, white supremacists challenge DNA testing by pointing to Jewish people who own or operate these services as proof of a Jewish conspiracy to undermine the white race by convincing whites that race purity is a lie. Cognitive dissonance is resolved not through the assimilation of new information, or even its rejection, but the concoction of a separate narrative in which what appears as real is in fact grounded in nefarious intentions.

Conspiratorial thinking can curve anxiety or induce catharsis against the angst of uncertainty, but intolerance of uncertainty does not necessarily predict conspiratorial thinking. Moulding, et.al. (2016) found that, while controlling for uncertainty, a worldview characterized as "(socially) threatening, non-random, and with no fixed morality" predicted proneness to conspiratorial thinking (p. 345). Stressful life events and perceived stress predicted conspiratorial thinking (Swami, Furnham, Smyth, Weis, Lay and Clow 2016). Brotherton and Eser (2015) found that "proneness to experiencing boredom is associated with stronger endorsement of conspiracy theories only in as much as boredom proneness is associated with increased paranoia" (p. 1).

Imhoff and Bruder (2014) argue that conspiratorial thinking can be understood as a generalized political attitude "distinct from established political attitudes such as right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO)" because it emerges from a prejudice that high-power groups are more threatening than low-power groups, whereas RWA tend to venerate power and submit to it (p.25). Imhoff and Bruder's (2014) final study in their article emphasizes that conspiratorial thinkers differ from right-wing authoritarians when they try to change the status quo. That a secret group is responsible for one's low social status motivates the conspiracy theorist's attempts to change the status quo (Imhoff and Bruder 2014, p. 39). Most concerning is the possibility that conspiratorial thinking aims to change the status quo through the targeting of certain groups believed to be co-conspirators.

Conspiratorial narratives deliver a moral message in part by pointing out the nefarious intentions of powerful elites. Among far-right conspiracy theorists *Info Wars*'s Alex Jones is the most widely known.[38] After over a decade of decrying the evils of liberal and conservative elites his narrative has had to shift to explaining why his preferred candidate and fellow conspiracy enthusiast Donald Trump has failed to do what he promised. One answer Jones provided was that Trump was being covertly drugged by "deep state operatives" in preparation for a coup, which also explains rumors of Trump's mental deficiency (Daniels 2017). Jones is now in the uncomfortable position of having his preferred candidate not only win the presidency but actively pandering to his conspiratorial audience while remaining convinced that high-powered elites are conspiring to ruin society for the low-power groups that know 'the truth'.

Although Jones does not claim to be alt-right he nonetheless defends their activities and dog-whistles the same kinds of paranoid antisemitism. Following the Charlottesville rally, Jones

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[38] See Alexa's traffic statistics on *InfoWars* at https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/infowars.com

not only claimed that the riots were staged to impose martial law, but that KKK members who attended the rally were, in fact, Jews in disguise. This statement was followed by the requisite denial that he has any problem with Jewish people, just that KKK members without hoods look like the cast of Seinfeld or Howard Stern (Buncombe 2017).

Conspiracy theories can be co-constitutive with confirmation biases that sustain the moral precepts of people from any ideological background. For the alt-right white genocide, the international Jewish conspiracy, and a near constant paranoia that people posting on their platforms are outsiders trying to discredit them or spoil their spaces all support the idea that their power is being diminished by the people they hate. Andrew Anglin, of *The Daily Stormer*, and Swedish neo-Fascist radio show *Red Ice TV* both shifted to white supremacy from conspiracy theorizing (Lokteff 2015). Both *The Daily Stormer* and *Red Ice TV* constitute illegitimate media outlets for largely false or exaggerated stories. Stempel, Hargrove and Stempel (2007) found that frequent use of this kind of media increased belief in conspiracies that pander to one's ideology.

The highly moralized scenarios that conspiracy theorists concoct are shared online due to the ways emotion influences the spread of moralized content. A group of researchers found that the presence of moral-emotional words "increased their diffusion [on social networks] by a factor of 20% for each additional word" (Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker and Van Bavel 2017). Furthermore, triggering moral outrage via the violation of norms can lead to either outrage fatigue or, if expressing this outrage is easy, leads to intensification of future experiences of outrage (Crockett 2017).

Practice and policy as crypto-moral narratives

Following the approach of Phillips and Milner (2017), this study assumes that the message is more important than its original intent, meaning bigotry is bigotry even if the person

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producing content is insincere. Furthermore, this study assumes that the alt-right is not a distinct ideology but instead draws from other ideologies, meaning they can be defined according to whom they appeal and whom they hate. This process is essentially based on moral judgment and requires certain psychological tendencies and processes to sort potential adherents from those that reject various moral positions of the alt-right. This sorting is made possible, in part, by tolerance for the alt-right's brand of transgression, ambiguity, and conspiracy narratives.

The exploration of identity *via negativa*, as Phillips and Milner (2017) suggest, is incomplete without the positive and optimistic elements of certain alt-right leaders and adherents. Their rhetoric is not all doom and gloom. However vulgar, there is an element of joy to the transgression and the belief that 'normies' cannot comprehend their gaslighting behind the veils of ambiguity and anonymity. The term crypto-morality first appeared in Avner Greif and Steven Tadelis' (2010) theory of moral persistence to explain why moral beliefs persist in time well beyond their popular zeitgeist. They define crypto-morality as "the secret adherence to one morality while practicing another in public" (Greif and Tadelis 2010, p. 229). This study seeks to greatly expand the epistemological reach of this term as it only describes the micro-political *context* under which certain moral beliefs are hidden or encrypted. Greif and Tadelis' (2010) use of the term does not address crypto-morality as a kind of skill utilized when addressing an audience that is not sympathetic to your positions or policies. Nonetheless, Greif and Tadelis' focus on the willingness of individuals to divulge moral beliefs differently under different circumstances, and how socially sanctioned beliefs deemed taboo in the past nonetheless persist through family, friends and non-work associates is commendable.

Speaking from personal experience, any white person in the South who has spent time in a room with other white people will eventually discover instances of racism arising rather

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naturally as expectation of social sanction are diminished. No form of communication has diminished the risk of social sanction more than online anonymity, which is perhaps why the doxing of political opponents online is considered such a serious action, regardless of ideology. Doxing, or releasing other's private information online, takes free-floating moralism surrounding a person's avatar or screenname and provides a real target for backlash, which can include everything from pranks to death threats. After the Charlottesville rally opponents of the alt-right took to doxing participants, in some cases getting them fired from their jobs (Smith 2017).[39]

Crypto-morality describes affect laden textual and visual communication that is difficult to decipher in terms of moral agency or intent but nonetheless develops narrative around the target-object toward which the content is directed. For the alt-right encrypting fascist or Nazi ideas anonymously under the guise of criticism or trolling, coupled with disavowal, claims of irony, or other forms of ambiguity, creates a situation in which their social identity can be deciphered by what they reject. As far as actual policies are concerned, leaders and adherents to the alt-right both prescribe governmental and individual actions that have a practical moral language of their own, the popularity of which was driven largely by Trump.

Crypto-fascist policies like 'peaceful ethnic cleansing' and chants that include the lines 'Jews will not replace us' are among the most thinly veiled, but at least one alt-right adherent posting on 4chan the day after the Charlottesville rally made clear how badly that event had hurt their cause. The post is worth reproducing in its entirety:

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[39] See the @YesYoureRacist Twitter feed. Logan Smith circulated pictures of Unite the Right rally attendees asking Twitter users to identify them.

Don't get trapped in an echo chamber where you can no longer relate to normies [sic].[40] Pretending that Charlottesville didn't massively push the average white person away is really stupid. We have a chance to actually make changes now that Trump has shifted the Overton window to the right, but we need to be smart and make the movement appealing to the AVERAGE white person:

- Disavow all Nazi/KKK edgelord LARPers.[41] There is no way to lose public support quicker than going around making Nazi salutes and holding Wiki [sic] torches while chanting "Jews will not replace us". This instantly makes the average person hate you.

- Build a populist movement with realistic, incremental overt goals. Repealing the 1965 Immigration Act and replacing it with something that both limits total immigration and prioritizes white immigration is an actual tangible political goal.

- Keep the long-term goals covert, and don't ever reveal your power level.[42] Talking openly about an [sic] white ethnostate only leads to failure and the average public turning against you, so disavow anyone who reveals his

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[40] According to knowyourmeme.com, normies are boring and conventional. The term is etymologically linked to *Treating the Alcoholic* by Stephanie Brown as a description for those who do not have a mental illness and lack understanding of those with a mental illness. Retrieved from http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/normie

[41] LARP stands for "live action role play" and here refers to people who pretend to be Nazis online.

[42] "Hide your power level" refers to hiding your affiliations to avoid being labelled. Retrieved from http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/hide-your-power-level

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power level. Leftists will recognize dog whistles and know we're crypto,
but normies [sic] won't listen to them.

- Start first by focusing on multiculturalism, because it lot [sic] easier for
  people to see how non-white countries produce culture that is at odds with
  our values. People like Peter Thiel should be the voice of the alt-right, not
  cringelords [sic] like Richard Spenser.[43] [44]

This kind of admission is rare, but it speaks volumes. There are clear signs of a policy
strategy and intent to encrypt admittedly racist and authoritarian policies with a genealogy in
fascism. Those that view their alt-right activity as a joke become the useful idiots that attract
young people looking to transgress norms and scare their parents. More serious adherents to the
alt-right, like the user quoted above, are trying to consolidate the message, and launder hatred
and bigotry with 'serious' discussions of multiculturalism. But how does crypto-moralism work,
how do we recognize it, and what conclusions can be drawn by studying it?

Andrew Goatly's (2007) *Washing the Brain: Metaphor and Hidden Ideology* was the
initial work that influenced the current study's appropriation of the term crypto-morality. Goatly
utilizes Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) formulation of embodied cognition and moral metaphor to
critically examine the ways harmful ideology can be combated through the use of less harmful
metaphors. As Goatly (2007) explains:

[W]ashing the brain does not mean *brainwashing*. Through the latter may have originally
stressed the removal of existing patterns of thought in order to introduce new ones, it now
tends to mean the inculcation of propaganda. *Washing the brain*, by contrast, suggests the

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[43] Post retrieved from http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1285221-2017-unite-the-right-rally

[44] Thanks to Natalie Parrott's YouTube channel *ContraPoints* for bringing this post to my attention.

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possibility of removing harmful ways of thinking. The paradox is, of course, that the metaphorical pattern that this title exploits has itself been recruited in the cause of harmful ideologies, such as ethnic cleansing and other drives towards racial or mental purity [emphasis in original] (p. 2)

The last line perfectly frames the motivation behind this study, with one caveat. Whereas Goatly suggests that ideology is *hidden* in metaphors and therefor unconscious, this study assumes that, at least for strong adherents to the alt-right, their true ideological commitment to some form of fascism, however watered down, is apparent to them. The narratives they build around their targets are *encrypted* in the sense that the receiver's underlying moral tendencies and affectations are the target. Like network encryption, moral metaphors require a pattern of decoding present in the receiver, even if the actual intent of the message (that which the sender encrypts) is lost, at least at first. If the alt-right does indeed have a radicalization pipeline it is lined with ambiguity but forged to deliver new members ready to accept the decrypted message.

Crypto-morality is the style of an individual's moral system when it is expressed with full knowledge that their actual ideology is taboo and would likely be rejected by outsiders. It is the closest to ascribing intentionality to alt-right content producers that this study can claim to go. Crypto-moralism, on the other hand, describes the messages themselves. Moralist and moralism often have a negative connotation, with moralists seeking to control someone else's morality and moralism being the simplistic way of speaking or writing proverbially to deliver a simplistic view of right and wrong. Evoking this connotation is entirely intentional. Whether they be religious proverbs or drawings of masturbating frogs rejecting the advances of women, moralistic messages must appeal to something basic that the receiver can recognize and, through

repetition and affective intensity, eventually turn them from outsider into a conduit of their message, whether this receiver is fully aware of alt-right influence or not.

Embodied moral psychology provides the necessary tools to describe how moral emotions can be turned into conduits for ideology via affective intensity and enacted by the affective valence of certain events. The rest of this chapter focuses on insights from a loose association of ostensibly commensurable tendencies in psychology and philosophy of mind known as 4EA (embodied, embedded, extended, enacted, affective) psychology.

According to Protevi (2013) the 4EA approach differs from computational models of mind "by defining cognition as the direction of action of an organism in its environment rather than as a kind of information processing…[T]he 4EA school rethinks the allegedly central role in cognition of 'representation'" (p. 100). With respect to morality, embodiment places the source of moral discourse largely through metaphorical reference to sensory information (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Haidt and Joseph's (2009) work is built off of five moral foundations (harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity) that are applied to ideology to differentiate the frequency of appearance of moral foundations in left and right-wing morality. Haidt's work rightly emphasizes the social sources of morality that adjust sensitivity to his moral foundations, but his foundations lack a dynamism that is required for context-specific analysis. Furthermore, his method relies on methodological individualism, whereas a 4EA approach focuses on how individuals become conduits for moral beliefs enacted locally within a specific social ecology. To achieve an understanding of the individuals and groups through their environment theory must "come to terms with the way in which human social norms emerge from, but are irreducible to, processes at the level of the individual" (Goldspink 2014, p. 55).

Sneddon's (2011) externalist critique of Haidt's moral psychology applauds the social intuition model of moral judgment Haidt develops, but takes issue with how the portrayal of this model conflicts with Haidt's portrayal of "the innate aspect of moral judgment." By externalizing Haidt's social intuitionist model, Sneddon's insists that "moral judgment can be both a process of externalizing something inner and a process of collaborating with others" with the theoretical caveat that an externalist approach leads to the conclusion that "there is no single psychological capacity that constitutes the performative core of moral judgment" (Sneddon 2011, p. 41). The *performative disunity* of externalist moral judgment contrasts sharply with theories practiced by most mainstream moral psychologists. Context and relationships matter for how moral judgment is expressed and, for online communication, anonymity and limited consequences can exert a major influence on how individuals perform moral judgment.

While Haidt's foundations highlight certain embodied referents their specific manifestation, combination, and target-objects in real-world discourse can only be simplified and reduced to representative anecdotes. For example, Trump's border wall, as a target of moral discourse, can elicit complex combinations of moral metaphors that span or exceed the boundaries set by Haidt's moral foundations. In particular, when non-moral, or aesthetic, values are expressed alongside moral values to heighten their intensity there is little Haidt can say. After all, how else can one explain the emergence of Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOWs) without noting that their notable lack of sexual pleasure influenced their moral stance against associating with women? If one takes a hedonistic perspective on morality pleasure *is* a moral good as well as an aesthetic good.

Time and space are folded into Haidt's ingroup/outgroup category, without noting that these function as moral categories onto themselves as well as derive from sense experience.

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Haidt has included liberty/oppression as a sixth moral foundation intended to explain the libertarian impulse (Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto & Haidt, 2012), but again the nuances of actual discourse are lost. Libertarians can imagine a community composed, self-sufficient individualists that reject government control and exclude undesirables, while other libertarians might imagine a hedonistic freedom grounded in freedom of movement, 'unleashed' capitalism accelerating the kinds of pleasures they can experience and making their favorite illicit activity accessible. The images they concoct reflect their aesthetic use of space and time to illustrate moral good.

Starting with bodies and their senses as the 'wetware', or conduit, of affectivity, whether aesthetic or moral, means that visual culture and discourse combine in the process of sense-making. This process requires an exegesis on what, exactly, is meant by affect and extension in the social psychological sense. *Affect* is a body's transitive capacity for state change and the capacity to induce state change in other bodies (Protevi 2011, p. 393). Whereas emotions are individual and subjective, evoked as they are by objective circumstances, affect breaks the subjective/objective dualism by giving bodily states and the world a manifold relationship experienced ecologically through transmission, whether through embodied interaction, text or images. Brennan (2004) understands the transmission of affect as a fundamentally group-focused phenomenon. The limitations of methodological individualism are that it cannot account for transmission. By acknowledging entrainment of individual emotion and the "affect in the room" on can begin to speculate about the material basis on which affect is transmitted or, to put it another way, how bodies act as conduits for ideological affectations in specific spaces (Brennan 2004, p. 68).

In this study, affect applies to both material and virtual spaces as loci of affective transmission, but is far more focused on the affectations made possible by anonymous virtual

www.manaraa.com

spaces. These spaces constitute that into which mind is *extended* insofar as the sharing of content reflects the thought process of a group. At this point it should be apparent that the adoption of 4EA psychology in this study is largely due the kinds of data available and how mental processes can be deduced from them. A view of psychology irreducible to what is 'inside' the mind turns mind into something that can be studied using the artifacts of groups interaction.

Enactivism has the most to do with events, as it assumes a temporally bound, unstable, non-static entrainment of minds. The production of meaning "is generated within the system for the system itself- that is, it is generated and at the same time consumed by the system...Meaning is always relational in the sense that it depends on the specific mode of co-determination, or coupling, that each system realizes with its environment; different couplings produce different meanings" (Colombetti 2010, 148). The enacted appraisal of events is less focused on individual cognitive and emotional processes and instead emphasizes intersubjective bodily arousal, or affect (Colombetti 2010, p. 151). Affect is just as important to understanding human behavior in a physics lecture as it is in a 4chan board.

Referring to Sneddon's (2011) externalist approach to moral judgment, the issue of *embeddedness* is raised within his frame of performative disunity of moral judgment. Embeddedness of moral judgment is "an issue of realization (implementation, the means of performance)" within a system (p. 47-48). Sneddon (2011) also includes the automaticity of (some) actions as coupled with the automaticity of moral judgment. That moral judgments occur automatically undermines moral reason as the source of moral judgment. The addition of automaticity in action and performance to that of moral judgment "provides *prima facie* support for the framing of hypotheses that embed some ways of performing moral judgments *completely*…in our capacities for producing actions and attributing responsibility. That is, these

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capacities amount to ways in which we perform moral judgment" (Sneddon 2011, p. 48). This complete embeddedness of moral judgment and performance raises ominous questions about individual susceptibility to radicalization via the repetition of spontaneous acts of trolling that reinforce the actions themselves and hatred for the 'other.'

The alt-right performs moral judgments in a multitude of ways depending on context, audience, anonymity and the affective valence of events to which they are reacting. The viral character of moral outrage online relies on the synchronic actions of troll mobs that perform their moral judgment, often in abusive, threatening and sadistic ways. The reactive tendencies may be supplemented with diachronic, thoughtful, reason-prone subjective states focused on strategy or actual intent of action, but reason and ethical reflection are not what motivates thousands of people to harass a single individual for months.

Events that have, at least at the time they occurred, little to do with the alt-right can demonstrate how online content is used to build off the uncertainty politically divisive events present to each side of a culture war conflict and then how the alt-right has exploited the side most proximate to their own position. The narrative built around these events is constructed using encrypted moral metaphors and euphemisms (like 'peaceful ethnic cleansing') targeted at demographics the alt-right rejects.

Alt-right affectations emerged from the rejection of modern leftist political correctness and its mythical origins in feminism and social justice prior to the popularity of the alt-right itself. 4EA psychology permits an emphasis on intersubjective processes and a virtual context, characterized by anonymity, transgression, ambiguity, and conspiratorial narratives, operating on a bodily capacity to effect and be affected. Without access to individual feedback or even most individual identities in the alt-right discussion boards, video comments, commentaries, articles,

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and trolling behavior become the cultural artifacts through which intersubjective processes are deduced. Complexity theory in social psychology has developed from an ontology in which relationships between and subsequent synchronic organization of individuals is at least as important as individuals themselves. What persists between any two or more individuals is irreducible to individuals. One must account for the unique relationship they have forged.

Methods and Data

The methods utilized for the event-case analysis are derived from an epistemology best described as *qualitative complexity*, although its terminology varies depending on the theorists and philosophers utilized by a given social scientist. This study uses the assemblage algorithm developed by Castellani and Hafferty (2009) as it allows greater use of the available data and the creation of encrypted moral precepts through the combination of moral categories and target objects. This chapter will demonstrate how the foundational concepts of moral precept, enaction, organization, event and affectation discussed above ground the case selection and coding.

A fixture of an epistemology grounded in qualitative complexity, but purposefully avoiding a conceptualization of a complete system, is the assumption that the 'whole' is ultimately out of reach because whatever aspects of a system one is interested in they cannot be defined statically. The alt-right is defined as a process of affective entrainment whose character is highly fluid and unstable. Inquiry utilizing complexity theory may include systemic constraints and possibilities of a whole system, but, according to Patton (2015), there is a dispute over how systems theory and complexity theory relate (p. 151). Complex systems may appear as a subcategory of systems theory. This study assumes the other side of this dispute. Complexity theory attends to different issues than systems theory, but the two can overlap. Patton's (2015) distinction on this position suggests that systems theory focuses on interrelationships,

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perspectives and boundaries whereas complexity theory focuses on emergence, nonlinearities, dynamics, and adaptation.

This study begins with the complex relations among political, often spontaneously formed, organizations and asks *how* encrypted moral messaging worked to spur the emergence of the alt-right, but does not claim to explain *why* the alt-right emerged. Asking first 'how does this work?' eliminates the possibility of causal models (why did the alt-right emerge?) in favor of pragmatic analysis of action, expression and relationships.

Smith and Jenks' (2006) work on the philosophy of qualitative complexity helps approach the operationalization of morality in this study. The term they coined for the nonformal analysis of systems, or in this case aspects of systems, is *eco-auto-organization*. Instead of attempting to peer into the 'black box' of consciousness, the box is unpacked into the self-organizing environment populated by human and nonhuman actors (automated networks, websites and twitter bots, for example, are all capable of spreading moral discourse without agency while nonetheless appearing to poses agency):

> Eco-auto-organization suggests that an opening appeared in a somewhat general sense in which a population of individuals might prosper as a social group given the 'amplification' of co-operative tendencies into something akin to what we could call developed 'communication' by means of symbols…
>
> The properties of a system cannot be reduced to the components. Interaction is what gives the system its complexity, that is, the possibility of self-organization. (Smith and Jenks 2006, p. 203)

The unique ecology of online interaction imposes communicative and material constrains on users. In the alt-right's case rallies and protests have proven disastrously unhelpful to their image

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and cause. But possibilities of organization have emerged that are truly self-organizing. While the alt-right is not especially well organized, in the hierarchical sense, they can achieve wide-spread public attention through actions that reflect this decentralization.

The number of contingencies that set the alt-right on its current trajectory far exceed the possible individuals to which intentional action can be ascribed. Had Trump not felt slighted by Obama he may never have run for president and his hateful, hyperbolic, conspiratorial and juvenile speech would never have been 'plugged' into the already existing culture wars unfolding online and the alt-right's public exposure would, presumably, be much less pronounced.[45] Trump and Yiannopoulos' twitter account constituted particularly well-connected nodes in their growing popularity the cultural production of the alt-right on places like 4chan took place almost entirely free of their influence.

Alt-right crypto-moralism can be defined as follows: affect laden content, both moral and aesthetic, visual and textual, that carries the signification of target-objects that distinguish alt-right adherents from those they reject. Affect is communicated through metaphor and a distinct aesthetic culture, and the alt-right's proto-fascist ideology is encrypted with a veil of irony, ambiguity, playful transgression, disavowal or the exaggeration/invention of facts to suit a conspiracy narrative or outright hate speech. For a policy to be viewed as rational by potential alt-right converts some a priori, unconscious moral affectations must be shifted to turn an individual into a conduit for alt-right moral precepts.

Moral precepts are defined through the relationship that persists between alt-right and proximate groups. MGTOWs who abandon relationships with women may not immediately

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[45] See Wang (2017) for information on Obama's roast of Trump and its potential influence on Trump's decision to run for president.

share an intense hatred of feminism, but attributing one's lack of sexual prowess or pain of rejection to an amorphous target like feminism shifts attribution of blame to an identifiable, albeit abstract, outside source. Implanting feminism within a general category of leftism expands the target of distain and takes an individual one step closer to the alt-right. Taking leftism as a Jewish conspiracy against Europe achieves a full conspiracy narrative that contains previous biases and adds several levels of abstraction to them. The shifts from libertarianism to alt-right adherence covered earlier relies, in some cases, on shifting moral precepts from pragmatic politics to utopian vanguardism.

The content of moral precepts includes both target-objects and the moral metaphors that stand out against the obfuscating forces of irony, ambivalence, disavowal etc. Aesthetic categories intensify the affective valence of a given piece of content, combining with moral precepts to increase the 'viral' character of a message, as Brady, et.al. (2017) demonstrated. Rather controversially, this study does assume that hedonistic pleasure is a source of moral discourse as the absence or supplementation of pleasure has spurred so many moral narratives in the alt-right and within the manosphere. As *accounting* and *spatial* metaphors are among the most common in moral discourse the notion that feminists and leftists have *stolen* or *blocked* access to sexual pleasure by 'alpha' and 'beta' men alike, leaves room for groups like MGTOW or the Proud Boys to offer an alternative. For MGTOWs it is *segregation* from women and for the Proud Boys it can be the increase of 'alpha male' *capital* that *empowers* men to find *agreeable* women.[46]

The data analysis chapter will discuss aesthetics anecdotally by descriptions of pieces of content and how pleasure and beauty (or a depiction of its absence) heightens the affective

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[46] See https://www.mgtow.com/ and http://officialproudboys.com/

valence, whereas deciphering the moral precepts of a particular piece of content requires a set of initial meta-moral categories with political valences that are combined or disputed in discursive play. Each category listed below is followed by a small number of negative metaphors and how other metaphors resolve them:

- Account-exchange: stolen, drain on resources, welfare resolved by renegotiation, taking back, removal of moral or aesthetic good

- Group-space: difference, outsider, invasion, occupation, spy resolved by group intimacy, border, nation, distance, wall, suspicion of outsiders

- Movement-time: restriction, oppression, limitation resolved by empowerment, freedom

- Leadership-authority-hierarchy: despotism, illegitimacy, 'cuck' resolved by strength, power, anarchy, democracy, revolution, guillotines

- Pain-harm-anxiety/pleasure-stimulation-excitement: killing, raping, uncertainty resolved by revenge, castration, future tense idealism

- Disgust: dirty, corrupting, spoil, rot resolved by purging, cleaning, detox, sterilization

Some of these categories and examples overlap given the inexact character of figurative language. *Purging* can relate to both disgust and the need to remove *toxins*, and group-space and the removal of *undesirable* people from a specific space. Resolutions of the angst brought about by negative forces create the figurative grounds on which policies are built, like 'peaceful ethnic *cleansing*,' elimination of *welfare*, Europe-only immigration or racial *Balkanization*.

The assemblage methodology of Castellani and Hafferty (2009) provides the tools necessary to analyze aspects of a system that is qualitatively distinct and complex. As one of the few methods available in qualitative complexity, Castellani and Hafferty's (2009) assemblage algorithm encourages systems thinking, but the nature of a complex system does not permit

linear modelling, so the algorithm focuses on modelling characteristics of a system in its complexity. They provide the following six-step algorithm, of which many steps are repeated to reach saturation points in data analysis:

> [T]he goal of assemblage is to move the researcher through a six-step algorithm for constructing a model of some social system of study. This algorithm roughly proceeds as follows: (1) help the researcher define a set of research questions in systems terms; (2) establish the social system's field of relations and determine the web of social practices out of which it emerges; (3) use this information to catalogue the numerous ways the system is coupled/expressed at a particular moment in time-space; (4) condense/cluster this catalogue into a smaller grid of the system's most important practices to create the network of attracting clusters; (5) examine the internal dynamics of this network for a particular moment in time-space, including its interactions with key environmental forces and its trajectory within key environmental systems; and, finally (6) assemble these discrete, cross-sectional snapshots of the system into a moving model, concluding with some overall sense of the system as a whole (p. 67)

As a case-based approach the assemblage algorithm "treats a social system as a set of cases, each of which represents one of multiple ways that a web of social practices couple to express some social system of study" (Castellani and Hafferty 2009, p. 71). Building a system from the ground up with cases that represent systemic coupling, in this case, takes the online cultural wars as the system in which the alt-right emerged through the coupling of moral precepts alongside other ideological organizations to produce relations irreducible to characteristics inherent in either. The events selected below offer snapshots of the distributed moral outrage from which the alt-right

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draws. In this way one can achieve a 'sense' of the system as a whole but not claim to describe *why* the system as a whole exists.

Assemblage methodology requires a number of validity checks performed in the course of creating the working model of a given system. Castellani and Hafferty (2009) provide examples of questions, asked throughout the conceptualization and analysis phases:

> [D]o the identified attracting clusters that I identified actually interact with one another to form a social system, or are they disparate areas of inquiry I am forcing into a network of my own making?...Does the model "hold together" relatively well or does it keep falling apart? Can I really use such terms as self-organization, emergence, tipping points, attracting clusters and so forth to describe my topic, or am I forcing these terms on my data? Finally, am I just saying the same thing about my topic as everyone else, albeit with the fancy new tolls of complexity science? (p. 79).

As much of the initial writing of this study took place during the analysis it is worth addressing some of the questions and the potential pitfalls that arose during the initial stages of this study. If anyone wishes to check the validity of the analysis presented below they should start with the relationships discussed above followed by these epistemological considerations:

- Macro-level clusters were operationalized as the loosely defined and overlapping *ideological* categories either given to or self-ascribed by their ideological adherents. The categories assumed to be viable before the analysis include: feminist, LGBTQ rights, immigration rights, black rights, alt-right, alt-light, manosphere, white supremacist, conservative, paleoconservative, libertarian, paleolibertarian, neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, neo-reactionary.

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- Meso-level clusters are composed strictly of *organizations*, but in an expansive sense of the word. News outlets and policy institutes are obvious members of this category, but contagiously organized trolls mobs located on 4chan as well as the individual forums and twitter accounts involved in a particular event count as organizations as well.

- Micro-level clusters are composed of individual *leaders* of organizations like Yiannopoulos, Spencer and Taylor as well as *commentators*, anonymous or not, who work under a specific name or pseudonym.

- The maps are necessarily simplified and should be referenced along with the thick description that follows. Limitations on font size and overall space available required the simplified relations present in the model be develop further in the descriptions.

- The maps represent the final step in the analysis once the textual data have been put through the first four stages of the assemblage algorithm. The thick description will include tables of common metaphors based on patterns that emerged in the data as well as representative anecdotes found within the data.

- The maps only represent the thematic extensions of the alt-right pipeline. Tables in the analysis section should be understood as emergent properties of relational phenomenon that fill out the meso- and micro- level relational complexity implied by the maps.

The data were drawn from message boards, commentaries, video comments, blogs, articles, and YouTube videos that describe, depict, or comment on major events that marked initial moral performances by right-leaning participants. Data from within the alt-right are contrasted and compared to data from outside of, but proximate to, its typical sphere of influence. As these events took place prior to or during the ascent of the alt-right in public consciousness their reach, at the time, was more limited. Each case section of the data analysis

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chapter will include a separate subheading in the reference section that lists the sources. As much of the data is anonymous there is often little more than a URL available as referent. Other sources will include archived posts that have long since disappeared from the websites in which they originated. The cases and moral themes involved are as follows:

- Gamergate: anti-feminism
- Black Lives Matter protests: racism and racial conflict

Each event involved distinct kinds of moral performativity that singled out targets for synchronized outrage.

Analysis

Events involving the synchronized actions of thousands of individuals are temporally bound manifestations of diachronically developed moral judgments and performative schema. The affective intensity of these events can shift the trajectories of participants' moral intuitions toward more radical organizations as the connections between leftism, feminism, 'Jewish cultural Marxist' philosophy, and globalization are touted as the sources of misery for the right-wing in any given culture war event. The moment-by-moment process of organizing troll mobs during these events proves just as interesting as the residue of blogs, videos, and commentaries these events leave in their wake.

Organized actions by the alt-right are contingent, enacted and nonhierarchical. The networks carry the flow of outrage without anything resembling a leadership in their initial stages and tend to emerge as reactions to events. Leaders emerge to spur the outrage, as

Yiannopoulos did for Gamergate,[47] but the initial reactions must be wide-spread and affect-laden to get the attention of those, again like Yiannopoulos, who wish to frame movements for their own purpose.

The analyses below appear in chronical order: Gamergate from October 2014 and the growth of Black Lives Matter. Gamergate was chosen for several reasons: it was the most widely known instance of antifeminist trolling, its development preceded the popularization of the alt-right but helped create Yiannopoulos' role as a provocateur of the alt-right/alt-light, and its repercussions are still being felt as YouTube commentators continue to post hundreds of videos (now three years later) targeting many of the women involved.[48] The growth of Black Lives Matter was chosen because it took place in the months prior to the election of Donald Trump in November 2016. How these events were portrayed by the alt-right while Trump was on the rise framed how the alt-right understood Trump's supposed allegiance to white nationalism. Links to the data will be provided under separate headings in the references section. It is possible some sources may have moved or been deleted since their initial inclusion.

After a brief overall case description each section will proceed according to Castellani and Hafferty's (2009, p. 67-82) six step assemblage algorithm with each section aimed at the following goals:

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[47] See Lees (2016) for an analysis of Yiannopolous' role in Gamergate and subsequent incapacity of news media to sort the detail due to an illusion that participants in mass harassment had actual points to make about video game journalism.

[48] See YouTube creator Thunderf00t's Feminism versus Facts playlist, which currently features seventy-five videos from this single user: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJeX6F-Q63I&list=PLQJW3WMsx1q3BAZh3XsK1cSwCiaqjSulc

(1) an internal profile and thick description of each cluster, (2) an overview of the

distribution of the various cases within each cluster, (3) a map of any additional sub-or

supra- clusters; and (4) an overview of the interactions, relationships and conceptual

distances of the clusters in relation to one another and the system as a whole (Castellani

and Hafferty 2009, p. 72).

How each cluster (organization composed of supra-structural commentators and embedded in

super-structural ideological categories) relates to the others will be mapped as a visual aid.

Opponents of the alt-right are included in the mapping, but their actual complexity of views is

simplified for the sake of concision and the fact that the alt-right perpetuates a strawman version

of Black Lives Matter and feminists. This necessary simplification should not be taken to signify

that the author of this study in any way accepts the reductionist parody of these groups

perpetuated by the far right. After the map is presented the rest of the section will proceed

through the presentation of anecdotes that demonstrate how the data were analyzed and

discussing the ideological spectrum that is assumed to be the most radical among alt-right

adherents.

Women will always betray you and steal your toys: Gamergate and antifeminism

The Events. The succession of events loosely strung together as Gamergate began with the

release of a free independent online game title "Depression Quest," created by Zoe Quinn, in

August of 2014. Despite its nontraditional subject matter and simple link interface "Depression

Quest" received positive reviews for its portrayal of mental health.[49] This publicity started a

backlash from 4chan, with one post saying "next time she shows up at a conference we…give

her a crippling injury that's never going to fully heal" (Parkin 2014).

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[49] Game and brief list of awards available at http://www.depressionquest.com/

As Quinn continued to receive sexist comments, rape threats, death threats and disparaging remarks about the role of women in the video game industry one of her ex-boyfriends, Eron Gjoni, posted a long rant about their sex life, including accusations that she cheated on him with at least five men tied to the gaming industry.[50] Even though the men she had allegedly slept with had never published a review for her game a troll mob quickly formed online that seemed to wholly accept Gjoni's side of the story. The organization of the harassment campaign that took place over the ensuing weeks began on 4chan via a private IRC channels set up through the site.[51] The "Burgers and Fries" channel, named after a joke made by Gjoni referencing the Five Guys restaurant chain, contains the initial reactive upheaval that ended in at least three women in the gaming industry having to flee their home and go, temporarily, into hiding out of fear for their lives.[52]

Brianna Wu and Zoe Quinn, both game developers, along with feminist cultural critic Anita Sarkeesian, were the principle targets of harassment, but other major targets included Leigh Alexander and Felicia Day (Lees 2016). Wu became a target after merely tweeting jokes about Gamergate (Scimeca 2014). But the cases of Zoe Quinn and Anita Sarkeesian are interesting for the sphere of relations they represented to the participants in the harassment campaign. Quinn became the archetype for the 'personal betrayal' men experience from women in relationships and reinforced their idea that women use their sexuality to get ahead. The

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[50] Eron Gjoni's original post is still available at https://thezoepost.wordpress.com/

[51] Records of Zoe Quinn's personal role in discovering these connections is available at https://storify.com/strictmachine/gameovergate

[52] A near complete transcript of the "Burgers and Fries" channel is available at https://archive.org/details/TheInfamousIRCChannel

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explanation from the mob was that, because Quinn had allegedly slept with a games journalists, that the entire campaign was about 'ethics in game journalism.'[53]

Quinn attracted bigotry for how she allegedly led her private life, whereas Sarkeesian's harassment was largely due to her being the public face of feminist critique of the gaming industry. After spending several hours watching and reading content on her cite, *Feminist Frequency*, a sober viewer can only be left with the impression that Sarkeesian may be among the least radical left-leaning feminist critics working today. The overall message of her series' elementary-level discussion of the portrayal of women in video games, "Tropes vs. women in video games," is that the video game industry continues to market much of their high value, or triple-A, content to men even though women make up a growing portion of game players. One oft noted aspect of this asymmetry is the lack of relatable female characters, and an unrealistic and stifling portrayal of female bodily dimensions.[54]

Participants in Gamergate harassment were never able to coordinate their efforts to suggest what it is they actually wanted. The juvenile harassment campaign aimed at women in the video game industry emerged through the confirmation of many of the delusional biases held by the almost exclusively male users of 4chan, the manosphere in general and the more diverse alt-light. Quinn's rumored promiscuity represented the 'imminent betrayal' by women that 'all' men face, especially since women could, ostensibly, use their sexuality to 'invade' the gaming industry. Sarkeesian, somehow less understandably, became the feminist Golam of political correctness threatening to take away male gamers' sexy toys.

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[53] See https://archive.org/details/TheInfamousIRCChannel. Search (CTRL+F) the term 'ethics' to find entries.

[54] See, for instance, "All the slender ladies: Body diversity in video games" (Sarkeesian 2016).

Gamergate was the event that launched the career of Milo Yiannopoulos as the anti-feminist provocateur in chief. Yiannopoulos championed Gamergate, despite having earlier written an article disparaging men from playing video games (Yiannopoulos 2013). After Gamergate was triggered, Yiannopoulos (2014) confessed to having once been judgmental towards gamers and then proceeded to repeat many of the unsubstantiated claims against Quinn and minimized the death threats. Jilani's (2014) assessment of Yiannopoulos' involvement found that Gamergaters were not especially fond of his appropriation at first, but he seemed to provoke his way into their sphere of influence.

In line with the typical paranoia that surrounds the alt-right and alt-light, at least one major conspiracy theory around Gamergate claimed that the harassment was a false flag meant to make the participants in Gamergate look bad. To be fair, it does seem some participants were actually taken in by the idea of 'ethics in game journalism' and did tweet against harassment.[55] The problem with this claim is that the initial reactions to Gjoni's blog on the "Burgers and Fries" channel describes in detail the thoughts and motives of the trolls involved. Quinn, Sarkeesian and others are clearly the victims of a paranoid upheaval whose repercussions are still being felt. To say Gamergate 'ended' is only to draw an arbitrary line. The women involved remain targets of harassment.

The Fallout. Thanks in large part to Gamergate the role of feminism in modern society, or at least a strawman version of it, has been called into question by a diverse group of YouTube commentators including channels operated by gamers, atheist skeptics, alt-light provocateurs, alt-right bigots, men's rights activists, MGTOWs and many others who were sympathetic to Gamergate or involved themselves. One striking feature of all the videos and comment sections

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[55] See https://storify.com/LadyFuzztail/gamergate-may-be-a-victim-of-a-false-flag-operati

used in this analysis is the near complete lack of competent knowledge or even awareness of basic feminist thought, whether that be from a social, psychological, historical or cultural perspective.

Now three years later, Quinn and Sarkeesian continue to be the focus of an unusual amount of ridicule but the rise in popularity of 'SJW cringe compilations' was accompanied by a host of new targets, including colleges and universities. YouTuber Carl Benjamin (Sargon of Akkad) went so far as to create a change.org petition to suspend 'social justice courses' at universities.[56] Benjamin began shifting the focus of his channel from atheism to 'anti-SJW' content during Gamergate.[57] But Benjamin has made videos disparaging more than just feminists with topics including disparaging assessments, immigrants, Muslims and identity politics. He can barely be considered alt-light, a title I ascribe to him based on the way he approaches these topics and his largely uncritical interview with Jared Taylor.[58] With most videos having well over a hundred thousand views and many reaching well over half a million, Benjamin's channel reflects a more general shift among gamers and atheist YouTube commentators who became popular in the wake of the New Atheist movement.[59]

The investigation into Gamergate and the popularization of anti-feminist commentary began with data mining the "Burgers and Fries" IRC channel. Key words like sex, Zoe, Anita, depression, feminist, gaming, industry, developers and journalist constituted the initial search through over two thousand pages of dialogue among Gamergate participants. After the first

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[56] See https://www.change.org/p/universities-suspend-social-justice-in-universities

[57] See Benjamin (2014) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZI2IRbSKts

[58] See Benjamin's (2017) *The Thinkery* podcast

[59] The New Atheist movement has itself been criticized as having a misogynist culture (Marcotte 2014)

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search commonly observed words like harassment, STD, dead, rape, nudes and reputation were included. Representative phrases and their associated moral categories are presented in Figure 1 below.

Table 1: Personal and Social Moral Precepts Expressed During Gamergate

TARGET	MORAL METAPHOR	PROBLEMS	RESOLUTION	INTESIFIERS	DISMISAL	COUPLING
Social/ Feminism/ Sarkeesian	Account-exchange	SJWs fund feminist critique	Ruin funding channels, revive	Sarkeesian depicted as 'greedy Jew'	Their outrage is just about money	N/A
	Group Space	Gaming industry SJW infiltration	They can't shut down 4chan or IRC, Violate their space	Message board infiltration RIGHT NOW, /pol/ isn't safe!	Typical SJW	Accounting-revenge
	Movement-Time	Shut out of our spaces	Shut out feminists, trap them in Tumblr	Let the purge begin	Unrealistic depictions of women *empowering*	Purge from Group-space
	Leadership-Authority	Nepotism	Meritocracy	Kill them to help game developers	SJWs worship women	Exchange their pain for our makers
	Pain-harm-anxiety	Video games are dead, no future	Destroy SJW influence	N/A	N/A	End of gamers, end of men
	Disgust	Industry corrupt	Journalistic ethics	N/A	Nothing but 'journo' propaganda	N/A
Personal/Women/ Quinn	Account-exchange	Exchanging sex	Not rape, taking sex anyone can get	She slept with everyone she met in the gaming industry	Her feelings don't matter, she destroyed Gjoni	Pain- rape as punishment revenge
	Group-Space	Her game is not a game at all	Ruin reputation	Violate her life	Only radical feminists will defend	N/A
	Movement-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Leadership-authority	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Exchange- slept her way into the industry
	Pain-harm-anxiety	Uncertain future of gaming	Get rid of anxiety by alienating foreign forces	They don't belong	No women on the internet	N/A
	Disgust	STDs, multiple partners, ugly	Shame (release of nudes)	Rape threats, violence	N/A	N/A

Reactive expressions during Gamergate lacked refinement and their spontaneity, while

hyperbolic, did not mesh metaphors to create a distinct narrative. People on the forum were

insisting that harassment was not appropriate, but this did not have any notable effect on the fallout this event had for its targets. While it was helpful to separate the spheres of personal and social, there was considerable overlap. How Quinn was alleged to have conducted herself in her personal life was representative of how the industry exchange works, with women receiving undeserved attention either out of fear of a feminist crackdown on gaming or 'SJW virtue signaling' by male game developers and journalists, which may in turn eliminate those aspects of gaming that men are alleged to value, particularly violence, nudity, and submissive female characters. While none of the characteristics of male-centered video games have declined in the least, one should never doubt the ability of ideologues to produce a controversy where none existed.

The fallout of Gamergate expanded and further organized an outrage industry whereby more 'refined' arguments in articles and videos were produced against 'SJWs' in the games industry over anything viewed as a slight to male domination in gaming. An article by Ethan Ralph (2016) on *The Ralph Report* website moans about the game *Overwatch*, which seems to be among the few first-person shooters with a diverse audience, removing an animation in which a latex clad female character's butt grows larger as she turns and moves on the loading screen. Vigilant as ever, Ralph tracked down a complaint on an *Overwatch* website and wrote an article titled "Blizzard gets rig of *Overwatch* animation because of one SJW complaint," a statement he could not possibly support. Karl Benjamin (2016), aka Sargon of Akkad, complained about the decrease of scantily clad women in the card game Magic: The Gathering's artwork. He even invites an 'expert' on the game who seems to have dedicated a great deal of time worrying about the 'thought crime' of being anti-social justice. Jeremy, Carl's guest, summarized his impression of what 'SJWs' think of him and his favorite card game: "Most of the articles that were being

promoted [around a discussion of women in Magic: The Gathering], and this is my opinion, my impression, they read like this: women don't play magic because all men are disgusting pigs who make them feel unwelcome" (Benjamin 2016).

The affective valence of Gamergate revealed tensions in the personal and social implications of feminism that extended far beyond the gaming industry. In the wake of Gamergate anti-feminist commentaries have remained popular regardless of political commitment. Ultimately Gamergate only primed the reactive anti-feminist sensibilities of its participants and sympathizers.

Before moving on to the current dynamics of anti-feminist groups I feel it is necessary to make my position on gaming clear. I play video games and have since I was six years old. In some deeply personal ways I understand the escapism it can provide. What I cannot understand is why men, especially men in their thirties, whether they are in the gaming industry or not, would consider 'gamer' to be among their principle identifiers. If 'gamer' signifies a base-line by which you assess an issue as complicated and diverse as feminism I advise finding a supplementary hobby that does not consume your time along with your critical faculties.

Current Moral and Organizational Dynamics. Gamergate involved reactive morality that focused on both micro-level interpersonal relationships addressed by the manosphere and the macro-level cultural changes brought about by feminism attacked by the alt-light and alt-right. One of the principle differences between alt-right and alt-light is the degree to which they wish to roll back women's rights. The Proud Boys, as exemplars of alt-light misogyny, may want to venerate housewives, but the alt-right wants full domestication.

Alt-right YouTuber Black Pigeon Speaks (2016) made a video titled "Why women destroy nations*/civilizations- and other uncomfortable truths" and its follow-up video "How

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women dismantle nations*/& other uncomfortable truths" which discuss what he sees as the danger of women's choice. He offers among the most direct and pathological position on women among alt-right commentators. From "Why women destroy nations":[60]

- "If women are allowed to choose, harems form. If women are allowed a voice in matters that pertain to the safety of a nation then that nation will die, inevitably. It's as simple as that."

- "Women do not, on an instinctual level, care very much about her [sic] tribe, nation or civilization. It's in their nature not to."

- "This half century-long experiment of women's liberation and political enfranchisement has ended in disaster for the West…and the only solution would be the return to a more patriarchal society and this seems highly unlikely."

- [requisite disclaimer that women are not to blame, it's just a civilizational problem]

- "…Criminals, gangsters and mass murders are always going to be more attractive to women than hard-working honest men...Consider how many women throw themselves at drug dealers versus, for example, math teachers."

- [truly horrifying and diluted discussion of women's judgment as it relates to sexual arousal during rape]

- "By allowing women to fuck freely the West has de facto entered a matriarchy that disincentivises [sic] young men"

Black Pigeon Speaks (2016) is an extreme, or at least a remarkably blunt, example of a common alt-right position on women's rights. Once a commentator has begun to suggest that women

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[60] The link provided for this source was a mirror. In the follow-up video Black Pigeon Speaks claims it received over half a million views.

voting or achieving any kind of sexual choice is a threat to civilization it is no longer a question of what stage of feminist cultural influence should be considered legitimate (suffrage, second wave, etc.) but a return to full patriarchal domination.

The MGTOW website[61] provides insights into the personal affectations of men who have decided to do without relationships with women in general. The analysis that follows seeks to unite the relationship between the personal sphere of MGTOW celibacy and how the alt-right draws on this angst by intensifying and generalizing these affectations. In rejecting feminism, however, their concerns do address social, and not just personal, concern.

The history section of the MGTOW cites traces their origins back to "Schopenhauer, Tesla, Beethoven, Galileo, or even Jesus Christ" as examples of voluntarily celibate men. They see themselves as the 'equal and opposite reaction' to feminism. There is little to suggest a strong political alliance among the MGTOWs, but their rejection of feminism places them in close proximity to alt-light ideas. Men's rights activism (MRA) is so diverse that it is hard to place them near the alt-light. Their most redeemable motivations focus on issues of custody rights. Meninists utilize transgressive anti-feminism so, at least in practice, share a performative moral characteristic with the alt-light.

MGTOWs on YouTube tend to more openly express their disdain for women through a social, rather than a personal, lens. As discussed above the term 'Red Pill' is used, roughly, to signify a rejection of feminism and social justice via being 'woken up to the truth,' when in reality it just means one has found agreeable propaganda. Red Pill Germany's (2016) MGTOW channel features a video on "political correctness in the workplace" wherein he complains about the 'postmodern world's' intolerance of pin-up pictures in the workplace. A lot of MGTOW

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[61] https://www.mgtow.com/

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content retreads the myth that women don't like 'nice men' or that women cannot comprehend why MGTOWs exist even though their 'politically correct feminist attitude' created them.

Groups not included in the map but are helpful in mediating interactions and moving individuals along the pipeline include commentators, like Benjamin, who use libertarian as a signifier for not being told what to do. Benjamin had his twitter account suspended for harassment and sending pornography across the platform. The cries of censorship and destruction of free speech began to emerge in his defense under the twitter hastag #FreeSargon.[62] The problem is that freedom of speech extends only to what the government can and cannot do. If Twitter suspends you it takes away your platform, not your freedom of speech. In the circles frequented by Gamergate sympathizers, freedom of speech means being able to make the speech of others emotionally taxing.

Like Benjamin, who began in the YouTube atheist community, other New Atheist adherents have also adopted an anti-feminist discourse built, like the New Atheists, on a high valuation of the natural sciences coupled with a dismissal of the humanities and social sciences. Sometimes referred to as STEMbros by their left-leaning opponents, their position tends toward the conspiracy that 'cultural Marxism' has taken over academic fields throughout departments in the humanities and social sciences. This issue will be addressed more closely in the other analyses, but anti-feminism is a mainstay in three of the most popular YouTube atheist channels: TJ Kirk's TheAmazingAtheist,[63] Phil Mason's Thunderf00t[64] and Carl Benjamin's Sargon of

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[62] https://twitter.com/search?q=%23FreeSargon&lang=en

[63] 1,049,185 subscribers. https://www.youtube.com/user/TheAmazingAtheist

[64] 742,000 subscribers. https://www.youtube.com/user/Thunderf00t

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Akkad[65] channels. Benjamin in particular has applied transgressive morality in their uninhibited use of racial slurs, disparaging remarks aimed at mental illness (including that feminist are autistic or mentally ill),[66] immigrants, trivializing rape[67] and 'black culture and family structure'[68] all while supporting a diluted form of libertarian individualism. Actual libertarian thinkers, I have to image, are barely aware of their presence.

Pick-up artists like Roosh V have created a niche industry that inverts the MGTOW belief of separation into one that reduces women so completely to sex objects that everything from their mental health to their sexual pleasure are dismissed as unimportant (Sherwin 2016).[69] Instead of insisting on traditional marriages or separation from women, pick-up artistry grounds its worldview in an acquisition of social capital and confidence in men through the 'conquest' of as many women as possible, often with the added caveat that this is somehow recapturing masculinity against what they see as a feminizing and infantilizing modern culture.

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[65] 728,000 subscribers. https://www.youtube.com/user/SargonofAkkad100
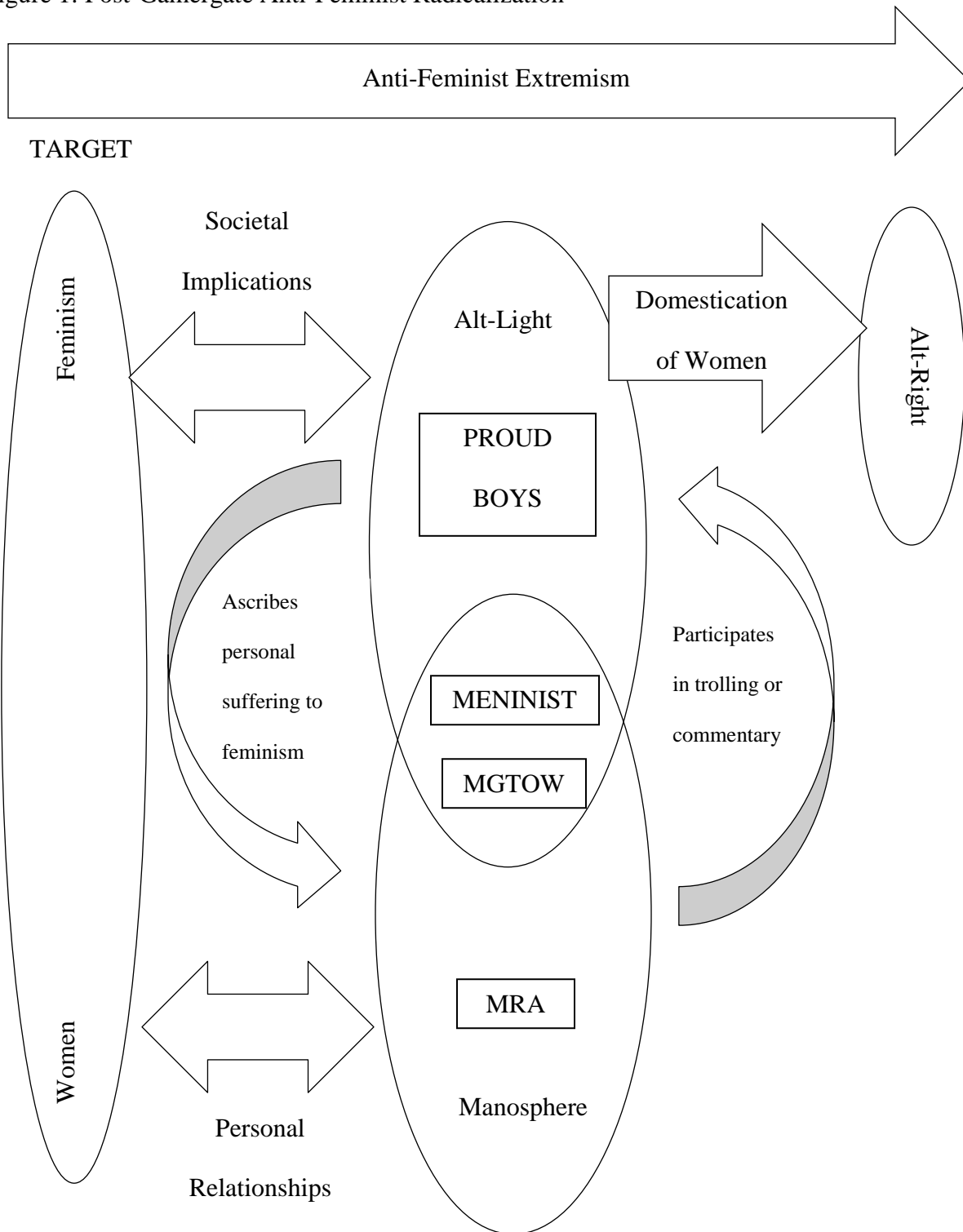
[66] See Benjamin's (2016) "#Feminists4Autism"

[67] Benjamin (2016) "Is feminism good for the world?"

[68] Benjamin (2016) "Why do black people commit more crime?"

[69] Also see Roosh V's *Bang*, a "book for men who weren't born with the natural ability to seduce beautiful women." https://www.rooshvstore.com/books/bang/

Figure 1: Post-Gamergate Anti-Feminist Radicalization

Which lives matter? Negotiating and negating concern for others

Ambiguity in use of racial humor has a folk history of confusing white people who have failed to grasp the difference between transgressive racial humor intended to deconstruct and render the absurdity of race apparent to a mixed audience, and the crude racist humor shared among white people that makes them feel edgy. Black comedian, Dave Chappelle, was famously rumored to have taken a break from comedy because white guys would quote his racially charged skits back at him, seemingly missing their intent altogether (Dunn 2013). The precarious but seemingly beneficial use of racial humor to forge understanding between races has no place within the pathological use of racist propaganda on the alt-right. They do not demonstrate an understanding of the differences between parody and satire either. When Andrew Anglin tells journalists that his racism is satirical this statement is outrageous for more than just its dishonesty. If satire is intended as an attack on an opponent's beliefs or actions, how can someone who admits to being racist, says racist things and admires Hitler claim his use of racist imagery is satire and rhetoric? Satire directed at what, exactly? Your own beliefs? (Lokteff and Anglin 2015). Unfortunately, the encryption of racist beliefs through humor is among the most effective sources of joy for the alt-right, alt-light or anyone who believes that posting caricatures of racial minority groups is an effective way of thumbing their nose at the 'PC police' on the left, mostly anonymously of course.

The outrage, hatred, paranoia and fear the alt-right induces among its adherents requires the usual mix of pseudo-science, pseudo-history, conspiracy and extreme policy proposals to focus attention on their opponents. The alt-right, in this case, denotes commentators that have given up dog-whistling racism to white conservatives and settled instead for outright racism and bigotry. The alt-light has a more nuanced and encrypted use of racism.

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The alt-light, a la *Breitbart* and similarly aligned groups, have taken the Southern Strategy as an instruction manual for entraining racist and anti-social justice sentiments among libertarians, conservatives, and centrists. *Breitbart's* obfuscation of Black Lives Matter (BLM) before, during, and after the 2016 campaign was supported, intentionally or not, by Trump's feckless spread of white supremacist myths about black on white crime (Greenberg 2015). Although Breitbart's headlines are often intentionally misleading and the coverage veers in a distinctly anti-establishment far-right direction, the comment section is overwhelmed with the paranoid positions to which they pander and make the headlines appear tame by comparison. But Breitbart and its commentators cannot even come close to the level of paranoid, racist and vitriolic content on alt-right white nationalist websites (what's left of them, anyway). The unifying vision connected alt-light with alt-right, however tentative and divisive, ran through the campaign of Donald Trump (Sinclair 2017).

To rehash the 'identity *via negativa*' theme of this study, the common enemy shared by the alt-right and alt-light in BLM creates a set of relations capable of capturing a small portion of outsiders along the alt-right radicalization pipeline to ultimately arrive at a position in which calls for either racial Balkanization or 'peaceful ethnic cleansing' are accepted as reasonable policy. Unlike Gamergate, participation from 4chan users was limited and was in no way a matter of perceived intrusion into their space. The best evidence of 4chan's involvement was the attempt to have BLM labelled a terrorist organization in the final months of the 2016 election through a White House petition. It received the hundred thousand signatures necessary to get the issue addressed by the White House (Alfonso 2016). Minneapolis police also believe that the four white supremacists who shot into a crowd of BLM protesters were actively posting about their plan on a 4chan's /k/ board, which focuses on guns (Furber and Phillips 2015).

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I would like to give a brief position on BLM so the analysis presented below can be assessed by readers with potential biases in mind. I found it easy to ignore the countless cherry-picked anecdotes used by BLM's opponents to portray them as self-obsessed, violent, police-hating radicals. The message that holds BLM together, available on their Facebook pages and website,[70] [71] seems far less radical than the Black Panthers of the 1970s, a group that faced similar distain. But the Black Panthers did scare white people and, arguably, may have cost the Civil Rights Movement some white supporters. That conservatives perpetuate the same kinds of visceral reaction toward BLM, whose positions are far less radical than even the moderate civil rights activists around Martin Luther King, is only a matter of fear, outrage and misunderstanding. Much of the data used in the analysis, even those produced by mainstream conservatives, appear to me as little more than racist outrage porn. Perhaps it is a matter of my own bias, but I fail to find anything encrypted in BLM's message or leadership that lead me to believe that they are anything like their portrayal in conservative media. The inane hyperbolic portrayal of BLM by the alt-light alongside the bigoted horror show of alt-right and white supremacist media nonetheless makes mainstream conservatives appear as the height of sober rationality by comparison.

This section focuses on the assessments, reactions and counter-actions taken by alt-light and alt-right groups during one of BLM's protest activity, beginning in 2014. While many of the media sources and commentaries analyzed below had made highly disparaging or outright racist assessments of BLM during this period, Trump's popularity on the far-right, as both catalyst for the perpetuation of racist conspiracy theories and authority figure to which the alt-right and alt-

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[70] http://www.blacklifematters.org/

[71] https://www.facebook.com/BlackLivesMatter

light could defer to in their defense, intensified the protests. So once again I will defer to the activities of the target and how they were assessed by the alt-right/alt-light during highly charged periods first, followed by a description and map of relationships that have persisted since.

In line with the assemblage algorithm, a distinct set of data, groups, and macro-level ideological categories were included based on their importance in the particular pipeline being described. The data spanned a much larger span of time, three years, compared to Gamergate, which lasted less than two weeks. The data were also sourced from a broader swath of the available alt-light/alt-right media for the time covered, as opposed to the events of Gamergate being analyzed through on a single discussion channel and subsequent fallout. Finally, given the number of protests, BLM contains a succession of events planned with a largely decentralized group as opposed to the singular event of Gamergate. There will be no fallout section, only an analysis of speech and a map of the racist pipeline into the alt-right.

The macro-level clusters include conservative, libertarian, alt-light, alt-right and centrist. *Fox News* and *The Daily Caller* represent arch)types of conservatism. *Libertarian's Forum* and *LewRockwell.com* act as archtypes of libertarianism. *Breitbart, InfoWars* and *Rebel Media* act as archtypes of the alt-light. After these sections the current dynamics will be graphed along with a discussion of how the alt-light mediates between libertarian/conservative assessments of BLM and acceptance of the outright white nationalist and white supremacist moral precepts of the alt-right.

The Events. Since 2014 Black Lives Matter has developed a program of protesting police violence and racial profiling following the killing of unarmed black men throughout the country. In 2016 alt-right and alt-light groups took to social media to celebrate the success of a candidate they believed defended their position, a belief later confirmed with the appointment of

Breitbart's Steve Bannon to Trump's cabinet. For conservatives and libertarians Trump proved a more divisive figure during this ascent, with the rise of 'never Trump' Republicans trying to get Trump replaced with another candidate as the nomination approached and an expression of concern from libertarians skeptical of Trump's policies concerning immigration, national security, drugs and gay marriage.[72]

Libertarian:

Table 2: Negative Libertarian BLM Moral Precepts

	Problem	Resolution	Intensifiers	Dismissal	Coupling
Account-exchange	Damage property/ Dems/government should not treat anyone differently	Discourage black protest/ Discourage racial preference	Cost of jail time/ cost of welfare	Whites don't break things/ just want government money	Space- damage private property
Group-space	Identity politics	All/human lives matter	Individualism	No 'racism,' black or white	Account-they want what we earned
Movement-Time-Constraint	Censors free speech, PC	No more bullying	N/A	N/A	Harm to free speech
Leadership-Authority-Hierarchy	Do not respect leaders who made America great, their leaders just extort money	Individualism	N/A	Police violence exaggerated by leaders	N/A
Pain-Harm-anxiety	Murder one another	Stop giving criminals a platform	Limited state means they cannot make state harm us	Police violence exaggerated	N/A
Disgust	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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[72] See "Libertarians versus Donald Trump" at https://www.lp.org/news-press-releases-libertarians-versus-donald-trump/

Table 3: Positive Libertarian BLM Moral Precepts

	Problem	Resolution	Intensifiers	Embrace	Coupling
Account-exchange	Cost of drug war	Legalize drugs	Cost of jail time	Free from prison	Movement = freedom
Group-space	Police reform, housing reform eliminates ghettoization	Work together	Let market	The left betrays black people with welfare that destroys motivation, but we don't	Freedom- no longer shackled by government
Movement-Time-Freedom	Public housing and crime	Eliminate public housing	Public housing not subject to market forces	Create communities uninhibited	Group-space Limited or no police
Leadership-Authority-Hierarchy	Black leaders under-appreciated	Focus on blacks in meritocracy	Anecdotes of successful black people	Together in a meritorcracy	Free to do what you see fit without interfering with freedom of others
Pleasure-stimulus-excitement-relief	Blacks pursue gain in the black market, gets them killed	Experience pleasures of individualism and wealth	Drugs less damaging than crime that follows them	Reduce violence, motivation through self-interest	N/A
Purity	Corrupt crony market	Free market	Destroy government	Let blacks govern and police themselves	N/A

Libertarians are not divided by what they believe causes black suffering and alienation, as it is almost always state bureaucracy. Even the most vitriolic commentators were prone to blame BLM leaders after the state, with only a few instances of outright racism, like claims to biological differences in IQ. These can be explained as atypical paleo- or alt-right leaning users and commentators. The promotion of individualism against identity-based community formation is a typical libertarian moral precept. Against expectations that many would blame individual black protesters, the leaders of BLM were targeted for having bad leaders or disrespecting leaders they favored.

Conservatism:

Table 4: Negative Conservative BLM Moral Precepts

	Problem	Resolution	Intensifiers	Dismissal	Coupling
Account-exchange	Asymmetry of criticism, fake charities	No political correctness, contribute more	Censors, drain on resources, charity fraud	Everyone condemns censorship and violence except	Harm-Can't criticize BLM, must stop violence
Group-space	Take over and destroy public space, Americans don't like them, reject black conservatives	Disinvite or arrest	Invasion of space	BLM does not include all black people or all women	Must harm them before they harm us
Movement-Time-Constraint	Illegitimacy of academic study of BLM, should constrain	Either don't' teach, or present a 'balanced' perspective	Left-wing university propaganda	African American Studies illegitimate	Propaganda on campus, alienating conservative students
Leadership-Authority-Hierarchy	Leaders don't condemn within their own ranks, Dem leaders think they are radical	BLM must publicly condemn whatever others find offensive, Dems will avoid them	BLM graffiti vandalize Trump building	Just afraid of Trump, can't handle that others don't share their perspective	Can't control their group, or the group is at it appears, leaders want violence
Pain-Harm-Anxiety	BLM fosters violence, kills Americans, hates police	Police stop violence, label BLM hate group	Campuses are burning, BLM not punished, as they should be	'Disruption' is BLM's code word for violence. BLM are vandals	Invade and destroy public spaces
Disgust	"Clinton Staffer on Black Lives Matter- "Yuck"	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 5: Positive Conservative BLM Moral Precepts

	Problem	Resolution	Intensifiers	Embrace	Coupling
Account-exchange	Police violence costly	Leave black people alone, minor infractions should be let go	Eric Garner costs New York $5.9 million	No one wants to waste money harassing or hurting black people	Pain, suffering, loss
Group-space	White feel alienated	BLM holds 'white ally' rally	Solidarity	Some want dialogue, to understand	N/A
Movement-Time-Freedom	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Leadership-Authority-Hierarchy	Dems don't care about black people	Eric Garner's daughter dislikes Clinton	Garner's daughter 'trashes' Clinton	Dems exploit death for political reasons. Reason to side with Garner's family	Selling untaxed cigarettes not a concern, government/ authority overreach
Pleasure-stimulus-excitement-relief	reacting to minor infractions with violence	Sympathy for Eric Garner, not violent	Killed for doing nothing	Find common ground in relieving unnecessary suffering	Group-space, accounting (i.e. asymmetry of response to Garner)
Purity	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Nearly all the coverage of BLM, as a group, was negative across *The Daily Caller* and *Fox News's* available articles and opinion pieces. But an interesting and ultimately conservative narrative emerged around the choking death of Eric Garner that carries important strategic insights into how conservatives respond to certain black victims of police violence. When personal suffering and government overreach converged in Garner's case there were strong arguments about how New York city trains its cops, where their priorities lie and what 'unnecessary violence costs all of us.' There are far more conservatives than libertarians and if BLM can adopt a strategy focused on communicating the immense amount of waste in the prison system, the drug war and over policing tentative agreements between BLM and conservatives may be forged. The conservative focus on family values means BLM's approach to fighting police violence, when talking to conservatives, should emphasize personal suffering instead of

targeting police as a group. It cuts down the 'Blue Lives Matter' rhetoric by focusing on costly incidences of injustice.

The Alt-Light: This section will only include negative appraisals of BLM. No distinctly positive appraisals were found.

Table 6: Negative Alt-Light BLM Moral Precepts

	Problem	Resolution	Intensifiers	Dismissal	Coupling
Account-exchange	Asymmetry of shame between being blacks and whites	Don't apologize for being white, blacks should be ashamed for the way they act	BLM jealous of attention Paris shooting received, don't care about white people	Communists	They take from our group
Group-space	They hate white people, want to remove us, destroy country	They enter our space with crime, so make them leave	BLM are Invaders, promote racism	BLM Cultural Marxists, not American capitalist culture	N/A
Movement-Time-Constraint	High crime neighborhoods are police no-go zones, insulate themselves	End BLM	Country will be destroyed, Comment section "call it what it is- White genocide!" "Just a matter of time"	White don't hold blacks back, their own culture, race does	Globalists using BLM to turn whites into slaves
Leadership-Authority-Hierarchy	Peace prize a sham, BLM leaders think whites are inferior race	Don't' award violent criminals	Australian left-wing loonies, white cucks letting black people kill them	Obama leads hate groups like BLM, supports ISIS	George Soros, illuminati, funding BLM, conservative Americans at the bottom
Pain-Harm-Anxiety	Target police officers, increase crime, destroys black lives, BLM full of Muslims who want to kill white people, celebrate death go to war, battle BLM, comments- black lives splatter	Reveal their violent tendencies, fight 'extreme' black on white violence	Nearly every headline hyperbolic, exaggerated to intensify threat of violence	Comment sections: Their suffering is their own fault	BLM here to hurt us, invade
Disgust	BLM supported by soy eating SJW cucks, Sick! comments sections full of racist comments on 'apes'	Comments- Stop white genocide by this scum	Comments sections: black people are animals, inferior	Comment section: 'Apes have more dignity'	Inferiority of blacks in racial hierarchy

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The previous graph was perhaps the hardest to make, as the articles were so full of dead links to crucial 'evidence,' hyperbole and false claims that the only remaining factors were vague target objects and rants featuring intensely moralized language with racist epitaphs present in every article concerning BLM. Many of the same false or exaggerated claims were shared between sites, often with one site linking to other, therein creating an echo chamber completely devoid of serious discussion of BLM and insulated from sober assessment. Many of the accusation-prone headlines never delivered on their promise of earthshattering evidence that proves this or that about BLM. The headlines read like many of Trump's tweets – short punchy lines and some short word signifying disgust: "'Sick:' Black Lives Matter supporters celebrate murder of Dallas cops" (Watson, 2016). These articles take tactless comments of a few individuals and use them to discredit BLM.
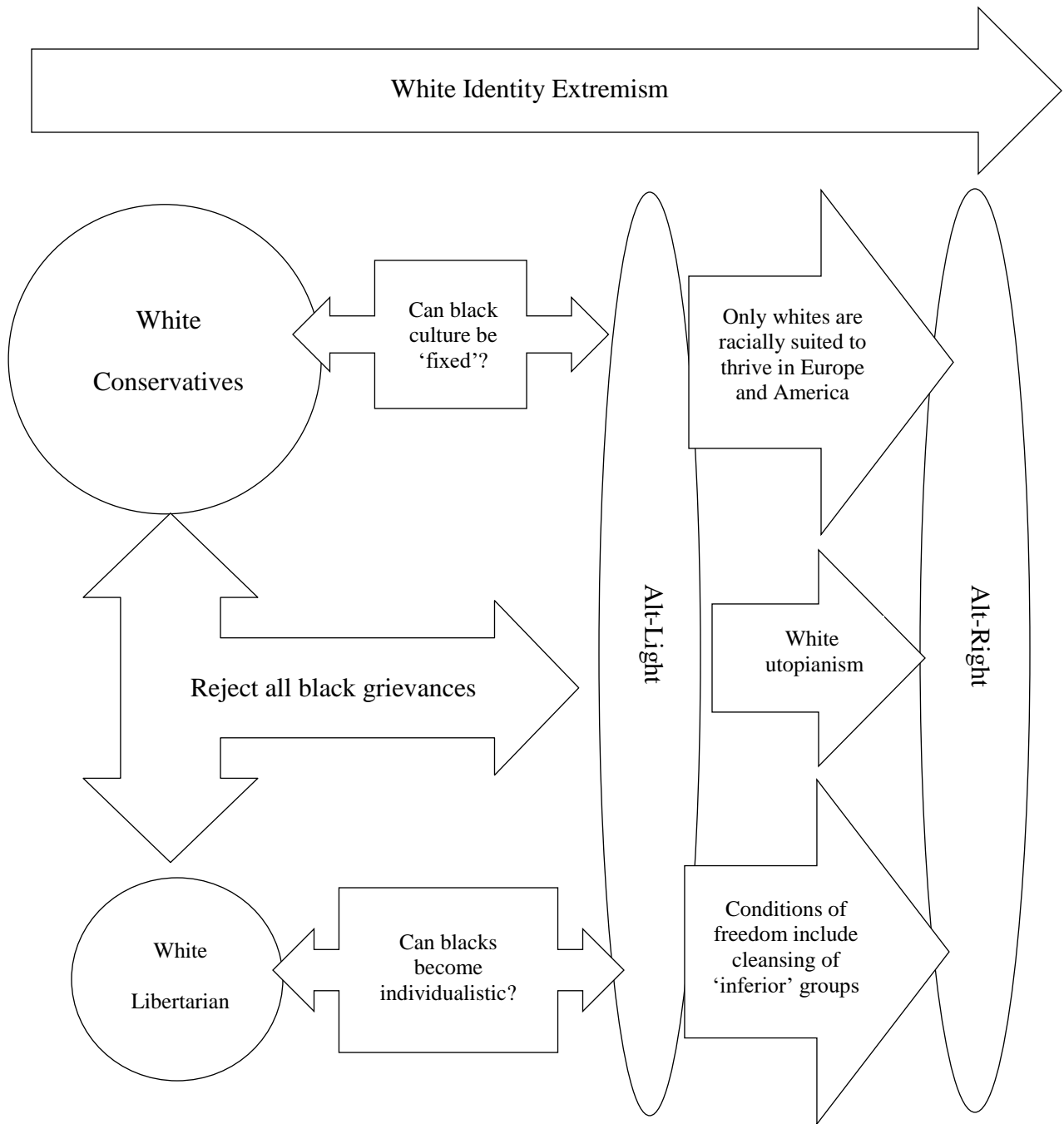
The total lack of anything resembling sympathy or attempts to understand the grievances of BLM denotes a complete and total rejection of BLM, and 'All Lives Matter' rhetoric appeared often in the comment sections. Accusations that BLM are violent were always accompanied by comment sections that threaten or support violence against blacks. All three websites retread the same tired insults, ironic disavowal and transgressive racism that defines the alt-light, but lack the rampant use of racial slurs common on alt-right and white supremacist websites.

Current Dynamics.

Libertarians and conservatives each have sympathetic positions from which to view BLM. While conservatives tended not to imagine an ideal world at nearly the rate of libertarians, their concern for stability in the personal sphere and sympathy for Eric Garner means BLM might want to take heed of these patterns if they choose to approach conservatives with their

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grievances. The alt-light utterly lacked any sympathy for BLM, with a few half-hearted

suggestions by Gavin McInnes that individual black people break-out of their 'leftist delusion'

and join the alt-light themselves. But this statement seemed largely motivated by McInnes'

attempt to distance himself from the move overtly racist alt-right (McInnes 2017). The following

graph illustrates the way the alt-light confirms major doubts about the black population in their

sphere of entirely negative coverage of BLM. Through their particular brand of transgressive

racism, the alt-light removes the inhibitions against racism in would-be adherents. A subsequent

focus on white identity lands especially racist and identarian alt-light adherence firmly in the alt-

right.

Figure 2: Anti-Black Radicalization

Discussion and Conclusion

Several limitations of this study became apparent throughout the conceptualization and execution of this study. Complexity theory and 4EA psychology provided new lenses through which to view the emergence of novel political groups, but they come with a precarious lack of operational specificity. Without further investigation into other areas of concern, like LGBTQ rights and immigration, an understanding of the tactics used to discredit centrists and leftists is ultimately lacking in a fully developed complex model. Beginning each analysis with a distinct set of concepts relevant only to the case makes combining maps all but impossible without further refinement of the model via repetition in the assemblage algorithm. 4EA psychology can only suggest oversights in moral psychological theories and possible ways forward in the study of moral psychology. It is not a refined theory and, so far, uses of this position continue to be speculative, including this study. Affective valence was ultimately beyond systematic methodological operationalization. Affect could only be discussed in the analysis through a selective focus on inexact textual markers within their context of expression. But emphasis on affectivity, embodiment, and inaction did provide a means by which the interactive ecology of the online culture wars could be defined, ontologically, as a system. Defining moral judgment as a performative schema required such interactive, process-oriented terminology, but other forms of extended or ecological psychology may fair better when methodologically operationalized.

The principle conclusion of this study is that the alt-right thrives on two strategic uses of morality: pulling in sympathetic outsiders by encrypting their message and providing the excitement of transgression, and obfuscating the message of their opponents to make them appear ridiculous or threatening. In each case presented above the machination of the alt-light proved central to the presentation and moral intensification of white nationalist and anti-feminist

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ideas without overtly addressing policy in any substantive way. The alt-right provides far more in terms of policy, however unlikely and authoritarian, but such policies can only be desired once feminists and minority groups have been opposed with the soft fascism of the alt-light. The primary concern for those opposed to the alt-right should be how to turn members of proximate organizations away from the radicalization pipeline, so it is best to conclude with some general strategic implications of this study.

The expression of disgust toward feminist and black targets appeared more often in alt-right and alt-light sources. Conservative and libertarian sources tended to utilize moral precepts from other categories, becoming especially sympathetic to black people when issues of their family or personal freedom were brought to fore in the Eric Garner case. The creation of 'cringe' compilations remain among the more common forms of anti-feminist propaganda, as it expresses a primal response to humiliation coupled with imagery of an ideological 'other.' Black people were likewise the target of disgust, with imagery of sickness, death, rape and other dehumanizing attributes common among 4chan's /pol/ users and more subtle equivocations of white=pure/dark=corrupt common among alt-right think tanks like *American Renaissance*. The transgressive and 'ironic' uses of racist and sexist images and language on 4chan and other anonymous communities nonetheless communicate what Taylor and Spencer actually believe.

The alt-light proved the most confounding ideological category, as it is difficult to pin down what actual policies *The Rebel*, *Breitbart* and *Info Wars* actually support in terms of policy. The alt-right is easier to attack because they present policies that can be criticized for their clear relationship to fascist ideologies. What the alt-light has created is an echo chamber of ambivalent dog-whistles, often sharing each other's material, that disregards the grievances of black people and feminists outright and then relies on paranoid conspiratorial thinking to create a

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sense of urgency, or at least outrage, through hyperbole, exaggeration, or outright lies. They prime users to accept alt-right positions through dismissal of grievances. Alt-light media also embrace alt-right adherents and leaders uncritically, at least until the Unite the Right rally exposed the alt-right as crypto-fascist. The cost of associating with the alt-right has already forced several alt-light figures to disavow white nationalism. In some cases loss of advertising and investment have followed in the wake of these associations being brought to light. Alt-light backpedaling and disavowal, along with Trump's poor performance, combine to create some important opportunities for action against these far right groups.

The alt-right and alt-light have certainly wielded online communication effectively, but there is no coming cyberutopia on which they can build any kind of foundation for change. Trying to stop 4chan /pol/ users from wallowing in the horror show they have created should not be a priority of alt-right opposition. The truly nefarious part of this system is the mediating role of the alt-light, as their media neutralizes sympathies for vulnerable people and all too often flirts with or outright endorses racist, conspiratorial, authoritarian or misogynistic beliefs. They have encrypted these messages to the point that their position is now widely accepted as part of civil discourse, including an ongoing endorsement of them by the president of the United States. The alt-right's problem is that it is bring back fascism in a way that too closely reflects its genealogy. The alt-light shares the moral precepts of the alt-right without the blatant roots in fascism and this factor has made them more mainstream, better funded and with influence that extend far beyond online trolling. Rendering the alt-light irrelevant will prove difficult but, given its influence, it is currently more of a threat to civil discourse than the alt-right's ratbag conferences and army of 4chan trolls.

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