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## "Keep it in the Closet and Welcome to the Movement": Storying Gay Men Among the Alt-Right

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“Keep It in the Closet and Welcome to the Movement”: Storying Gay Men Among the Alt-Right

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	3
Narrative.....	3
White Supremacy.....	7
White Supremacist Social Movements.....	9
White Supremacy Online: The Alt-Right.....	12
Sexuality.....	15
Sexuality in the White Supremacist Imagination.....	21
Chapter 3: Methods.....	27
Sample.....	27
Analysis.....	30
Chapter 4: Constructing Competing Characters: The Degenerate and the Substandard Ally.....	32
The Degenerate.....	32
Anti-Semitism.....	33
Conservative Christian Doctrine.....	36
Pseudoscience.....	38
The Substandard Ally.....	43
(i)Logic of the Closet.....	44
Redrawing Respectability.....	47
Sexual Storying as Boundary Work.....	51
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion.....	54
References.....	59
Appendix A.....	69
Appendix II.....	69

## ABSTRACT

The fundamental questions this project aims to answer are 1) how the alt-right engages in storying the sexual, specifically the “homosexual” character 2) the ways that broadly circulating ideas about masculinity shape movement boundary work processes, and 3) the work that this storying is doing for the alt-right in the context of American white patriarchy. Broadly, two characters were storied on r/altright: The Degenerate and the Substandard Ally. First, the Degenerate is a pedophile, a diseased sexual hedonist, and a Jewish-led weapon set on destroying the white race. The image of the Degenerate is produced through the mobilization of anti-Semitic tropes, conservative Christian doctrine, and (pseudo)scientific rhetoric. This narrative presents homosexuality as a contagious risk to *all* people. The second character, the Substandard Ally, is constructed as a foil to the Degenerate. The Substandard Ally can be a member of the movement because they have no control over their sexuality and are adequately masculine. The strategies used to justify the Substandard Ally’s inclusion in the alt-right are to deploy the (il)logic of the closet and redraw the line between good/bad sex. I argue that the sexual storying of the alt-right ultimately functions to maintain white patriarchy by reinforcing the sexual value system, obscuring the workings of patriarchy by presenting a hybrid hegemonic masculinity, reconceptualizing the “good” sexual citizen, and deploying homonationalist discourses.

## **“KEEP IT IN THE CLOSET AND WELCOME TO THE MOVEMENT”: STORYING GAY MEN AMONG THE ALT-RIGHT**

The 2016 presidential election cycle brought to fore deep divisions amongst the nation regarding how Americans regard race, gender, and sexuality in the contemporary moment. Rhetoric from now-president Donald Trump elicited heated public debates, highlighting the competing understandings of our current social order. On the periphery of these debates about president Donald Trump’s racist rhetoric, a group called the alt-right was focusing the nation’s attention on individuals who many Americans believe to be relics of the past: white supremacists.

Espousing vitriolic racism, violent sexism, and transphobia, the alt-right seemed on the surface to reflect the same ideology of white supremacist groups of the past. However, one self-described figurehead of the alt-right, Milo Yiannopoulos, troubled this characterization. As a gay Jewish man, Yiannopoulos’ association with a white supremacist movement drew questions about how the alt-right views homosexuality. Touring colleges and Universities in the United States and Great Britain to preach his anti-feminism, anti-social justice, and racist doctrine, Yiannopoulos clearly was ideologically aligned with the hateful rhetoric of the alt-right. Each stop on this *Dangerous Faggot* tour in 2015 roused both outrage and support, culminating in the February 1st stop at University of California Berkeley where protesters clashed, property was damaged, and media coverage once again erupted trying to parse the difference between free speech and hate speech for white supremacists. Following the 2017 far-right, racist Unite the

Right rally that resulted in the death of anti-racist advocate Heather Hyer, the alt-right was once again catapulted to the nation's attention.

However, the question of his sexuality remained. Though Yiannopoulos himself has claimed to be a "poster boy for the alt-right," his role in the fledgling white supremacist movement instigated heated debates amongst movement members and drew confusion from outside onlookers. Both concerns, however, returned to the same puzzle: what place did a gay man have in associating with a white supremacist movement? This project seeks to go beyond just Yiannopoulos, exploring instead the broader questions his existence in the movement raised amongst white supremacists. To do this, I will be looking at the narratives the alt-right produces about gay men, paying particular attention to how masculinity is unpacked in these stories of the white supremacist imagination.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Narrative

Narratives, as stories that help actors create and sustain meaning, are fundamentally “social acts that depend for their production and cognition on norms of performance and content that specify when, what, how and why stories are told,” in turn shaping the conduct of our social world (Ewick and Silbey 1995:197). As objects of sociological inquiry of their own right, stories can be examined for the ways they are produced and read, and, importantly, the political work that stories do in organizing the social order (Plummer 1995). Specifically, this project is not focused on individual’s storytelling, but instead on narratives circulating in a social world that are storied by multiple authors, are contested over time, and are often in conflict with one another (Loseke 2016). Socially circulating stories are increasingly told (and retold) through social media where there is a “digital entanglement” of story authors, making the production of meaning a collaborative process (Robards 2018:62).

Widely communicated stories are not only *about* something, they also *do* something -- serving as resources to make sense of one’s identity (Plummer 1995b), connecting social movement participants around a collective identity and shared ideology (Davis 2002), and can become institutionalized in social policy (Loseke 2007). Narratives do this work across increasingly heterogeneous audiences through the deployment of symbolic and emotion codes, as cultural ways of thinking and feeling, respectively, that convey more-or-less shared systems of

meanings in order to make stories legible and believable to broad public audiences who have varied social locations (Loseke 2009; 2016:2).

Symbolic codes organize ways of thinking and are “loaded with countless moral evaluations and expectations about how lives are lived, how lives should be lived, of rights, responsibilities, and power relationships” amongst social actors (Loseke 2016:10). Some symbolic codes, such as those related to race, sexuality, or gender, are under constant contestation and revision, but nonetheless are embedded throughout social life and are deployed to construct plots and make narratives intelligible across heterogeneous audiences. Symbolic codes embedded in narratives of identity produce images of a type of person -- such as the homosexual or heterosexual -- who behaves in predictable ways and is deserving of particular rights or sanctions (Loseke 2007). Though the systems of meanings packed into symbolic codes are not universally shared, they provide a foundation for making logical sense of the social world.

Embedded in symbolic codes are emotion codes, as cognitive models that organize “expectations, standards, and ideals” surrounding the “experience, expression, and evaluation of emotions” (Loseke 2016:12). Anger, fear, disgust, and joy are emotions that are organized by mostly shared ways of understanding the world. In stories, symbolic and emotion codes make stories coherent and believable by connecting with audiences fundamental sentiments about how the world works and is experienced.

More specifically, this project focuses on a particular type of narrative production: storying the sexual. Sexual stories, “narratives of the intimate, focused especially around the erotic, the gendered, and the relational,” are no longer private or pathological, but are instead public and fundamentally social enterprises (Plummer 1995b:6). Sexual stories are told by



sexologists, historians, social movements, legislators, talk show hosts, individual people, and a whole host of other authors in a “sexual storytelling society” (Plummer 1995b:5). Examining sexual stories enables us to question 1) the nature of stories, 2) the social process of producing and consuming stories, 3) the social role that stories play, and 4) the relationship between stories and change, history, and culture (1995b:25). These questions are explored through the sexual stories told by the alt-right, namely their constructions of gay men.

Intimate narratives not only tell what people *do*, they also tell who people *are*, and in doing so, construct “sexual types of people: heterosexuals, gays, lesbians, bisexuals” (Loseke and Cavendish 2001:345). Sexual storying of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) lives and experiences, in particular, have often taken shape as “modernist tales” characterized by “suffering, surviving, and surpassing” (1995b:16). A “modernist tale” is predicated upon “the Essence, the Foundation, the Truth” of the sexual subject who is, always has been, and always will be gay. (Plummer 1995:134). This linear story of searching for one’s identity is now widely understood as “coming out,” following a gay subject from a childhood of suffering, through a realization of sexual difference, to a search for community, and ending the eventual acceptance of a gay identity (Crawley and Broad 2004; Plummer 1995).

These modernist tales are increasingly told alongside what Plummer calls the sexual storying of late modernity, which reflect three key changes: 1) personal participant stories gaining authority over previous voices of authority like science and religion, 2) stories of deconstruction destabilize the notion of a singular coherent identity category, and 3) stories of difference that challenge the existence of an essential sexual truth (Plummer 1995a:110-111). Sexual storying of late modernity is readily observable through social media sites such as reddit, where public negotiations of meaning actively involve all posters as story authors (Robards

2018). In this moment of late-modern storytelling, coming out can be thought of as a formula story -- a socially circulating narrative about types of experiences and people that become widely utilized for interpreting and articulating lives and experiences that one does not have direct contact with (Loseke 2001).

The “coming out” narrative has had utility in the LGBT movement history (Fetner 2008; Crawley and Broad 2004). The “coming out” narrative, employed by LGBT movement activists, shaped the broader cultural narrative concerning LGBT folks -- leading us to the current moment where the dominant cultural understanding is that LGBT folks are “born this way.” The tale of “coming out” also orders identity narratives at an individual level, providing rhetorical resources for folks to make sense of their own experiences. The deployment of the “coming out” formula story provides the resources for individuals to make their identities intelligible through storytelling. Formula stories have political utility in that they convey ideas in a coherent manner, yet are also limited in their capacity to portray difference and diversity of experience.

In line with the framework laid out by Plummer, a concern with power is central to this project. Sexual storying is political storying -- clearly demonstrated in the mobilization of the “coming out” narrative by LGBT movement activists and the institutionalization of that narrative in the legalization of same-sex marriage. This analysis makes explicit the workings of power that shape both material outcomes and subjective understandings of those conditions. Here, power is not conceptualized as a concrete status that individuals either have or do not have. Instead, the “flow” of power is the “process which shifts outcomes and distributes control and regulation. It affects hierarchy, patterns of domination, and the distribution of resources” (Plummer 1995b:26). Sexual stories are produced, told, and heard in this “flow” of power and cannot be interpreted outside of their cultural and historical backdrop.

First and foremost, I am examining these stories within the context of institutionalized white supremacy and institutionalized heteronormativity that organize our current social order. To better situate these stories, then, the following section explores the white supremacist imagination. Next, I utilize sexuality as the primary lens through which I explore this white supremacist imagination, remaining attentive to how institutionalized inequalities along the axis of race and sexuality are in a recursive relationship with one another. Lastly, I turn to how these mechanisms of hegemony manifest in the alt-right's storying of gay men.

### **White Supremacy**

Before turning to an analysis of the white supremacist imagination, I would like to note that the labeling and defining choices made by researchers are political tasks (Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2006). Throughout this project, the term *race* refers to “a constructed identity and social category” (Daniels 2009:10) that is “historical, ideological process” (Sommerville 2000:6) “given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embodied” (Omi and Winant 1986:60) and, most importantly, is shaped by “relations of power and privilege” (Ferber 1998:20). Additionally, *systemic racism* refers to “the way that enduring racial stereotypes, ideas, images, emotions, proclivities, and practices have thoroughly pervade social, cultural, and economic institutions” (Daniels 2009:10).

*White supremacy*, as used here, pulls from Bonilla-Silva's (2018:8) conceptualization of racial structure in which “racialized social systems, or white supremacy for short, became global and affected all societies where Europeans extended their reach. I therefore conceive a society's racial structure as the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege” (2018:8). Any racial order is interpreted, justified, or challenged through *racial ideologies*,

“common frames, styles, and racial stories” (Bonilla-Silva 2018:9) that are shaped by “cultural assumptions and systems of representation about race through which individual’s understood their relationship with the world” (Sommerville 2000:17). I am using the language of a *white supremacist imagination* in reference to this complex interplay of social structures, ideologies, and belief systems that symbolically and materially privilege whiteness.

The problem of “the color line” observed by W. E. B. Du Bois (1939) continues to keep America divided along racial lines by privileging whiteness. White supremacy in America, far from being a fringe movement or the paranoid politic of extremists, deeply organizes the workings of the social world and how that world is subjectively experienced. The contemporary systems of white racial domination in America are shaped by legacies of colonialism, genocide, and slavery that continue to organize our understandings of and conduct within social life, well beyond individual acts of racial prejudice (Feagin 2009). White supremacy rests upon the lie that whiteness, and all other racialized social categories, are based in biological difference. While the colonial era of the 16th and 17th centuries piqued researcher interests in classifying the colonialized racial Other (Daniels 1997), prior to the eighteenth century there was no conceptualization of race as a fixed, biological category (Ferber 1998; Sommerville 2000). The emerging “science” of racial classification was weaponized to justify “an economic system of racial slavery” (Daniels 1997:13). In the context of the US, the lie of “Whiteness” is often starkly dichotomized with “Blackness” and relies on biological essentialism that emphasizes physical markers and phenotypic traits, making race something that you either are or are not (Daniels 1997). Essentialized points of difference are used to push ideas that intellectual inferiority, deviant sexual behavior, and other traits deemed undesirable are immutable characteristics of those constructed as not white, in turn justifying racial inequality.

### **White Supremacist Social Movements**

In regards to naming overtly racist practices, organizations, and individuals, Ferber (2004) argues that even “the term white supremacist may obscure the fact that American society is itself white supremacist” (15). Following in her critical and feminist analysis, I similarly contextualize the white supremacist groups discussed in the following section within the broader landscape of racialized inequality. The Southern Poverty Law Center’s (SPLC) 2017 *Year in Hate and Extremism* report recorded a 4% increase in hate groups from 2016, totalling in at 954 groups. Significant shifts in white supremacist groups in particular were recorded, with the number of Klu Klux Klan (KKK) groups falling drastically from 130 to 72 and neo-nazi groups increasing 22% from 99 to 121 groups (2017). While there is certainly ideological overlap in the neo-nazi, white nationalist, skinhead, neo-confederate, KKK, and other hate groups covered in the SPLC report, the asymmetrical shifts highlight the lack of complete uniformity of goals and ideologies. However, the following section provides a brief overview of various white supremacist groups, the whole of which I refer to as compromising the broader white supremacist movement, and the ways in which the digital era is shaping their practices.

To use the language of former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke, the white supremacist movement has “repackaged” itself, now framing their movement in a manner more aligned with the “color-blind” racial ideology most dominant today (Bonilla-Silva 2018). Social movement actors engage in framing, the “signifying work of meaning construction,” to identify problems, discern solutions, and motivate collective action (Benford and Snow 2000:614; Snow and Benford 1998). Frames are not static; instead the ongoing production, negotiation, and maintenance of frames render the social world intelligible for movement actors (Benford 1997).

Successful framing resonates with audience's "stock of folk ideas and beliefs" to connect the movement's espoused values with those of the sympathetic audience (Snow and Benford 1988:204). Framing processes are deeply interwoven in movement's construction of identities -- supportive protagonists, oppositional antagonists, and uncommitted audiences (Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994). The production of a collective identity necessitates the maintenance of group boundaries wherein social movements, simultaneously and relationally, define who they are and who they are not (Hunt and Benford 1994; Buyukozturk et al. 2018; Gamson 1997). Answering the "who are we" question requires drawing boundaries of inclusion/exclusion, developing a group consciousness, and connecting individual political expression to that of a common cause (Taylor 1996). In examining these collective processes through a narrative framework, "collective identities are socially constructed through storytelling" of key movement narratives (Benford 2002:71). Frames serve as "interpretive schemes" (Benford 2002) through which narratives are made meaningful, significant, and compelling (Olsen 2014). The "narrative constitution of identity" (Davis 2002:3) is a process imbued with moral evaluations of the characters and plots in narratives told by social movements (Polletta 1998).

Importantly, these movement activities are also gendered. To treat gender as an institution is to recognize its multifaceted nature -- encompassing "ideology, practices, constraints, conflicts, and power" -- and to acknowledge its dynamic yet enduring character (Martin 2004:1264). Social movement actors take up particular images of masculinity and femininity in the "language and ideas that activists use to frame their messages, define themselves and their shared interests, and build solidarity," engaging movements not only in the construction of a collective identity, but also actively engaged in the social construction of gender more broadly (Taylor 1996:172). Regardless of the movement's explicit focus on gender

or the gender composition of the group, gender shapes boundary work processes because they are predicated upon dominant cultural understandings about how one properly “does” gender (Gamson 1997; Taylor 1996; West and Zimmerman 1987). Embedded in the construction of a movement’s collective identity are also interpretations of how genders should be performed, experienced, articulated, and organized in relation to one another. In this way, white supremacist movements not only draw their identity around racial classification, but also around shared or contested beliefs about gender.

Branches of the broader white supremacist movement have gone to great lengths to shift their public image. The shift from “traditional racism” to “new racism” (Bonilla-Silva 2018; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2006) is not an ideological shift away from white supremacy, but instead a deliberate transformation of the movement narratives presented to the public (Perry 2000). White supremacists have reframed their movement by constructing a collective identity in whiteness to justify advocating for “white rights” (Berbrier 2002), “intellectualizing” racist rhetoric (Berbrier 2000; Daniels 1997), and constructing themselves as blameless victims of policies like affirmative action, a double standard denying them pride in their racial heritage, identity assaults reducing their self-esteem, and as eventual victims of the “ethnic cleansing” of white people in America (Berbrier 2000).

Many groups distance themselves from the label of white supremacist, choosing instead *white separatist* or *white power activist*, for example. White separatists have engaged in frame transformation and frame alignment that positions them to appear in accordance with the dominant cultural pluralist master frame, in which diversity and tolerance of different others are highly valued (Berbrier 1998). White separatists have done this by 1) espousing “hate free” racism, 2) equating whites to ethnic and racial minorities, and 3) deploying emotional appeals to

“love, pride, and heritage preservation” to legitimate and destigmatize their movement (1998:441). White separatists are then operating out of what Berbrrier calls “*Kultural Pluralism*,” a frame that appropriates the rhetoric of cultural pluralism to justify white supremacist belief systems.

White power activists, recognizing the cultural codes against overt racism, selectively conceal and reveal their stigmatized identity as an “aryan activist” (Simi and Futrell 2009) and instead rely on more private conceptualization of activism such as parenting (only white children of course) as a way to strengthen their personal, social, and collective movement identities (Simi, Futrell, and Bubolz 2016). The continued persistence of white supremacist groups, in spite of contemporary color-blind standards for how to regard and articulate US race relations, speaks to the efficacy of these strategies for the broader white supremacist movement.

### **White Supremacy Online: The Alt-Right**

Of particular importance for white supremacist movements in the current moment is the role of cyberspace as a “free space” where activists can covertly access movement information, attract new members, and manage the image portrayed on their websites (Adams and Roscigno 2005; Caren, Jowers, and Gaby 2012; Futrell and Simi 2004:36; Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang 2012; Schafer, Mullins and Box 2013). Cyber racism, coined by Les Back, describes the ways in which white supremacist movements in Europe and North America utilize the internet and digital media to connect with global networks of white supremacists, enabling racist rhetoric to transcend national boundaries (Daniels 2009). Studying white supremacy online differs from previous examinations of print materials or ethnographic work in that the participatory quality of



cyberspace opens the floor to more voices, whereas more formally organized social movement organizations of the past may have held a tighter focus on movement messaging.

However, not all online participants are created equal. Researchers need to remain attuned to the fact that cyber racism involves an array of active participants (innovators, content creators, supportive members, oppositional members) and passive participants (supportive lurkers, curiosity-seeking lurkers, oppositional lurkers). As manifestations of white supremacy online are shifting, so too must our methods. White supremacists have utilized cyberspace to propagate ideology through cloaked websites that disguise hateful content and to launch cyber harassment directed at individual people (Daniels 2009). Legal regulation fails to curb the efficacy of cyber racism because it treats a distinctly social problem as a technological issue.

This project focuses on the alt-right as one such movement that has capitalized on a changing media environment to catapult their movement into the public's attention. For the sake of this analysis, I am conceptualizing the alt-right as a predominantly online-based social movement shaped by neo-reactionism, anti-feminism, anti-governmentality, and masculinity, but is primarily concerned with maintaining white racial domination. The alt-right is primarily online-based and comprised of young white men (Forscher and Kteily 2017). There is no consistent agreement in the literature about the specificities of the movement's ideology. "At its core," political scientist George Hawley contends, "the alt-right is a white nationalist movement" (2017:12). For cultural historian, Niko Heikkila, the alt-right:

Breaks from conservative foreign policy and free trade orthodoxy in favor of higher cultural ideals, coalescing around issues they oppose, namely multiculturalism, (non-white) immigration, feminism, and "political correctness." Indeed one of the unifying factors is the belief that mainstream conservatives have sold out white people as a group. (2017:2)

The alt-right is largely dispersed amongst online social hubs, often participatory media networks like 4chan, 8chan, and reddit (2017:1). Kelly (2017) points to some online social hubs that served as precursors to the alt-right and have member or ideological overlap with the alt-right: Return of the Kings and r/TheRedPill representing the “manosphere” and the broader men’s rights movement; Breitbart as representing the “alt-lite,” with less overtly racist rhetoric; Jared Taylor’s website American Renaissance representing more explicitly white nationalist ideology under the guise of “race realism.”

Across these various platforms, however, there is an underlying similarity in the way these ideologies are conveyed. In the changing media landscape, the alt-right employs several mechanisms to articulate their messaging: memes, trolling, and dog whistles, defined by Berlet (2017):

*Memes:* A repeated phrase or image—usually with a clear message such as in a trope—that is shared across cyberspace in a self-replicating manner by online users who distribute the message without encouragement so that it spreads like an atomic reaction

*Trolling:* Posting text and messages intentionally worded and designed to antagonize opponents in such a way that they will overreact, and then can be further antagonized and mocked for their intemperate response.

*Dog Whistles:* Phrases that can be interpreted different by different audiences, with some people not hearing any content at all. When a person hears a phrase in the form of a trope they may insert into the message the identity of their favorite loathed enemy target group

The “meme and troll culture” of the alt-right is utilized to combat “political correctness,” what white supremacists believe to be a symptom of a larger pro-feminist and multicultural America (Heikkila 2017). The “performance of trolling” is representative of racist ideologies and writing off these ideologies as only trolling masks the dangers of white supremacist rhetoric (Romano 2017, cited by Heikkila 2017:8). I take these strategies to be much more than just broad rhetorical shifts in our media environment. Instead, the employment of trolling, memes, and dog whistles cloaks racist ideology. Studying shifts in rhetoric, not only the content but the form as well,

should be of interest to scholars studying how white supremacist movements in the current media landscape make themselves more aligned with normative cultural practices.

A way to illustrate some of the ideological divisions within the alt-right is to look at prominent movement leaders and unpack the various factions they represent. Richard Spencer, who coined the term “alt-right” and is president of the white nationalist think tank The National Policy Institute, sees the alt-right as grounded in “identitarianism,” which according to Spencer is “fundamentally about difference, about culture as an expression of a certain people at a certain time” (Heikkila 2017:3). Richard Spencer associates identitarianism with “race realism” or “human biodiversity,” continuing the legacy of white supremacists co-opting the scientific rhetoric to legitimate racism. Andrew Anglin, editor of the neo-nazi website Daily Stormer, weaponizes irony and calls himself leader of the alt-right’s “meme and troll brigade” to advocate explicitly for white nationalism (Heikkila 2017:4). In contrast, Milo Yiannopoulos, former Breitbart News tech editor and self-proclaimed “political provocateur,” is often considered representative of “alt-light” because he utilizes less overtly racist rhetoric and because he is a Jewish gay man, two identity categories usually excluded from white supremacist social movements. That the alt-right has not uniformly condemned his association with their movement points to potential changes in their maintenance of group boundaries and opened the floor for many of the narratives produced amongst the alt-right.

## **Sexuality**

This project focuses not only on white supremacy, but also the ways that racial inequality intersects with sexual and gender inequalities that all deeply organize our social worlds. While gender and sexuality are inextricably linked, it is analytically useful to separate gender and

sexuality into distinct categories for analytic inquiry. First, both gender and sexuality are tied to “chromosomal sex” (Sedgwick 2008:27), here used to refer broadly shared notions of a biological basis for differentiating between the binary of those assigned male or female at birth. Here, gender refers to a “socially organized achievement” that is “subject to evaluation in terms of normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities” thought to correspond to the chromosomal sex one was assigned at birth (West and Zimmerman 1987:127). Importantly, gender is an institution – encompassing “ideology, practices, constraints, conflicts, and power” – that is dynamic and enduring (Martin 2004:1264). Sexuality here refers to “the array of acts, expectations, narratives, pleasures, identity-formations, and knowledges, in both women and men, that tends to cluster most densely around certain genital sensations but is not adequately defined by them” (Sedgwick 2008:29).

Patriarchy, or the enduring “the long-term structure of the subordination of women” to men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:839), is used as an analytical framework for understanding enduring gender inequality. Importantly, patriarchy conceptualized here does not homogenize the broad range of experiences of gender inequality, but instead recognizes that “categories of race, ethnicity, sexuality, culture, nation, and gender not only intersect but are mutually constituted, formed, and transformed within transnational power-laden processes such as European imperialism and colonialism, neoliberal globalization” (Patil 2013:848). Central to the maintenance of patriarchy is the institution of heterosexuality, or the structural privileging of heterosexuality as the normative manner of organizing social life (Rich 1980; Demetriou 2001). The term white patriarchy will be used here as a short hand to refer to the interwoven nature of racial, gender, and sexual inequality.

The turn of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a turn in conceptualizations of sexuality, away from a focus on acts and towards a focus on identities and types of sexual people distinctly characterized by a heterosexual/homosexual binary (Foucault 1978; Halperin 1989; Sedgwick 2008). In the emergence of the modern sexual system, the normative status of heterosexuality created the notion of “the closet” as “the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (Sedgwick 2008:71). The relations of the closet -- “the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition” -- deeply structure Western culture and knowledge production, yet raises incoherent paradoxes for how to understand the homo/heterosexual definition (3).

Sedgwick identifies minoritizing (“an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority”) and universalizing (“an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across a spectrum of sexualities”) frameworks as two contradictions in the modern sexual definition (1). The minoritizing view produces narratives of particular types of sexual people that are inherently homo- or heterosexual, containing the threat of homosexuality within the homosexual body. However, the minority model is mobilized simultaneously alongside a universalizing narrative in which the spectre of homosexual contamination haunts everyone.

In the modern sexual system, sexuality is organized by a hierarchical system of sexual value in which erotic conduct and identity categories are subject to moral evaluation by a culture that is characterized by sex negativity. In this system, “erotic variety is dangerous, unhealthy, depraved and a menace to everything from small children to national security” (Rubin 1984:152). The development of sex law codifies and ensures the continuity of conservative Christian sexual values that privilege marital, monogamous, reproductive heterosexuals (Rubin

1974). Enforcing sex law denies “inferior” sexual categories the right to privacy, a paradox of the homo/heterosexual definition in which sexuality is relegated to the private lives of individual people, yet simultaneously a matter of public concern when adjudicated in the legal arena (Rubin 1974; Sedgwick 2008). Further, right-wing ideology links political weakness and declines in American power to immoral and non-familial sex (Rubin 1974).

Essential to the line drawn between good/bad sex is heteronormativity. Here, heteronormativity refers to “the suite of cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders, that gender reflects biological sex, and that only sexual attraction between these “opposite” genders is natural or acceptable” (Schilt and Westbrook 2009:441). Heteronormativity is constituted within and across structural, cultural, interactional, and individual dimensions of the social world (Jackson 2006:108). This is not to say heteronormativity is immutable and ahistorical, but instead heteronormativity is historically and culturally situated (Ward and Schneider 2009). Importantly, heteronormativity does not only encapsulate heterosexual people or acts, but a “normative way of life” (Jackson 2006:107). Homonormativity (Duggan 2003) and transnormativity (Johnson 2016; Malatino 2017) are related regulatory normative ideologies that fabricate hierarchies of legitimacy based on LGBT folks’ proximity to that normative way of life.

Heteronormativity relies on adherence to gender normative performances of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity here is understood as “the practices, behaviors, attitudes, sexualities, emotions, positions, bodies, organizations, institutions, and all manner of expectations culturally associated with (though not limited to) people understood to be male” (Pascoe and Bridges 2016:4). As configurations of practice, there is no singular masculinity, but instead masculinities are constituted in relation to other masculinities and femininities (Connell 1992:45; Connell

2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hierarchy is not only between men and women, but also among genders. Within the larger white patriarchal context, particular configurations of masculine practices become hegemonic, while others are subordinated or marginalized, a relationship exemplified in the subordination of gay men in particular (Connell 1987).

Hegemonic masculinity refers to “the configurations of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and subordination of women” (Connell 2005:77). While not a static status held by individuals, hegemonic patterns of masculinity in our current historical moment have been routinely defined as exclusively heterosexual. Hegemonic masculinity is also deeply intertwined with the privileges afforded by whiteness (Ward 2008). This becomes explicit in white supremacists’ use of gender as an analogy for racial hierarchy, equating white superiority to masculinity and the downfall of the white race as a result of feminization (Ferber 1998:30).

Contemporary sexual system is “a creature of scientific racism,” fashioned to maintain white supremacy (McWhorter 2017). As anxieties about the future of the white race increased, sexuality as a unitary field of knowledge emerged as a way to regulate populations through strategies of pathologizing difference and enforcing eugenic practices (Markowitz 2017; Storr 2017). Late nineteenth century racial ideologies were foundational for the early models of homosexuality that were emerging from sexology and psychology, undergirding the development of the methodologies used to fabricate a binary between Black and white bodies. Scientific racism of the nineteenth century relied on comparative anatomy to reinforce the “notion of racial hierarchies through the method of ranking and ordering of bodies according to stages of evolutionary ‘progress’” (Sommerville 2000:24).

Notions of racialized differences were also deeply interwoven sexual meaning. French naturalist Georges Cuvier's exploitation of Saartjie Baartman, who became known as "The Hottentot Venus," equated "physical excess" of genitalia, buttocks, and breasts with "sexual excess." The "physical excess" became sufficient evidence to confirm their dominant racial prejudices that cast Black women as hypersexual, starkly dichotomized with their idealized notion of hyposexual white women. The use of comparative anatomy provided the framework for sexologists attempting to locate a biological cause for homosexuality, where a similar equation of physical excess to "abnormal" sexuality was utilized in medical texts describing the lesbian clitoris as significantly larger than that of heterosexual women (Sommerville 2000:41).

Relatedly, Ferguson (2004) employs a queer of color analysis to similarly expose the presupposition embedded in Sociology that have historically posited race, gender, sexuality, and class as natural and discrete formations (4). Canonical sociology, specifically, has utilized discourses of normative sexuality to organize the racial structure in the US. In racializing "heteropatriarchy through whiteness," sociology has constructed African American cultures (and especially African American nonheteronormative practices) as inherently antithetical to a liberal, capitalist American culture that venerates normative, white sexualities (18). The history of "racialized regulations of gender and sexuality" continue to organize American social life broadly and justify inequality along lines of perceived difference (139). The imposition of classification -- race, gender, sexuality -- has come with the imposition of hierarchical arrangements of power.



### **Sexuality in the White Supremacist Imagination**

The following section utilizes sexuality as the primary lens through which to examine the white supremacist imagination. I pay close attention to how homosexuality, gay men specifically, have been storied as either a driving cause behind the “white genocide” eradicating white nuclear families or as a part of a larger Jewish conspiracy theory concocted solely to subjugate white men. Central to the white supremacist ideologies explored here is a fixation with masculinity.

Although not always explicitly stated, the contemporary white supremacist movement is profoundly concerned with articulating a white male identity (Ferber 1998; Kelly 2017). White men, routinely the central focus and active producers of white supremacist ideology, are constructed in relation to the hyposexual white woman, the hypersexual Black man, and the effeminate Jewish man (Daniels 1997). White men stand juxtaposed to white women and are warriors tasked with protecting white women from the “rapacious” Black man (Ferber 1999). The driving mantra of the white supremacist movement - “we must ensure the existence of our people and our future for white children” - is then predicated on protecting white women’s sexuality (Blee 2004; Ferber 1999; Perry 2004). This racialized sexual story is concisely conveyed in the deployment of the term “cuck,” used by the alt-right to describe “a process through which one must 'unlearn' liberal beliefs in order to fully re-masculinize the self” (Kelly 2017:75). The term “cuck” references being “cuckolded,” or a story about men’s wives cheating on them, usually with Black men. In deploying the term “cuck,” the alt-right not only connects with shared ways of thinking about sexuality, but also shared belief systems about the racial order. The “cuck,” then, is not only regulated by compulsory heterosexuality, but also compulsory interracial sexuality, both working together to perpetuate the illusion of strict racial

and sexual boundaries (Ferber 1988:22). Interracial sexuality becomes an attack not only against the white race, but white masculinity specifically.

Turning now to images of gay men in the white supremacist imagination, compulsory and institutionalized heterosexuality remains the primary regulating force in gay men's marginalization. Presuming that gay men cannot reproduce white children to ensure the continuity of the white race, gay men are "race-traitors." Homosexuals are also "gender-traitors" that disrupt the masculine/feminine binary embedded in their essentialist understandings of gender (Perry 2004:92). Heterosexual masculinity is constitutive of what it means to "be a man," making gay men are morally culpable for their own marginalization (2004:93). Masculinity subordinates women and racialized Others through sexual domination (Pascoe 2012), which is often accomplished through penetration. Ironically, white men are able to maintain their grasp on hegemonic masculinity via penetration, even in male-to-male sexual contact: "Central to this definition of masculinity and its concomitant view of homosexuality is not the contour of relationships between men, but rather the body and the penetration of the body" (Daniels 1997:51). Penetrating other men, especially the racialized Other, is construed as one way to maintain white men's domination. The broadly circulating narrative of the hyper masculine white supremacist becomes antithetical to the homosexual man through the equation of domination with penetration. Gay men are denied access to hegemonic masculinity because they are emasculated by (the presumption of) penetration.

By bringing in the body the white supremacist imagination constructs homosexuals as in part responsible for the oncoming "white genocide" because they are "disease-ridden," prone to "carnal" sins of the flesh, and "pedophiles" who target white children (Perry 2004). The language of "perversions," "defectives," "nature freaks," and "degeneracy" make them morally

culpable for their subordinated status (Perry 2004:93). The conflation of gay men with disease intensified during the HIV/AIDS pandemic that ravaged gay men's communities in the 1980s and 1990s, with white supremacists blaming gay men for the spread of HIV/AIDS to potential movement recruits and threatening the ability of healthy white bodies to reproduce white children (Perry 2004). These depictions are also racialized in that the vilification of LGBT community in the 1980s and 1990s further marginalized more vulnerable groups such as gay Black men, transgender women, and other nonheteronormative people of color (Cole 1996).

The language of the "degenerate" is linked with the second way the white supremacist imagination produces the homosexual character, namely by arguing that the "Jews have "spawned a wave of homosexuality and degeneracy in America" (White Aryan Resistance, vol. 8, no. 2, 1989, p.13, as cited by Daniels 1997:113). The decline into "degeneracy" is linked to anti-Semitic rhetoric of Hitler's Third Reich, making this story more than just a negative moral evaluation of homosexuality but also an evocation of genocidal thought (Kelly 2017). Central to these stories is the "Jewish question," often shortened to "JQ," which references Nazi Germany's labeling their genocide of Jewish people as the "final solution to the Jewish question." The JQ remains one of the most contentious fault lines across various factions within the broader white supremacist movement.

The "Jewish conspiracy" to eradicate the white race constructs a feminized Jewish man that controls the "Zionist Occupied Government" (ZOG), in turn feminizing the nation state by their close association with one another (Daniels 1997). The Nazi movement in World War 2 similarly weaponized a feminine/masculine binary to glorify a masculine Nazi state and justify the genocide of a "weak" effeminate Jewish population (Taylor 1996:171). White supremacist publications that print language such as "white men built this nation, white men are this nation"

strive for a reclamation of the nation through the *remasculinization* of the nation (Ferber and Kimmel 2004:114). The feminizing influence of the Jewish man is construed as being the driving force behind the civil rights, LGBT and feminist movements that threaten white, heterosexual men's privilege. The granting of (some) civil liberties to LGBT people is made out to be a result of the feminized "ZOG," which "threatens to minimize not only the sexual domination of heterosexual white men, but also their political and economic power" as well (Perry 2004:92).

The threats to white supremacy posed by Jewish men and white gay men are perceived as similar because these two groups could "pass" as potential movement members due to having a greater likelihood of sharing some of the physical markers of whiteness than other racialized groups may have (Daniels 1997:132). White gay and white Jewish men's exclusion from white supremacist movements, then, is less predicated upon racialized phenotypic differences grounded in biological deterministic logic and instead construed as a failure to properly enact white supremacist masculinity. While the "Jewish Question" is still contested within various factions of the broader white supremacist movement, it seems that the alt-right is now wrestling with the "Homosexual Question" as well.

Important in answering this question is a recognition that the alt-right is driven by a "reactionary rehabilitation for white masculinity" that was bred in the war on terror following 9/11, which was constructed as a hyper-masculine outsider attacking the liberal, feminized "ZOG" of America (Kellie 2017). These panicked notions about the state of masculinity are clear in the alt-right:

The alt-right is both inspired by and defined by a discourse of anxiety about traditional white masculinity, which is seen as being artificially, but powerfully denigrated with catastrophic consequences for the nation. It also argues that this discourse is dominant in much of the political and cultural mainstream. (Kelly 2017:69)

Berlet (2017) similarly argues “a key innovation of the alt-right is that being a gay white man is acceptable if he is willing to verbally brutalize women” (2). In the public imagination and among some key figureheads of the alt-right, there seems to be some acceptance of Berlet’s claim.

Returning again to Milo Yiannopoulos, his overtly transphobic and homophobic rhetoric on his 2015 *Dangerous Faggot* college speaking tour and dangerous practice of outing LGBT students and faculty exemplified Berlet’s claim that denigrating non-normative gender or sexual practices can bring gay white men in alignment with the alt-right in all but his sexual identity. Milo is not the only person aligned with the alt-right who does not outright condemn homosexuality. Greg Johnson, editor in chief of the “north American new right” publishing house Counter-Currents, argues “homosexuality is beside the point” (Johnson 2010). White gay men can serve as allies (sometimes even assets) to the white nationalist movement because “they also have more free time and more disposable income to devote to the cause” (Johnson 2010).

In “The Homo and the Negro,” published by white nationalist Counter-Currents, author James O’Meara posits that gay men represent the “elite” of Western culture because they have been integral to the creation and maintenance of “Western civilization” and that bringing “a queer eye” to the overwhelmingly “homophobic far right” can continue the dominance of Western civilization (O’Meara 2002). Jack Donovan, also contributor and author with Counter-Currents publishing, rejects the label “gay” and instead adopts the label “adrophile” to denote “a man whose love of masculinity includes sex with other men” (O’Connor 2017). In *Androphilia: A Manifesto: Rejecting the Gay Identity and Reclaiming Masculinity* (2016) Donovan argues that the seemingly contradictory identities of white supremacist and homosexual can be reconciled through masculinity. While these individuals are by no means conclusive evidence that the majority of the alt-right is accepting of homosexuality, the large following that Yiannopoulos,

Johnson, O'Meara, and Donovan have within the movement warrants investigation into the relationship between homophobia and masculinity in the context of American white patriarchy

## METHODS

The fundamental questions this project aims to answer are 1) how the alt-right engages in storying the sexual, specifically the “homosexual” character 2) the ways that broadly circulating ideas about masculinity shape movement boundary work processes, and 3) the work that this storying is doing for the alt-right in the context of American white patriarchy.

### Sample

My sample comes from a former online social hub for the movement on reddit.com called r/altright. Reddit bills itself as the “front page of the internet” and ranks as the fifth most trafficked website in the US and 17<sup>th</sup> globally (Alexa Internet 2018). Users can make accounts to post content (text, images, videos, news articles, etc.) that other users can then “upvote” or “downvote” to indicate their approval or disapproval of that content, thus moving the comment higher or lower in the post thread and creating non-linear conversations amongst posters (Buyukozturk 2018). Importantly, the content posted on reddit is publicly visible, even to those who do not make an account.

While reddit does not constitute as a social network site (see Boyd 2010), there is a sense of community fostered through the use of subreddits. While operationalization of an online community is often contested, Van der Nagel (2013) conceptualizes reddit as such due to the existence of “subreddits,” or themed forums reddit users subscribe to in order to follow and engage with particular topics. Reddit has thousands of subreddits (between 10,000 to 15,000

active) which all have varying numbers of subscribers. The subject of subreddits range from topics as broad as r/science with 18,321,396 subscribers to as niche as making soap on r/soapmaking with 8,053 subscribers (reddit Metrics 2018).

On one hand, niche subreddits, like the 7,625 former subscribers to r/altright, serve as a home base for those with similar interests and can facilitate intense discussion and a sense of community (Buzzfeed 2017). On the other, reddit also facilitates anonymity by not requiring redditors to ever provide a real name or even an email when registering with the site (van der Nagel 2013). There is no way to confirm if the content posted anonymously online is “true” or coming from “real” members of the alt-right movement. However, if we are to take seriously the notion that we are always “doing” or “performing” (Butler 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987) our genders across various contexts, then we can “view the identities claimed online as equally ‘revealing’ or ‘reliable’ sources of knowledge” (Ward 2008:419). Because of this, the focus of this analysis is not on individual redditors themselves, but instead on the stories produced in the comment content.

The particular sample for this study differs from traditional data collected from reddit. In January 2017, r/altright was banned from the site for violating the site’s terms of service that prohibits harassment and hate speech (Buzzfeed 2017). However, reddit user Jason Baumgartner began Pushshift in 2015 as a big data storage and analytics project that aggregates data from multiple social media sites – most notably, every one of the 1.7 billion publicly available reddit comments at the time. Pushshift updates their archive monthly and is publicly available for researcher’s use. The data are available both through Google’s BigQuery cloud service and through Baumgartner’s pushshift.io initiative website. (See Appendix A for details on process, characteristics, and ethics for this dataset). My data are a portion of this larger archive, making it



as much a historical data source as it is a collection of interactions from an online community. Because the data are no longer visible through the site itself, I am partially limited in my ability to view interactions between subscribers and their interactions with the website interface itself.

While this type of data provides more of a snapshot in time rather than a look at an active community, I argue that the singular snapshot captured in this data are from a consequential moment in the history of sexual storying. A year after the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 and amidst the election of Donald Trump, 2016 saw major public conversations concerning the meanings of race and sexuality in our current moment. The granting of some civil rights to same-sex couples comes right before what some view as the ascension of an overt racist to the White House, troubling the notion that progress towards equity and justice is a linear process.

Using Google's BigQuery, I first used a query that downloaded all of the post threads from r/altright subreddit during 2016. I then used a second query that created a table containing all of the posts' additional content including their date/time, post ID, post author, post title, post text, comment ID, comment parent ID, comment author, comment content, pic link, and permalink. A final query joined the two tables together to make the dataset that was then downloaded from Google BigQuery's cloud service in a csv file and converted to excel for cleaning. The initial dataset yielded 23.2 MB and 130,904 comments total. To narrow down my sample, I conducted a keyword search through the thread titles for "gay" in excel. I limited my scope to posts that had over 20 comments to capture the interactional component between comments, not just the text content itself. Lastly, I narrowed the threads down to those that were explicitly eliciting a discussion from the other subredditors about their thoughts regarding gay men or homosexuality broadly, excluding threads titles that focused on specific individuals or events (See Appendix B for thread titles).

My final sample contained seven threads with a total word count of 14,392 that included all of the post content (date/time, post ID, post author, post title, post text, comment ID, comment parent ID, comment author, comment content). While this initially seems to be a large quantity of data for narrative analysis, the substantive content being analyzed was isolated to the post title, post text, and comment content. To analyze the data, content was transferred from excel to a word document where the comments were arranged chronologically in the comment tree under their respective threads. I assigned pseudonyms to further ensure the privacy of the redditors. I made a deliberate effort to fashion pseudonyms that reflected any significant themes conveyed in the original usernames, particularly as it related to trolling or white supremacist content.

## **Analysis**

My analysis merges a traditional narrative framework with data collected utilizing digital methods in order to explore the process of sexual storying online. These stories are not produced face-to-face or through mass media. Instead, they are negotiated through comment interactions between visitors on r/altright. Importantly, this analysis continues in Plummer's framework with an acknowledgement that power is essential to the political process of producing, telling, and hearing sexual stories. The narratives here extend beyond just the text itself and are instead also examined as deeply connected to the social processes that shape gender, sexual, and racial inequality.

After data were transferred, I organized each thread into an individual table in a word document. A first round of broad in vivo coding (Saldaña 2016) captured key vocabulary and phrases used on r/altright, which I recorded all in a separate word document. Utilizing the

language of commenters themselves, as opposed to codes generated by myself, provides a fuller picture of what commenters understand about their worlds in order to make these narratives believable. I then grouped the key vocabulary and phrases into thematic categories. For example, “lust,” “desire,” and “hedonistic” would all be grouped together under the category of promiscuity. A “close reading” (Loseke 2012) identified broad story elements – characters, plots, morals – present in the data. Of particular importance are the descriptions of a specific narrative character, the “homosexual,” which I recorded next and grouped into categories that created the image of particular types of people. Once the key character descriptions were organized, I turned to the moral evaluations that were conveyed in the symbolic and emotion codes deployed to produce these characters. Because the power imbued in sexual stories is deeply connected to emotions (Plummer 1995:28), emotion codes were examined for how they construct moral worthiness of the sexual subject (Loseke 2012). I then turn to the work these narrative depictions are doing for the alt-right as a social movement.

## **CONSTRUCTING COMPETING CHARACTERS: THE DEGENERATE AND THE SUBSTANDARD ALLY**

The sexual stories told by the alt-right produced two distinct character types of gay men: The Degenerate and the Substandard Ally. First, the Degenerate is a pedophile, a diseased sexual hedonist, and a Jewish-led weapon set on destroying the white race. The image of the Degenerate is produced through the mobilization of anti-Semitic tropes, conservative Christian doctrine, and (pseudo)scientific rhetoric. This universalizing narrative presents homosexuality as a contagious risk to all people who engage in certain acts. The second character, the Substandard Ally, is constructed as a foil to the Degenerate. The Substandard Ally is born this way, their biological destiny leaving them no choice regarding their sexuality. However, if they remain private about their sexuality and respect the importance of the nuclear family, they no longer become a threat to the continuity of the white race. The strategies used to justify the Substandard Ally's inclusion in the alt-right are deploying the (il)logic of the closet and redrawing the line between good/bad sex. The last section of these findings explores how sexual storying was the primary way that r/altright engaged in boundary work, specifically how contested notions concerning masculinity troubled these processes.

### **The Degenerate**

As a rhetorical construction, the composite character of The Degenerate has no place in the alt-right movement. In the language of the r/altright comments themselves, the Degenerate is

dangerous because they are “extreme degenerates who prey on children” and “pervert the youth with their endless obscenity” (AdoreAltRight, September; gordo, September) The Degenerate leads a “pump and dump lifestyle” that normalizes “damaging sexual practices like anal and oral sex” (freeyahspeech, November). Due to his “promiscuity,” The Degenerate is an “incubator for disease” that “already unleashed a plague” because “fags taint the blood supply” and “spread HIV at 60 times that of the regular population” (NaziLuvr, September) Importantly, The Degenerate is a race and gender traitor because they are a “Jewish constructed device” used to “divide the white race” (BiffleBall, December). Because they don’t reproduce, they “threaten the continuation of the white race” -- the primary focus of white supremacist movements (LuckyFash, September). To accomplish the production of this character, the alt-right 1] conjures anti-Semitic tropes and themes, 2] invokes conservative Christian doctrine, and 3] mobilizes pseudoscientific rhetoric as a means of claiming legitimacy.

### **Anti-Semitism.**

The Degenerate narrative incorporates anti-semitic tropes and themes already documented as fundamental to white supremacist belief systems. In response to CuriousCat asking “how do Jews have ANYTHING to do with homosexuality,” GildedMarcus replies “guess who led the movement.” Homosexuality is framed as “a Jewish constructed device used to divide whites, e.g., feminism/LGBT/leftism/sociology” and, importantly, that the alt-right believes it’s working. The feared endgame of a Jewish “infiltration” is achieving “white genocide,” or the complete and purposeful eradication of the white race and because gay men “don’t reproduce,” they are constructed as contributing to that end. The rhetoric of “infiltration” is also consequential, calling up images of a rodent or insect infestation, a rhetorical strategy utilized in Nazi Germany to justify violent anti-Semitism and genocide (Perry 2004).

Compellingly, Billy Roper Raver uses the language of an “infiltration” is also applied to gay men: “Jews infiltrate when nobody names the Jews. Gays infiltrate when nobody is willing to call them gays.” Unlike the racialized Other that is marked by phenotypic difference, both (white) Jewish and gay men have a shared ability to “pass” as white allies to the movement (Daniels 1997). These depictions evoke fear from the readers, instilling an anxiety that there are undetectable enemies amongst their ranks. This anxiety justifies not only reactionary repudiation of gay men, but also practice attack on who they believe to be the source -- Jewish men.

Additionally, gay men are “working alongside the kikes to destroy our morality.” The deployment of the ethnic slur “kike,” in reference to Jewish people, conjures the long history of white supremacists constructing Jewish people as “the ultimate enemy” (Ferber 1999:6). The “Jewish perversion of our modern culture” normalizes homosexuality, a process that white supremacists believe is accomplished through a Jewish “controlled” media. Like the “ZOG,” banking and media institutions are also portrayed as controlled by Jewish men attempting to feminize the white race (Daniels 1997). In representing gay men as normalized in the media, the “corrupting” Jewish force brainwashes younger generations into viewing homosexuality as acceptable, which poses the threat to their morality. Deploying symbolic codes of morality under threat again taps into fear that the changing, more accepting dominant view of gay men poses a threat to their way of life, making participation in the alt-right seem like a viable avenue to combat the anticipated change.

Anti-Semitic tropes justifying the exclusion of the Degenerate deploy a universalizing (Sedgwick 2008) frame, wherein all people are at risk of becoming homosexuals. A primary tactic of this strategy is identifying LGBT “propaganda” as capable of converting anyone in the heterosexual population:

I'm pretty sure the alt right is against all those things as well. Homosexuality has been increasing more and more as it is pushed through the media. It is not genetic. Any person can feel pleasure in their ass but that doesn't make it right. When my brother was in high school he knew maybe 1 gay in each of his classes at most. When I went through there were at least 2 or 3 and lots of women cutting their hair short and acting like men. Now there are trannies in my school, way more gays, and feminized men everywhere. Being anti gay and anti degeneracy is needed to combat the Jewish perversion in our modern culture. If you don't think it's getting worse you are insane. It gets worse everyday because one doesn't have to be genetically gay to be a degenerate. Any person is capable of being converted through the propaganda. You are way off base on this. (bigD\_Trump, August)

While a minoritizing frame usually points to a genetic basis for homosexuality, the “Jewish perversion” of the media converts heterosexuals. Additionally, by noting that “anyone could feel pleasure in their ass,” the alt-right mobilizes the fear that anyone could become homosexual by engaging in particular acts. This universalizing move focuses on specific erotic acts, here the (presumption) of penetration, as a contaminating threat to “right” erotic conduct.

Importantly, an anxiety that “homosexuality has been increasing more and more” utilizes fear as a call to action. Non-normative gender presentations – masculine women, feminine men, and transgender high schoolers – are mobilized as physical evidence of the increase in homosexuality. The Degenerate can be read as justifying his exclusion from the alt-right not because of a homosexual identity, but because of particular acts that are contaminating and not gender normative.

Throughout the anti-Semitic discriminatory narrative, a universalizing frame for understanding homosexuality is structured by a “homophobic pollution logic” wherein the homosexual serves as an “impure other to the pure heterosexual” (Seidman 2013:41). The anticipated “infiltration” of gay men reveals an anxiety that proximity to the Degenerate alone exposes the alt-right to potentially being marked by homosexuality’s stigmatizing touch. Additionally, normalization of homosexuality by the “ZOG” and “Jewish controlled” media opens even heterosexuals to the threat of “moral contagion” (Seidman 2013:44).

### **Conservative Christian Doctrine**

A second way the Degenerate is made believable is through appeals to conservative Christian doctrine. Central to this is the deployment of the symbolic code of family values:

You want to buy up a nice townhouse reserved for a real white family who plan to reproduce? You want to have a nice house with a white picket fence and show up with your twink at church and blaspheme the god you claim to believe? (buttplugbeer)

Here, the “real white family” is entitled to the “nice townhouse” and the Degenerate is robbing them of that opportunity. The “white picket fence” conjures images of an idyllic Americana suburb, reflecting a nostalgia for a time that never truly was, when the white nuclear family was afforded every nicety in life. Embedded in that idyllic Americana image is the assumption of church attendance, an act that would be blasphemous if the Degenerate were to bring his “twink” along with him. By employing the “twink” label in their argument, the comment is also reinforcing the association between gay men and effeminacy. Twinks, thought of as more effeminate and always the penetrated partner during sex, become antithetical to the white male head of household valued in the image of the “real white family” ideal.

Also embedded in the notion of “a real white family” is that marriage is reserved only for child-rearing homosexuals. The symbolic codes of marriage and matrimony represent ways of thinking about intimate partnerships not only as legal arrangements, but as religious rituals. In deploying these codes, the alt-right connects to broadly circulating narratives opposing the legalization of same-sex marriage that often are grounded in a freedom of religion framework.



By deploying these codes as antithetical to the Degenerate, they construct him as incompatible with family values, a respect for which is key to belonging in the alt-right.

The Degenerate is also routinely pictured as deserving punishment. Specifically, deploying the symbolic code of the “sodomites” evokes a history of religious imagery -- the Biblical story of God’s decimation of Sodom and Gomorrah as punishment for their (sexual) sinning, for example -- that is often appropriated in white supremacist constructions of gay men (Ferber 1998). The characterization of the Degenerate as “sinners” who refuse to “turn to Christ and repent” designates them not only as morally unworthy to be movement members, but also makes them deserving of punishment from god, as SouthernCross articulates:

Gays deserve to go to jail. Leviticus 18:22

Pornography and masturbation are refuges of the depraved and you are committing blasphemy right now. Gays deserve nothing but punishment. Leviticus 18:22

Their subculture is a Satan led one of sin. They must understand that they are sinning and submit to celibacy or heterosexuality or they deserve to be punished.

Here, claims to Bible verses are used to legitimize their argument when read by an audience that shares a similar veneration for conservative Christianity. A universalizing frame that focuses on acts over minority model also implicates pornography and masturbation as other erotic conduct deserving of negative moral evaluation. Language about submission to God evokes a vision of religion as a force to fear.

The tendency towards universalizing rhetoric also exposes an incoherent utopia/apocalypse logic in their production of the Degenerate character. While the alt-right strives to built a white patriarchal utopia, the impulse towards gay genocide actually propels them towards an apocalyptic omnicide. While every person in the biblical tale of Sodom and Gomorrah was not a sodomite, the presence of few homosexuals justified the decimation of their

people well beyond the minority of homosexuals (Sedgwick 2008:128). This incoherence in the alt-right's homo/heterosexual definition identifies a tension between a distinctly homosexual Other, that somehow has the potential to convert others to homosexuality and contaminate culture.

Interestingly, arguments on religiosity were rather infrequent, with one comment going so far as to say “we’re not religious here, good try.” Historically, adherence to Christianity has been central to the logics of the white supremacist imagination (Blee 2004). Yet, regardless of intention to condemn homosexuality on religious objection, repeated use of the term “sodomite” evokes the tangled history of religion and law in regulating sexuality, especially nonheteronormative sexualities. As early as the 1533 Act of Henry VIII “anti-buggery” laws to the US laws banning sodomy up until even 2003, conservative Christian doctrine has played a key role in shaping Western countries legal regulation of sex and sexuality (Weeks 1996). Importantly, deploying the symbolic code sodomite calls up the private/public paradox in the homosexual definition (Sedgwick 2008).

### **Pseudoscience**

Lastly, narrative productions of the Degenerate character were made believable to the r/altright audience by employing scientific rhetoric to shore up their claims to legitimacy. In response to a post asking “is the Alt Right unanimous on gay marriage and adoption,” one redditor suggests that “if you want to know what the Alt-Right thinks on any topic... just look at what the science and statistics says about that topic. Because the Alt-Right is a movement based on objective reality.”

Scientific rhetoric was most commonly deployed when unpacking the symbolic codes of “child abuser,” “promiscuity,” and “disease.” First, this type of person is a “child abuser,” as user WhiteMale\_88 cautions to “never forget that gay men are 14 times more likely to sexually abuse children than straight men.” Here, The Degenerate narrative character echoes historical constructions of gay men as pedophiles, a characterization long employed to justify denial of full rights and humanity to gay men (Fetner 2008; Plummer 1995). The Degenerate becomes a predator to the blameless victim of the Child, who is depicted as entirely asexual and in need of protection from the corrupting potential of sexuality. The deployment of the Child as a blameless victim evokes not simply fear, but “erotic terror” towards the predatory Degenerate (Rubin 1984:146). This erotic terror makes the Degenerate character believable because it connects with cultural ways of feeling towards pedophiles and the blameless Child character, which are exacerbated by the alt-right’s view that threats to the Child’s purity is also a threat to the continuity of the white race.

Further, the comment goes on to say “its one of those hatefacts that no one wants to talk about.” Hatefacts can be defined as “politically incorrect but true statements” (libraryofhate 2015). Although hatefacts are not used only by the alt-right, hatefacts are strongly associated with far right groups online because they are often used in arguments against multiculturalism. In framing their comment as a hatefact, the comment implicitly conveys that their depiction of gay men as “child abusers” is no longer the dominant cultural narrative surrounding gay men. Instead, the alt-right narrative of The Degenerate utilizes this hate fact to contradict the cultural pluralist master frame which espouses public tolerance for diversity (Berbrier 1998).

Second, gay men’s claimed “promiscuity” was also depicted utilizing scientific rhetoric, exemplified in Pukama\_Mama’s comment:

Their lives are hedonistic and promiscuous. A new study by a group of University of Chicago researchers reveals a high level of promiscuity and unhealthy behavior among that city's homosexual male population. According to the researchers, 42.9 percent of homosexual men in Chicago's Shoreland area have had more than 60 sexual partners, while an additional 18.4 percent have had between 31 and 60 partners.

Promiscuity is framed as “hedonistic” and “unhealthy” not by the University of Chicago study cited, but by the redditor. Citing a study from what is regarded as a reputable academic institution attempts to shore up the validity of the claim to the reader, portraying the image of the Degenerate as grounded in objectivity, not their own homophobia.

Another comment from George\_Lincoln\_Rockwell that denigrates the Degenerate for “having hundreds of partners in their lifetime” cites a study by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) and an Institute for Sex Research Publication entitled “Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Gay Men and Women” to substantiate the claim that “¼ gay men in America have had over 1,000 sex partners and 43% have had over 500.” Citing research from the NCBI, a branch of the National Institute for Health, again shows the reliance upon institutions of authority, science and government, to legitimize their argument. The choice to cite the book published in 1978 by the Institute for Sex Research is significant in that the Institute for Sex Research, also known as the Kinsey Institute, has had an important historical role in shaping cultural understandings of homosexuality, with both positive and negative consequences (Epstein 1996). The choice to cite this study also speaks to who they value as an authority on sexuality, choosing academic institutions over the voices of gay men themselves. What is more important to the narrative production than the actual validity and reliability of these cited sources, however, is instead an analysis of what their use *does* to make the narrative believable.

Lastly, the Degenerate is constructed by deploying symbolic codes of “disease.” Disease was imagined in two related but different manners: 1] to construct gay men as *diseased*, and 2] to construct homosexuality itself as *a disease*. Physically, The Degenerate men are “incubators for disease” that “spread HIV at 60 times that of the regular population.” Embedded in the deployment of symbolic codes of disease is the belief that promiscuity is to blame:

From a disease POV it is inevitable that homosexual men will worsen the spread and virulence of diseases. This is because nothing will stop homos from having tons of unprotected sex with many, many partners. They use their bodies as incubators for disease and then go on to spread them as much as possible. (freeyahspeech)

The “diseased” Degenerate character is connected to narratives surrounding the AIDS crisis, namely that “homos already unleashed a plague.” The depictions of gay men as such echo cultural narratives dominating the public imagination during the 1980s and 1990s, during the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. While denying resources to help in this public health crisis -- indeed, denying its existence at all -- public discourses surrounding HIV/AIDS relied on a fear of the disorder and sought blame in gay men, in turn vilifying nonheteronormative sexual practices.

Storying gay men in that way takes the AIDS diagnosis as “evidence of immoral behaviors and lifestyles denoting identity categories: homosexuals, injecting drug users, and prostitutes” (Cole 1996:280). Narrating the Degenerate as responsible for the AIDS crisis makes them not only a physical danger to others’ health, but also a social danger because “it diverts resources away from productive uses into keeping fags alive and functional.” While the alt-right narrative here shows a more explicitly violent homophobia, the homophobia abounding during the HIV/AIDS crisis was commonplace. Additionally, the Degenerate’s “unprotected sex with many, many partners” makes them out as morally culpable for their “diseased” fates. While the dominant cultural ways of feeling may elicit sympathy or even pity towards terminally ill

individuals, emotion codes of disgust are embedded in storying the diseased Degenerate so that their marginalization is justified

Moving beyond the individual *diseased* Degenerate,, the alt-right uses pseudoscientific rhetoric to construct homosexuality itself as *a disease*. Redditors make the familiar reference to homosexuality as a “sexual disorder/perversion,” but facts over feelings also explores alternative conceptualizations of “disease” to explain homosexuality:

Homosexuality is natural, but so is schizophrenia. Unfortunately, because of political lobbies it's difficult to do research on this. There might be a cure, vaccine, or therapy that could help you that we are prevented from discovering. Homosexuality might even be caused an infectious disease (facts\_over\_feelings)

There are many different biological and environmental causes that can make a person retarded. I suspect the same is true for homosexuality. It's probably caused, to varying degrees, by infectious diseases that affect the brain, cultural and social influences, early childhood trauma and abuse, hormonal imbalances in the womb, etc.  
(facts\_over\_feelings)

In deploying “schizophrenia,” the alt-right equates homosexuality to a highly stigmatized mental illness. While being “diagnosed” with either may be sanctioned by medicine, they are both cast as undesirable conditions. Both of these comments included a link to an Unz Review article titled *Greg Cochran's "Gay Germ" Hypothesis - An Exercise in the Power of Germs* to support their claim (2016). Greg Cochran’s hypothesis argues that homosexuality is caused by a brain infection, which the Unz Review author dubs the “Gay Germ” hypothesis. Homosexuals are not spreading this “germ,” as they are constructed as spreading sexually transmitted infections. Instead, their hypothesis views homosexuality as caused by a pathogenic agent that changes behavior and argue that homosexuality cannot be genetic alone because of the low prevalence rate. The Cochran “Gay Germ” hypothesis contests the broader cultural narrative that gay men are “born this way,” and while not completely painting them as responsible for their

homosexuality “disorder,” the “Gay Germ” hypothesis is still believable in a meaning system where gay men are so routinely pictured as diseased.

Embedded throughout the “objective” scientific rhetoric, emotion still plays a key role in making this type of character believable. Specifically, the emotion codes of disgust and fear justify homophobia as an evolutionary advantage:

"Homophobia" is heritable and normal in the same way we have fear and disgust reactions to insects, human waste, snakes, dead bodies, etc. We evolved that reaction for a reason. You are dangerous to yourself and everyone around you. (facts\_over\_feelings)

Deploying emotion codes in this way frames expectations of how and to what we feel “fear” and “disgust” as not only determined by culture, but also as grounded in scientific reality. Reframing homophobia as biological instead of cultural justifies and legitimizes the prejudice conveyed throughout the entirety of the Degenerate narrative, shaping not only the pseudoscientific claims but also undergirding the anti-semitic tropes and the deployment of conservative Christian doctrine. It is absolutely not a novel observation that science is shaped by researcher biases, by larger systems of inequality, and manipulated to fit neatly into existing cultural narratives. What is worth noting is how these appeals to “science” make the Degenerate character believable to an alt-right audience.

### **Substandard Ally**

Two seemingly contradictory identities -- gay and white supremacist -- are reconciled through the narrative production of the Substandard Ally. Constructed as a foil to the Degenerate homosexual, the Substandard Ally was born with an essential, true homosexual identity that he is unable to suppress. While his sexuality is inferior to heterosexuality, if he distances himself from gay culture and enacts gender normativity in all regards other than his sexuality, the Substandard

Ally can “be our allies in our fight for our homelands.” The primary strategies used in justifying the Substandard Ally’s inclusion in the alt-right are deploying the (il)logic of the closet and redrawing the lines of respectability in the sex hierarchy.

### **(il)Logic of the Closet**

In constructing the Substandard Ally, the alt-right finds themselves trapped in the paradoxes of the closet (Sedgwick 2008). The deployment of minoritizing discourses presents a sexual type of person, the homosexual, whose sexual identity is an inherent aspect of themselves and a small minority of similarly sexual others. A minority model positions the Substandard Ally as born that way by mobilizing symbolic codes of biological essentialism and choice. In this minoritizing narrative, the threat of heterosexuals “catching” homosexuality should be neutralized and contained only within the *homosexual body* of the Substandard Ally. However, this assertion is rendered incoherent because the alt-right is simultaneously deploying universalizing narratives that paint gay culture as contaminating heterosexuals and degenerating American culture.

First, the Substandard Ally is made a sympathetic character by framing their sexuality as biologically predetermined. By making homosexuality an immutable characteristic, they are no longer culpable for their sexual transgression:

I understand that, and quite frankly, homosexuality does disturb me on an instinctual level- it's an evolutionary dead-end, and it's just not the natural order of things. However, gays can't actually just choose to be straight. Because it's genetic, I can't really begrudge them for it, \*\*as long as they keep it private and away from the public eye.\*\*  
(yung\_hitler, September)

I'm no fan of homosexuality, and in an ideal world, it wouldn't exist. By ""natural,"" I meant that they're born that way; in fact, I'd bet a majority of them (at least not the degenerate flamboyant ones) really don't want to be gay. Just because they're gay, it



doesn't mean that they can't still be our allies in our fight for our homelands. My one request from them is that they keep it private." (yung\_hitler, September)

A primary strategy vilifying the Degenerate homosexual is the contagion premise wherein gayness is obtained by promoting a gay agenda, catching the contagion, or from older homosexuals recruiting children (Walters 2014:135). Framing sexuality as an immutable genetic characteristic of the Substandard Ally neutralizes these threats and promotes a benign homosexuality. Subsequently, the promotion of a benign homosexuality narrative opens the possibility for the Substandard ally to be involved in “the fight for our homelands.” The “fight for our homelands” implies not only the maintenance of white supremacy, it more specifically implicates white patriarchy. By identifying homosexuality as “an evolutionary dead-end” and “just not the natural order of things,” yung\_hitler reinforces heterosexuality as the normative ideal against which all other sexualities are hierarchically valued.

The search for an underlying biological cause for homosexuality permeates the narrative identity of gay men through the institution of medicine, in LGBT movements, and by personal identity narratives from redditors claiming to be gay. Outside white supremacist movements, a scientific explanation for homosexuality is searched for in studies examining twins, birth order, hormone levels, and prenatal stress, often with inconclusive results (Walters 2014). The symbolic code of “hormones” is often deployed in crafting sexual stories searching for a cause of homosexuality: “I wasn’t sexually abused as a child so it’s probably more of a hormone thing. I have a lot of testosterone apparently, a bit above average according to a recent blood test” (BiffleBall, December). Importantly, this story is characterized by an *excess* of testosterone. The coupling of “excess,” “deficiency,” or “imbalance” with deviant behavior is often mobilized in the minority model of homo/heterosexual definition that seeks to locate an origin of homosexuality (Sedgwick 2008:43).

The cause for their sexuality is not sexual abuse, which would render them a passive, feminine victim. Instead, they are gay because their testosterone levels are too high. In drawing upon widely held beliefs that testosterone and masculinity are inextricably linked (Sapolsky 2012), the Substandard Ally is distanced from the feminine Degenerate homosexual. The Substandard Ally echoes the sex endocrinology of the late 1950s that identified testosterone as the “male” hormone and estrogen as the “female” hormone, both deeply organized by cultural notions that painted women as the passive counterpart to the active man, they both subsequently provide a scientific language with which women’s subordinate status to men could be legitimated (Oudshoorn 1994). In this way, scientific claims that link testosterone to images of a high (usually heterosexual) libido, physical prowess, and aggression function to justify patriarchy. For the Substandard Ally, testosterone -- and masculinity by extension -- becomes the basis for an alliance between heterosexual and homosexual men for the purpose of perpetuating patriarchal gender inequality.

Central to storying the Substandard Ally is the deployment of symbolic code of choice. The alt-right utilizes Islam or Islamic countries as a foil to the US to demonstrate that the Substandard Ally has no choice in his sexuality:

It is so blatantly and intuitively clear that homosexuality is genetic, just based on the fact that no one would want to be stoned or hanged in Islamic shitholes for being gay, that you render yourselves as scientifically illiterate shitheads worse than the evangelical right. (independent\_thinker, October)

The Substandard Ally narrative takes gay people’s existence in (perceived to be) homophobic contexts as evidence that men cannot chose to be hetero- or homosexual. Additionally, “islamic shitholes” serves as a foil against which the US is given a moral upper hand because they do not “stone or hang” gay people. In deploying “islamic shitholes” as foils to the US, the Substandard Ally narrative evokes sentiments of American exceptionalism, tapping into audience’s beliefs in

America's superiority over other nations. In subsuming increased tolerance towards gay men under American exceptionalism, this sexual storying deploys homonationalist discourses that use increased tolerance of (some) homosexuals in the US as a sort of sleight of hand to continue racist and xenophobic practices that are grounded in white supremacy and colonialism (Puar 2007).

The Substandard Ally is organized by a search for the origin of homosexuality, which the alt-right locates in the realm of biological predetermination through the deployment of symbolic codes of genetics, hormones, and choice. In appropriating the narrative of the closet, the Substandard Ally utilizes minoritizing discourses that construct a homosexual body to stabilize homosexual identity within the individual, a stability that is predicated upon the separation of nature/culture as separate spheres. Here, the (il)logic of the closet narrative ignores the instability of the nature/culture binary, forgoing recognition that interpretations of nature are always shaped by culture.

### **Redrawing Respectability**

The second strategy used to justify the Substandard Ally's inclusion in the alt-right is redrawing the lines of respectability in the sex hierarchy. Whereas the distinction between "good" and "bad" erotic conduct once placed homosexuality squarely on the inferior side of the line, the Substandard Ally troubles this narrative. This move is accomplished by imagining a "normal" homosexual, distancing him from gay culture, and identifying other threats to the maintenance of white patriarchy.

First, the type-of-person construct of the Substandard Ally is imagined as gender normative in every manner, save their status as homosexual. For white\_nationalist, he identifies

as homosexual but specifies “I have a normal career and fiance and house and go to church. I don't call unnecessary attention to myself and I stay away from the ""standard fuckparty"" degenerate losers” (September). The degenerate “fuckparty” is the foil to this “normal” life which values proud participation in a capitalist system, the American dream of home ownership, and religious involvement. The deployment of the symbolic code of fiance shores up monogamous marital relationships as “normal,” whether heterosexual or homosexual. The Substandard Ally is also “normal” because, while he cannot access it himself, the nuclear family is seen as the ideal intimate arrangement:

I'm gay, but I've always understood the centrality and importance of the nuclear family. I think children should have a father and mother, and they should be the same race. I don't expect special status in society, and I don't think gay marriage should be a thing. Pride parades are degenerate and disgusting. It's possible to be a classy gay.  
(Sophisticated\_Homo, September).

The nuclear family again becomes central to competing constructions of homosexual men in the alt-right’s imagination. While the Degenerate is storied as demanding “special status,” the Substandard Ally rebuffs the granting of same-sex marriage. Broadening the lines around respectable sex to include the “normal” homosexual simultaneously narrows the definition of “good” heterosexual erotic conduct, in effect doubling down on compulsory heterosexuality and reproducing patriarchy.

While monogamous partnerships and nuclear families retained their place atop the sexual value hierarchy, partnerships between two men could be deemed respectable because there is twice the masculinity:

I'd like to remind you, that a relationship with two alpha males is twice as manly as one with a beta bitch ... it's just as traditional to find soldiers living, fighting and sleeping together, even from our tribal days, than it is to find Mummy and Daddy and 2.5 children living in the nuclear family. ... The only problem with gays is that they shove it down our throats with big parades and extra rights, affirmative action and forcing businesses to bake cakes; and the fact that they're led by effeminate, flamboyant sissies. The only thing that's more of a sissy than a camp man is most women. (Vrium, November)

The language of “alpha male” and “beta bitch” are lifted from the lexicon of the men’s rights activists also on reddit. Homosexual relations between men are normalized by linking them to environments where homosociality is the norm, like the military. The mention of the Soldier evokes an image of a masculine defender, valiantly placing his life on the line for his country. The deployment of masculinity alongside patriotism here aligns with American values of “supporting our troops,” eliciting respect for the Substandard Ally. This narrative denigrates femininity, both in the “beta bitch” and the “effeminate, flamboyant sissies” leading the movement.

Second, the Substandard Ally narrative redraws respectability by constructing gay culture, not gay men, as the degenerating force. The primary tactic to accomplish this is by framing gay culture as “hijacked by progressive liberals” (european\_defender, December):

Degeneracy and promiscuity of gays is a product of leftism, just like degeneracy and promiscuity of straight guys and girls is a product of leftism. Frankly, I am more repulsed by straight guys who are into pegging, than I am of gays. And guess what, if we talk about absolute numbers, there are more straight guys into pegging than there are gays. (independent\_thinker, August)

Particular erotic acts become degenerating in place of the erotic identities of those performing them. Kelly (2017) describes a post-9/11 masculinity crisis where white men felt the need to re-masculinize themselves in the face of the hypermasculinized “Muslim invader” who attacked a passive and, as such, feminized America (71). Additionally, the conflation of more left-leaning millennial politics became rhetorically equated with weakness and femininity that opened America up to attack from a racialized, hypermasculine Other. The Substandard Ally’s inclusion in the alt-right then is predicated upon a rejection of the feminized “left” and an embrace of masculinized far right politics.

Lastly, the alt-right redraws respectability by identifying other threats to white patriarchy. If the ultimate goal of the white patriarchy imagined by the alt-right is to ensure the continuity of the white race, homosexuals pose little threat:

Homosexuals are a tiny portion of the population and can't really make a dent in the future of the race one way or the other ... It would make more sense to demonize heterosexual couples who don't marry or those who choose to only have one or two kids. That's the constituency that actually matters, and the one that the future of the white race is contingent upon. Just because homosexuality shouldn't be promoted doesn't mean it's some great issue that everything else rests upon. (white\_pride, September)

Heterosexual couples with few or no kids become the threat to the continuity of the white race, not the Substandard Ally, because they (are presumed to) have the ability to reproduce. Again, the lines of respectability broaden to include the “good” homosexual at the same time that they narrow the boundaries of what constitutes as “good” for heterosexuals. An acceptable gay masculinity in the alt-right relies heavily on heteronormative *and* homonormative gender and sexual practices, which stress assimilationist impulses that erase gay difference and continue to privilege white patriarchy (Ahlm 2017; Duggan 2003; Walters 2014).

Other identifiable threats to the white birth rate include “no-fault divorce, feminism, and the welfare state” (independent\_thinker, August). Embedded within the threat of the “welfare state” is the symbolic code of the Welfare Queen, a Black woman having children for the sole purpose of taking advantage of government benefits (Cohen 1997). Indeed, it is clear that a focus on the continuity of the white race is intended to ensure the privileging of whiteness. However, by explicitly identifying “feminism” as contributing to white genocide, the alt-right is implicitly advocating for not only the maintenance of white supremacy, but more specifically, white patriarchy. The inclusion of the Substandard Ally in the alt-right, then, becomes a site to explore how the alliance between whiteness and maleness supersede homophobia.

Mobilizing the minority-model has indeed been politically efficacious, the fruits of which are visible in the passing of (some) civil rights to LGBT people. However, the (il)logic of the closet still presents an incoherent conceptualization of the homo/heterosexual definition, reflected in the competing Degenerate and Substandard Ally characters storied by the alt-right. Although the alt-right mirrors the broader cultural trend of redrawing the line of respectable sex to include some monogamous, white gay men onto the “good” side of the sexual value system, this comes at the expense of further regulating heterosexuality. The Substandard Ally narrative suggests an uncoupling of good/bad from heterosexual/homosexual sexual binaries. However, this shift fails to challenge the hierarchical system of sexual value more broadly, enabling the continuity of white patriarchy.

### **Sexual Storying as Boundary Work: Masculinity and Movement Membership**

The following section examines how contested notions concerning masculinity shape boundary work processes amongst the alt-right. First, I explore how three characteristics producing the Degenerate character – sexual practices, anti-Semitism, gay culture – are organized by shared understandings of masculinity. Second, I turn to how the Substandard Ally narrative impedes collective identity construction because he embodies contested understandings of masculinity among the alt-right. These negotiations are then analyzed to explore how r/altright is not only constructing the narrative character of the gay man, but also negotiating meanings of gender and sexuality more broadly.

Indeed, the alt-right is clear in who they are not: The Degenerate. Feminized by his sexual practices, proximity to Jewish men, and participation in gay culture, the Degenerate fails to perform alt-right sanctioned masculine practices. Embedded within the Degenerate narrative is

a universalizing frame that makes the alt-right susceptible to the degenerating contagion of homosexuality. First, gay men's sexual practices, specifically the presumption of penetration, equates femininity with sexualized dominance. The Degenerate is "disease ridden" due to his "promiscuity" and "damaging sexual practices like anal and oral sex." The feminization of penetration is a long established logic for understanding sex between two men, both inside the white supremacist imagination (Daniels 1997) and outside (Pascoe 2012; Rubin 1984). Also continues to devalue sex outside of "hetero, married, etc." erotic behaviors and makes sex excessively dirty (Rubin 1984:10). Second, the Degenerate is painted as a "Jewish constructed device" by deploying traditional white supremacist rhetoric that portrays Jewish men as effeminate (Daniels 1997; Taylor 1996). Granting of (some) civil rights to gays is also taken as evidence of the feminization of the nation-state because of the "feminizing" power of Jewish men in the "ZOG."

Lastly, the Degenerate's participation "gay culture" -- "parading through the streets with a dildo strapped to [their] crotch" -- distances them further yet from proper alt-right practices of masculinity. "Gay culture" is portrayed as feminine because it has been "hijacked" by "progressive liberals" whose multicultural values of diversity and acceptance threaten the continuity of the white race and foster the normalization of homosexuality. The threat of gay normalization is grounded in a belief that "gay propaganda" can convert the youth to homosexuality, makes the alt-right susceptible to the degenerating contagion of homosexuality, and weakens the nationstate.

While the Degenerate cements an idea of who they are *not*, the Substandard Ally troubles the alt-right's narratives of who they *are*. Sexual storying by the alt-right also demonstrates boundary work amongst those considered participants, that is, "the *us* is solidified not just



against an external *them*, but also against *thems* inside” (Gamson 1997:180). Because the alt-right engages in not only constructing a collective movement identity but also in constructing gender and sexuality more broadly, competing moral evaluations of gay men’s masculinity impede both of these practices. There is a clear delineation between the alt-right and the Degenerate. However, also internal contest between heterosexuals and Substandard Ally in the alt-right.

The Substandard Ally displays a white, heterosexual masculinity that appropriates a non-hegemonic practice of tolerating gay men, enabling two seemingly contradictory identities to be reconciled. The inclusion of the Substandard Ally into the alt-right signals a shift in the relationship between masculinity and homophobia in white supremacist movements, a shift that mirrors broader cultural transformation in conventional practices of masculinity (Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Demetrio 2001; Heath 2014). As a consequence of these changing understandings of masculinities, the alt-right faces a conflict in their collective identity construction between hegemonic masculinity that is predicated upon homophobia and newer, emergent masculinities that are, at least nominally, more tolerant of gay men (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). The inability to reconcile these two competing understandings of masculinity leaves the alt-right with a fragmented collective gender identity. While it is intuitive that race is key to boundary work, sexual storying of gay men shows how meanings of race are always co-constructed with gender and sexuality.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

By evoking anti-Semitic tropes and making appeals to both religion and science, the alt-right constructed the Degenerate as “hedonistic” and “diseased” “pedophiles” sent by the Jewish “Zionist Occupied Government” to destroy the white race. In constructing the Degenerate as diametrically opposed to them, the alt-right centered values they regard as central to the movement, namely nuclear family, objectivity, salience of white identity, and hegemonic masculinity. A second gay character was also storied as a foil to the Degenerate: the Substandard Ally. The Substandard Ally was produced via the (il)logic of the closet and by redrawing the line between good/bad sex. The Substandard Ally was born homosexual and as long as he distanced himself from gay culture, he could be a member of the alt-right. Embedded in both of these narrative characters are assumptions about appropriate performances of masculinity, which become central in negotiating movement inclusion/exclusion processes. In using sexual storying as boundary work, the Degenerate gay man is excluded because of his feminized practices of his (presumed) penetration, association with the effeminate Jewish man, and his participation in gay culture. The Substandard Ally troubles this equation between gay men and femininity. The Substandard Ally has a place in the movement because contaminating threat of homosexuality is contained with the homosexual body. Instead, gay culture becomes the degenerating force. The following section turns to the work these stories are doing within the context of white patriarchy.

Ultimately, I argue, that systems of white patriarchy are reproduced in the alt-right’s sexual storying of gay men and that there is a particular danger in the mobilization of the

Substandard Ally narrative character. First, the Substandard Ally is dangerous because it is an example of frame realignment that holds the potential to make the alt-right more appealing to a sympathetic audience, ensuring the durability of the white supremacist movement over time. In appropriating the minoritizing discourse from the logic of the closet, the alt-right neutralizes the threat of the contaminating homosexual and can thus grant the “normal” homosexual inclusion into the movement. The Substandard Ally narrative aligns more closely with the broader cultural narratives of gay men that are becoming more tolerant. Frame realignment presents the danger of a persistent white supremacist movement, even in the unequal racial structure that stigmatizes overtly racist rhetoric. Secondly, the Substandard Ally leaves Rubin’s (1984) sexual value system and white patriarchy as institutionalized inequalities unchallenged. Shifting the line between “good” and “bad” sex to include the “normal” homosexual still leaves the system of hierarchical evaluation of sex in place, perpetuating narratives that there is a narrow definition of “good” sexuality (white, monogamous, marital, traditional family, etc.) and paints all other erotic conduct as dirty and contaminating. The broader cultural transformations regarding masculinity are integral to this renegotiation.

While incorporating somewhat more tolerant and inclusive views about gay men seems, on the surface, to be indicative of a shift in the relationship between white, heterosexual hegemonic masculinity and homophobia, it is instead a hybridization that even further obscures inequality stemming from white patriarchy (Demetriou 2001). While some argue that “inclusive masculinity” brings increased acceptance of gay men and signals homophobia’s decreasing ability to regulate men (Anderson 2016), others point to the continuing durability of sexual inequality to be indicative that changes in individual practice do not challenge patriarchy. Demetriou’s (2001) theorizing of hybrid masculinities instead argues that incorporating “bits and

pieces” of marginalized masculinities and/or femininities on its own does not pose a threat to existing power relations between genders. Demetriou contends that hegemonic masculinity is best thought of as a “hybrid bloc” that appropriates practices from various non-hegemonic masculinities in order to reconfigure itself in alignment with prevailing cultural understandings of that particular historical moment. “Hybridization,” Demetriou argues, “is thus a strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy” (2001:349). Central to understanding hegemonic masculinity as hybridity is not just a recognition that hegemony is flexible and adaptive, but also a recognition that these changes are often “deceptive and unrecognizable,” making hegemonic masculinity harder to identify and thus challenge (355).

Importantly, the flexibility to effectively try on other masculinities is a privilege afforded mostly to white, straight, young men (Bridges 2014). Bridges and Pascoe (2016) suggest that “homophobia can both remain a normative foundation in contemporary Western masculinity and that men’s homophobic attitudes can be drastically changing” because homophobia is yet another dynamic system of inequality that adapts to the historical moment (414). Even the granting of some civil liberties, such as the legalization of same-sex marriage, continues to privilege “gender-normative, middle-class, well-educated, white” LGBT folks at the expense of those most harmed by homophobia (Malatino 2017:162; Walters 2014). Most importantly, in obscuring inequality, the normative status of heterosexuality remains unchallenged.

Lastly, the Substandard Ally perpetuates dangerous sexual citizenship narratives that privilege white heterosexuality and American imperialism. As a white supremacist ethnonationalist movement, alt-right is concerned with who is granted citizenship and access to rights in America, a vision ideally only extended to white people. The granting of (some) civil rights to the LGBT community signals a shift from the binary of the polluting homosexual/pure

heterosexual to a good/bad sexual citizenship binary (Seidman 2013). As the binary delimiting good from bad sexual citizens is uncoupled from the homo/heterosexual division, there is an increased regulation of sexual control over all erotic conduct and citizens (Seidman 2013). The systems of inequality leave the normative status of heterosexuality and whiteness untouched.

Sexual citizenship narratives do work beyond the borders of the US where the alt-right is primarily situated. Homonationalist discourses (Puar 2007) permeate these “inclusive” narratives, reinforcing notions of American exceptionalism that now weaponize increased acceptance of LGBT people into a liberal nation state as grounds to permeate racist and xenophobic practices of domination that are grounded in legacies of slavery and colonialism, evidenced in the alt-right’s continued use of “islamic shitholes” or “muslim” countries as foils to America. The deployment of homonationalist discourses by both the alt-right and by broader cultural narratives surrounding American exceptionalism not only threatens to perpetuate racial and sexual inequality within the US, but also on a global scale.

The sexual storying by the alt-right examined throughout this project speaks to the shifting understandings of masculinity in our current historical moment. Both within the alt-right and beyond, the relationship between masculinity and homophobia is undergoing some degree of transformation. However, these findings also encourage a healthy skepticism when interpreting the potential consequences of these transformations on white patriarchy. While the alt-right and broader cultural narratives regarding gay men may appear more inclusive of sexual difference, they do little to dismantle the institutionalized inequality along the lines of gender, sexuality, and race.

While this project explored the ways the alt-right stories gay men, future research should investigate how the narratives gay men in the alt-right articulate seemingly incoherent identities.

Additionally, this project was limited in its ability to observe interaction between members on an active social hub of the alt-right. Future virtual ethnographies of the alt-right online can illuminate more detail on the interactions amongst members and how more information about the users themselves can provide context to their sexual storying.

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## APPENDIX A

The data for this project is from a publicly available dataset of reddit comments. The dataset was compiled by reddit user /u/Stuck\_In\_the\_Matrix in r/datasets, a subreddit dedicated to posting publicly available datasets for research purposes. The dataset was initially created by /u/Stuck\_In\_the\_Matrix writing a python script that interacted with reddit's application program interface (API) to pull the information off the website. In this case, the initial script pulled off all of the 1.7 billion comments from reddit existing at that time. The dataset was then uploaded to Google's BigQuery, a web service that provides storage, the ability to share, and manage data analysis for particularly large datasets such as this, where it remained public for download by interested researchers. The data for my project are a subset of this larger collection. They were pulled using an SQL script that interfaced with the dataset stored on Google's BigQuery and downloaded into a JSON file on my person computer on March 24, 2018. I first used a query that downloaded all of the post threads from r/altright subreddit during 2016. I then used a second query that created a table containing all of the posts' additional content including their date/time, post ID, post author, post title, post text, comment ID, comment parent ID, comment author, comment content, pic link, and permalink. A final query joined the two tables together to make the dataset that was then downloaded from Google BigQuery's cloud service in a csv file and converted to excel for cleaning. The data were uploaded into excel for analysis. Although the data are no longer on the Reddit site itself, they still constitute as public data because they are publicly stored in Google's BigQuery.

## **APPENDIX B: THREAD TITLES**

Below are the thread titles examined in this study and the number of comments next to their title. My final sample contained 7 total threads, and a word count of 14,392 words.

*Keyword: "gay"*

- Alt Right Civil War: Jews and Gays vs. Whites (57)
- Are there other gays here? What are you doing about it? (220)
- Being anti-gay is a mistake (41)
- Gay members of the alt-right (37)
- Gays in the alt-right? (200)
- Is the alt-right unanimous on gay marriage and adoption? (21)
- The gay question (44)