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Ryan T. Summers

*Ursinus College*, [rysummers@ursinus.edu](mailto:rysummers@ursinus.edu)

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The Rise of the Alt-Right Movement

Ryan Summers

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Mentor: Dr. Anthony Nadler

## **Abstract**

The alt-right was once seen as an obscure subculture festering on sites like Reddit and 4chan. They were written off as a bunch of trolls and racists too scared to organize, and media outlets saw them as a fringe movement with little hope of growing. However, the 2016 Presidential election of Donald Trump is one of many important events the alt-right rallied behind. They are even leaving their computer screens and beginning to hold ‘free-speech’ rallies across the country. This project asks very important questions about how this has become possible. What are the nuances of this movement? How were they covered by traditional conservative media outlets? Maybe most importantly, how were they able to manipulate the media agenda and enter the discourse of American politics? I delve into these important questions to understand how messages of white-nationalism, isolationism, and anti-globalism are being re-framed to target and re-energize a younger demographic of conservatives. I hope this project is one of many future studies that can be used to analyze the history and importance of a modern counter-culture of Internet trolls, media manipulators, and organizers in a hyper-partisan news and political environment.

I found myself trying to understand the alt-right movement during the upset election of Donald Trump. Learning how this group entered mainstream status was quite amazing to me. I remember reading about the Twitter campaigns against Clinton and her health, and I dove into who and what was behind this Twitter storm. When I came across the term alt-right, I was surprised by the movement's goals. I also asked myself, what would draw someone to this movement? How has white-nationalism, isolationism, and anti-Semitism been re-framed to energize a younger demographic of conservatives? When I developed this research project, I narrowed my research down to three guiding questions. What factions fall under the term "alt-right", and what are their views for an ideal society? To what extent are new media technologies responsible for the rise of the alt-right and how have groups taken advantage of new media affordances? Finally, how are established right-wing and conservative media outlets like *Breitbart* and *The National Review* covering the alt-right movement? For each question, I grappled with figuring out what scholarly methods and evidence could offer insight, gathered research, and finally responded with an essay.

### **What factions fall under the term alt-right and what are their views for an ideal society?**

What factions constitutes as part of the alt-right movement? This is a question that people on the left and the right will need to know. I delve into this question to understand the nuances of this new movement. Some factions can draw parallels to European groups, especially in France, which has seen a similar move to the right in political ideology. These factions include Identitarianism, Neoreactionism, the Manosphere, & other subcultures. Many factions that fall into this term also have very different tenants of their ideologies.

The first faction I want to look at is the Identitarian movement. According to the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), the Identitarian movement has very similar ideologies to the New Right movement in France. These similarities include a mix of European chauvinism, fierce localism, biological determinism, and left-wing ideas such as Swiss-style versions of direct democracy. This doctrine is the closest to fascism within the alt-right movement. Richard Spencer of the National Policy Institute (NPI) is the most popular figure of this ideology. He has featured an essay contest titled “Why I’m An Identitarian.” Identitarian groups like Spencer’s support isolationism and are staunchly opposed to multiculturalism, or the idea that different cultures and ethnicities should be celebrated in a society.

The spread of this ideology can be linked to early 2000s France, when Generation Identitaire, a youth wing of the Bloc Identitaire, rose. This was a French anti-immigrant coalition that opposed any type of imperialist forces threatening French identity. In 2010, French Identitarians held a “pork sausage and booze” party in Paris as a deliberate provocation against practicing Muslims. Here in the US, Identitarian ideology has grown, though not to the extent it has in Europe. In a Radix Journal article published by the NPI, writer Nathan Wyatt looks at the Generation Identity movement in the US (Nathan Wyatt, 2015). He views this as the best conceptualization of the NPI’s movement and questions where this will head. One worrisome factor he notes is that the movement has a big presence on the Internet but not in the streets and organizing. Looking more into this faction of the alt-right will be interesting to see how far along this groups has come. According to Matthew Lyons, the Identitarianism movement greatly adheres to the European New Right (ENR) doctrine of ethnic and racial separatism, which is needed to defend bio-cultural diversity. The NPI holds many conferences featuring radical-right speakers in both Europe and the U.S. Another group in this movement is the Traditional Youth

Network (TYN). This group claims to support all kinds of nationalists and warns that a secular, relativist, and global world will fail.

In order to better understand the Identitarian movement, I want to focus more on NPI's Richard Spencer. I have highlighted what seems to be some interesting contradictions in his adherence to a white ethno-state. He views that allowing minorities into the movement as a separate entity can actually help the movement's goals. Spencer has expressed respect for Native Americans as a people. He has also expressed that African Americans has a form of spirituality which he admires. In a Huffington Post article, Spencer looks toward others outside the movement. He suggests that their interests could help the movement and that minorities could even serve as potential allies: "The alt-right is willing to work with allies of color". (Nelson, 2016). According to Richard Spencer, minorities will only realize full happiness when they realize that returning to the lands of their ancestors would be best for everyone. Could he be playing a PR stunt to attract more people to the movement, or does he actually hold these views at all? Whatever the case, using this to attract more people to get behind the movement could be a strategic tactic. It is also noteworthy to recognize that other racist movements have expressed that racial separatism would benefit all cultures. This draws parallels to other racist movements' thinking. A great example is the relationship between the American Nazi Party and the Nation of Islam who both held anti-Semitic views. What's also noteworthy is Richard Spencer's early involvement in growing the alt-right movement. His site, *AlternativeRight.com*, has been a massive voice for the alt-right movement. Matthew Lyons notes how developed ties with other publications has grown the reach of white ethno-state ideology. *AlternativeRight.com* has partners with *VDARE.com*, *American Renaissance*, *The Occidental Quarterly*, and *Counter Currents Publishing* (Lyons, 11-12). These publications push the Identitarians' anti-immigration,

anti-Semitic, and white ethno-state ideologies. Even though some of the ideas differ for each publication, the network of ideas helped to spread its messages and grow the movement. From about 2010 to 2014 the movement was growing on the Internet through these connections, then it saw a massive spike in coverage in 2015 to enter mainstream political discourse.

Neoreactionism (also known as NRx) is another faction of the alt-right movement. According to *neoreaction.net*, this movement's origins are attributed to blogger Curtis Yarvin, who also goes by the name Mencius Moldbug. This faction, according to Lyons (2017), rejects egalitarian principles, argues that differences in human intelligence and ability are mainly genetic, and believes that cultural and political elites wrongfully limit the range of acceptable discourse (p. 34). According to Gray (2017), writing in *The Atlantic*, Yarvin's ideology opposes all forms of democracy. Yarvin views democracy as a failure and describes it as "ineffective and destructive." In Yarvin's view, all governments should be autocratic. *Social Matter* serves as a major online publication and thought machine for this ideology. It provides users links to its sub-Reddit page and lists books and essays by neoreactionaries such as Mencius Moldbug (Yarvin), Karl Boetel, and James Donald. According to *Social Matter*, the movement theorizes that society has decayed under a history of bad governments masked with social and technological wealth. NRx'ers proclaim that society needs to undergo a "restoration program." The current United States government would essentially become obsolete and a nationalized banking, media, and education system would be under the control of a single entity or group and centuries of "dysfunction" would be rectified ("About Neoreaction," n.d.).

The ideology is also enthralled with hyper-masculine visions of men. In Post-Anathema, a Tumblr page, common images depict soldiers with guns, tanks, spacecraft, and Greek Gods. What's surprising is that this is one of the only factions which didn't back Trump during the

2016 election. Matthew Lyons in *Ctrl-Alt-Delete* (2017) documents this given their autocratic views. Featured in a *Vox* article by Dylan Matthews, NRxer Michael Perilloux is critical of Donald Trump:

He is simply another phenomenon within the arcane workings of the system, as worthy of support as the ebb and flow of the tides. Surely, the unprecedented nature of his campaign warrants excited interest as a historical case-study and promising fore-shock of a true restoration, but he is not the king, and we have a ways to go yet (Matthews, Dylan, 2016).

For neoreactionaries, anything short of a monarchy is a failure, even though Donald Trump has authoritarian undertones. For NRxers, Donald Trump still does not represent a candidate that can advance their far-fetched goals and ideals. What is also important to note, is how neoreactionaries differ from alt-right groups under the 'Identitarian' umbrella. For the most part, neoreactionaries do not emphasize anti-Semitic views as other alt-right counterparts. There's major differences than other alt-right factions, however, their ideas overlap and deserve to be placed in a similar ideology camp.

Another faction to look at is the "Manosphere". This faction in particular has received a lot of coverage for their misogynistic views. *Return of Kings*, *National Coalition for Men*, *puahate*, and Paul Elam's *Voice for Men* are prominent websites that are part of the Men's Rights Movement. These groups frames feminism as destructive for men. According to Rebecca Cohen (2015), writing in *Mother Jones*, the manosphere is "a loose-knit network of groups and activists who believe men are an oppressed class. Most adherents consider Warren Farrel to be the intellectual father of men's rights". One of the most infamous members of the manosphere was Elliot Rodger, the gunman who committed the Isla Vista massacre and often visited the site

*Puahate*. This name derives from “pua” which stands for pickup artists, who are self-proclaimed alpha males attempting to seduce women through a system of psychological gambits. By contrast, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) is another faction of the manosphere. According to Cohen (2016): “MGTOW is a faction that vows to avoid contact and relationships with women because they think women will inevitably treat them as “disposable utilities.” Men within the movement call women who support the movement part of the “honey badger brigade” as a way to poke fun at feminists who view these women as ignorant. The Honey Badger Brigade even has its own website founded by Karen Straughan. The site publishes podcasts and YouTube videos that touch base on men’s issues. She stresses “male disposability” is the main issue they try to address. It is quite interesting to see how women in this branch of far-right ideology has been able to work with men who are spewing misogynistic rhetoric from sites like *Men Going Their Own Way* and *Return of Kings*. Most surprisingly, this is the one branch of the alt-right that seems to have gained the most female members as a more extreme male-oriented movement.

An extreme offshoot of this movement is male Tribalism. Its main leader, Jack Donovan, is a staunch male supremacist who advocates for a system of patriarchal rule based on “tribal” comradeship among male warriors” (Lyons, 27). In his ideal governance system, men would gain power based on meritocracy and would be expected to train and serve as warriors. This sounds a lot like a modern vision of Sparta. Donovan praises the group, *Wolves of Vinland*, which is an off-the-grid community residing in rural Virginia. In a 2014 blog post on Donovan’s website, he writes a narrative following several members of the group. Donovan focuses on the rituals of fighting which prove who is the most masculine in the group. He even touches base on a video he saw trying to convince people that telling a males to “man up” is terrible to do. He retorts with: “It’s far worse to let a young man luxuriate in his own tears and fears and fantasize that

he's something special for doing nothing special. That's a degradation of his spirit and a waste of a perfectly good Y chromosome" ("A Time for Wolves," 2014). His most controversial view is his advocacy of "androphilia". According to Donovan, masculine men should love and have sex with other men. This is where his ideas may seem too radical for other alt-right members as many view any form of homosexuality as a threat to the movement. Seeing this as off putting to many members of the alt-right, it is easy to see why male Tribalism has not gained the membership that other alt-right groups have. It will be interesting to see if other groups like the Wolves of Vinland are able to grow.

While much of the mainstream conservative right has been associated with strong Christian beliefs, the alt-right and many of its leaders profess strong Neo-Pagan beliefs. According to Micahel Knowles (2016), writing in the conservative outlet *Daily Wire*, the alt-right admires Christendom for uniting the continent and giving a white European Identity. Members also reveres European paganism, very similar to Nazis, and its fusion with aspects of Christian beliefs. However, many alt-right members describe themselves as agnostics, former Christians, or even atheists (Knowles, 2016). Stephen McNallen of *AlternativeRight.com* is one of many involved in the Identitarian movement who self-identifies as a pagan. In a Radix entry, published by NPI founder Richard Spencer, McNallen discusses these beliefs (McNallen, 2010). "I am a pagan because it is the only way I can be true to who, and what, I am. I am a pagan because the best things in our civilization come from pre-Christian Europe" (McNallen, 2010). In Milo Yiannopoulos and Alum Bokhari's (2016) famous Breitbart essay on the alt-right, the piece contains five references to "tribe", seven to "race", thirteen to "the west" and "western", but only one to Christianity. What's important about this analysis, is it shows the movement is more focused on identity politics surrounding the white race and the western values that are held

deeply within the movement. Christianity, in this case, has been problematic because it has not allowed for the tribe to continue. In an ideological sense, it may have held a common set of beliefs, but it did not keep intact the blood lines that have been lost over time. It would be very interesting to see how future studies of the alt-right tackle the religion question and gather a more exact representation of the religious demographics that comprise this movement.

Members of the alt-right movement are increasingly concerned with Christianity because it crosses boundaries and mixes both blood and soil. Richard Spencer was also heavily influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche who was an outspoken opponent of Christianity. This shift to secularism can help explain how Trump also wrestled the GOP nomination from establishment conservatives. Trump trailed Ted Cruz among Republicans who attended religious services every week by 15 points. However, he led Cruz by a massive 27 points among those who didn't (Beinart, 2017). Even though many alt-right members are turning away from traditional views of Christianity, many hold much stronger opposition to Jewish and Muslim individuals than those who are avid church-goers. In the same *Atlantic* piece, Beinart (2017) references a study completed by Benjamin Knoll who found that Catholics, born-again Christians, and Protestants were actually more hostile the more they resented church. This can be echoed by many trolling memes that have been used extensively by those in the movement. Looking again at Andrew Anglin's "A Normie's Guide to the Alt-Right", we see how religious prejudice is intertwined with anti-Semitic views. Le Happy Merchant is one of the most prominent memes that alt-right members use to target the Jewish community. According to Anglin, "It is used for the purpose of dehumanizing the Jew as a type of evil monster, rather than a human being, while also being very funny its offensiveness" (p. 28).

Another interesting faction is a group called the Proud Boys. This can be best described as a fraternity. The group was created in 2016 by Gavin McInnes. They have similar views about the importance of fraternal ties that whites need to uphold, but try to distance themselves from skinheads and neo-Nazis. McInnes has also tried to distance himself from white-nationalists in the alt-right movement as he believes they also take their views too far. In a *Counter-Currents* piece by Spencer Quinn, he criticizes McInnes's video on the alt-right and his denouncement of "white chauvinists" in favor of "Western chauvinists". *Counter-Currents* is an alt-right publication that adheres closely to Identitarian ideology and is a close partner of *AlternativeRight.com*. According to Quinn, he views his "Western Chauvinism" argument flawed as minorities would never accept the premise that McInnes bases his argument. Also, if we are to assume that the Alt-Lite may be wrong, it would be too late to rectify the damages. "After enough race-mixing and miscegenation, as is promoted by the Alt Lite, if it is eventually proven that race really is as important as the alt-right says it is, then we're courting disaster" (Quinn, 2017). Thus, McInnes may garner a backlash from the alt-right for not drawing a color line.

The Proud Boys name is connected to a song in the Aladdin musical "Proud of Your Boy". This song is about Aladdin apologizing to his mother for his immature ways. McInnes heard the song at a school recital and thought that no one should be singing an apologetic song for being proud as a boy (Sommer, 2017). McInnes has tried to show that he is a far-right conservative and maintain the idea that Western culture is still superior. The Proud Boys Network even has rules that designates room for "Black Proud Boys" and "Gay Proud Boys" as long as they self-identify as "Western Chauvinists" and "they don't whine about racism or blame it for their problems" (Disser, 2016). Like the majority of alt-right groups, they heavily backed

the election of Donald Trump. What's especially concerning of this faction is its use of militant tactics. The Proud Boys like to get together and get drunk at rallies and instigate fights against antifascists (Antifas). McInnes, has also planned public demonstrations with other factions. During the inauguration, a video showcased McInnes reading an excerpt from Pat Buchanan's *Death of the West*, while he led a Proud Boys march to the DeploraBall. Also, anti-Semitic views are still a major aspect of the group. According to McInnes: "Hebrew is "spit talk...the whole language is clearing your throat...It's like Gaza, they're launching little tiny missiles from their mouth onto your shirt" (quoted in Krupkin, 2017).

Similar to the Proud Boys is a group called the Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights (Marcotte, 2017). This group was recently founded by Kyle Chapman who is better known as "Based Stickman". He is known for beating an antifascist protester with a wooden stick at a March pro-Trump rally in Berkeley, CA. In April, Chapman announced the founding of the fraternal organization on Facebook. This group is keen on instigating fights while at political events and rallies (Marcotte, 2017). In cases of violence, the group advocates the use of self-defense. According to David Neiwert of the *Southern Poverty Law Center*: "These guys are looking for a fight, these guys are clearly quasi-fascist, classic protofascists, and they're on the track to full-fledged fascism" (quoted in Marcotte, 2017). As groups like these ultimately form, it will be interesting to see how other conservatives and those on the left respond to acts of violence. Ultimately, there is concern for this kind of rhetoric to instigate violence from these fraternal groups of the alt-right.

Even though there are very few women in the alt-right, it's important to analyze how and why a woman might be drawn to a misogynistic movement. An analysis of one prominent woman involved in alt-right activism may offer insight here. One of the most high-profile

women in the alt-right is Lana Lokteff who co-hosts a white-nationalist talk show with her husband Henrik Palmgren. In Sam Miller's (2017) *Jacobin* article profiling Lokteff, Miller quotes Lokteff as she reduces feminism to the "crazy radical left-wing stuff that we see coming out of Hollywood." Similar to their male counterparts, women within the alt-right movement adhere to white-nationalism. They view multiculturalism is just a way to turn the United States into a cesspool filled with Jewish interests that promote hedonism, race-mixing, and feminism. Instead of feminism, ultra-conservative views of female roles are what should be instilled. To them, it is important to emphasize traditional gender roles and old-fashioned views of a woman's beauty. They also promote mid-century nuclear family values. Miller also examines Lokteff's personal views on gender roles. She rejects feminism as self-centered and ultimately focused solely on a woman's autonomy and not the importance of the family. These views are very similar to those expressed by women who were part of the anti-ERA movement during the 70s. They viewed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) as a way to destroy family households in order to falsely "liberate" women. She also argues that the suffrage movement transferred a "one vote per family" model to a "one vote per woman" model. In her view, women are supposed to share a vote with their husbands. Giving women the right to vote is what inherently stripped the nuclear family function in society. This ended men becoming the breadwinner of the family and ended the motherly and dutiful wife character. When women are accepted as members of the movement, they must emphasize the need to rebuild heteronormative white families with traditional values and gender roles.

Patriarchy, to Lokteff, is what allows the human race to survive. As quoted in Miller (2017), Lokteff asserts: "Once you believe that men are born as the dominant sex, then patriarchy becomes natural, normalized, even necessary: inferior women should "be taken care

of” by men.” It seems when and only when a woman accepts this position, she may be accepted by the alt-right. One of Lokteff’s closest collaborators is Daniel Friberg, co-founder of *altright.com*. He echoes these values in his handbook *The Real Right Returns* (2015). He agrees that the myth of equality of both sexes harms men and women—especially focusing on men who feel they are forced to compete with women in the job market. As a contributor on *Red Ice*, Lokteff has argued that women need to prepare for a race war with the invasion of different religions and ethnicities coming into the United States. She also argues that a cultural Marxist conspiracy is what is behind an attack on white identity and is driving mass immigration. This is what the alt-right means by “white genocide”, that open borders and multiculturalism is going to lead to the downfall of Western culture and whites as a whole.

What is needed for a “political project” to gain traction and attain the status of being a “movement?” According to scholar Jo Freeman (1999) there are four major conditions that allow social movements to thrive. First, there needs to be a pre-existing communication network (Twitter & 4chan). Masses alone do not just create a movement. If people of local areas are not able to be linked in some manner, it will just be an irritant or will fade away completely. If the movement is to spread quickly, the communications network must already exist. Second, the movement must have a communications network that is cooptable. This is the idea that like-minded people must comprise the movement and be open to new ideas to grow the movement. A good example of a cooptable network is the alt-right’s use of Twitter and other forms of media to spread messages. Members use these to ironically misconstrue the true meanings of the movement at first to others. However, this still allows the movement to grow and allows people with similar backgrounds, experiences, or ideas to dictate the main tenants of the alt-right movement. Finally, there must be two distinct patterns that emerge that allow the movement to

grow traction. First, there needs to be a crisis or some kind of event that sparks outrage and a need to create action within the pre-existing network. Next, there needs to be some form of organizing from leaders or groups who begin to disseminate messages and ideas to others within the movement. That's where we see social media personalities like Mike Cernovich and alternative publications create these avenues for expressing and calling on others to organize and get involved. These propositions that Jo Freeman lays out can be linked to the rise of the alt-right movement, but how long will this movement garner support with its masses on the Internet when mostly remaining anonymous? Also, will we continue to see more rallies and events held by these members such as recent organizing efforts by ACT for America protesting Sharia Law across the country (Selsky, 2017)? In order to galvanize the movement, there needs to be groups dedicated to the cause and groups that are able to effectively use existing communication networks to grow the movement. Later in this analysis, Twitter has become an interesting avenue for cooptable ideas to be shared and re-framed in order to spread the movement's messages. Understanding the different nuances of this movement can be very important to uncover how a far-right movement like this has been able to rapidly grow over the past few years. Looking back at this analysis, I hope this can create dialogue and serve as one tool to look back on how a movement like this could galvanize massive online support.

### **To what extent are new media technologies responsible for the rise of the alt-right? How are alt-right groups taking advantage of new media affordances?**

The ability of the alt-right to gain massive media coverage over the past year and a half is quite remarkable. I theorize that alt-right activists have taken advantage of the Internet and uses of its affordances are major explanations for this rapid coverage and emergence into mainstream culture. There are many reasons for this. First, trolling culture on sites like 4chan and Reddit are

main players in spreading messages of misogyny and racism as forms of antagonism (Milner, 2013). Trolls are able to spread political or humorous messages through memes. Meme creations are strategic as anonymous users are able to become agile actors and adapt to what works and what doesn't. Alt-right memes can even include things other than image macro images such as (((echo))), which is was a chrome extension that surrounded the names of Jewish people and organizations with several parentheses (Marwick, 37). Second, another reason for the sudden rise in coverage was the ability of alt-right movement leaders and members to influence the media agenda and take advantage of our newly sensationalized media environment that has emerged since the creation of the Internet. Alt-right members are now able to bypass traditional gatekeepers and enter the conversation much easier in a globalized community on the Internet. We are starting to see politicians and news connect to users on social media platforms, thus removing journalistic gatekeepers from the equation (Muller, 2016). Finally, the alt-right was also able to tap into a much more divided nation. With the rise in partisan divides and larger mistrust of traditional media, the alt-right was able to utilize new sites that have only began to form over the past decade. With the increasing spread of "fake news" and partisanship, their views were able to be intertwined into the campaign and coverage of Donald Trump. Biases in the way we consume news today, especially when algorithms dictate much of what we read, was a way alt-right members were able to finally see their ideas spread to the masses and become part of the discourse of American politics.

First, it is important to look at how memes and trolling culture were able to accelerate the spread of racist and misogynistic ideas. Scholars Whitney Phillips (2012) and Alice Marwick (2017) have been interested in how these subcultures have grown and ultimately reached mainstream status. Memes in particular can be used to repackage a nasty message and blur the

real intent of a message. Scholar Limor Shifman (2013) defines memes as “units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by internet users, creating a shared cultural experience” (quoted in Milner, 65). Also, in a report published by Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis (2017), they discuss properties of meme creation and trolling which create opportunities for media manipulation. “Poe’s law” is the concept that “without a clear indication of the author’s intent, it is difficult or impossible to tell the difference between an expression of sincere extremism and a parody of extremism (Marwick and Lewis, 5). Since 4chan and Reddit are sites based off anonymity, anyone can feel invincible and post anything with little to no consequences. In Marwick’s report, she analyzes the 4chan message board /b/ which is notorious for sensationalized content of very violent and grisly images. These are uploaded to deter outsiders from entering the board. As Phillips (2012) mentions, trolling culture has been able to manipulate the mainstream media agenda and criticize morals as dictated by the media. A prime example used by Whitney Phillips is when Fox News fed off of troll-created content surrounding the “Birther Movement” in 2009. With conservatives questioning the birthplace of President Obama, trolls jumped on and created very racist depictions of Obama. They photo-shopped him wearing a turban and this similar image was used as a picture for a *Fox News* article. Users on 4chan also placed his head on other black men, alongside watermelons, and used the Joker meme to picture him as a Socialist. When these images were found outside of 4chan’s /b/, they kept the discussion going and perpetuated the commentary from major news networks. In the summer of 2009, CNN’s anchor Lou Dobbs commented about this with racist undertones fretting about Obama’s “missing” birth-certificate (Phillips, 111). In Phillips’s analysis, media outlets were guilty of further normalizing racist stereotypes and a white supremacist agenda. She ends her analysis with concern: “But even those outlets and programs that avoided forwarding overtly

racist content were guilty, at the very least, of providing bigots a national audience, and for further normalizing racist discourse and stereotypes” (p. 111). In her view, the mainstream media was at just as much fault for normalizing and spreading the agenda of white supremacists.

Next, I want to analyze a particular trolling event that gained massive coverage in 2014 known as Gamergate. Gamergate unified the trolling and gaming culture in order to publicly target particular female gaming developers and journalists. These women were criticized for trying to start a discussion about misogyny in the gaming community. These events took place after a software developer named Zoe Quinn became the target of an organized brigade. This started after her ex-boyfriend published a rant about her on his blog. The ex claimed that she was a cheater and slept with a game reviewer in order to get coverage for a game she developed. Gamers’ main concerns were that gaming developers were aligning with “Social Justice Warriors (SJWs) and were biased in the reporting of games that were not inclusive (VanDerWerff, 2014). What trolls and gaming community members used to their advantage were the connections they made on the Internet. They created organized brigades and created networked groups. They took advantage of a concept called *participatory culture*, coined by scholar Henry Jenkins (2006). This is the idea that people online and in these trolling cultures, are in an environment that has relatively low barriers to artistic expression and engagement. In order for people to push back on the ideas that the gaming industry was sexist and vile, these ‘geeky’ kids pushed back with images and other tactics such as ‘doxing’. Doxing is the act of finding personal information of a target and releasing it publicly on the Internet.

A popular method of disseminating information and planning attacks took place on IRC chat logs. Logs from IRC chat forums show a small group of users from 4chan and Reddit “orchestrated a hashtag campaign to perpetuate misogynistic attacks by wrapping them in a

debate about ethics in gaming journalism” (Johnston, 2014). Nude pictures, death threats, and even rape threats spread through forums and became rampant as part of orchestrated harassment attacks against these women. In a TedTalk given by activist Anita Sarkeesian (2012), she describes what she refers to as “cybermobs”, or collectives of individuals who engage in a cooperative competition to increase harm to their victims (Sarkeesian, 2012). Again, with the ability to stay anonymous and feed off of others to continue these attacks, trolls and hostile gamers felt powerful and able to contribute to the movement. A study by Adrienne Massanari (2015) analyzes Reddit, which was very successful in spreading misogynistic messages. Reddit’s “karma” score is a major factor into whether or not something becomes valued by Reddit users. What’s also interesting, is that a site like Reddit very rarely tries to remove content because it might contain objectionable content. Site admins even discourage other Reddit users from engaging in “witch hunts” by down-voting indiscriminately or abusing the report tool. Another important aspect of Gamergate was the creation of networked and agile groups. This is another affordance of new media. People from different ideologies were able to come together around a common cause, and disappear just as quickly as it started. Thus, trolling culture and the gaming community became politicized to rally behind and create Twitter campaigns and target anyone who pushed back against their “shared culture.” Sites like 4chan and Reddit also created avenues for these actors to fester. With little to no repercussions for posting on these sites, pages and sub-Reddits were dedicated to the Gamergate events and served to spread these messages.

Another important way the alt-right spread its reach has been by manipulating the media agenda. What role has hyper-partisan news and content played in the outcome of the 2016 presidential election? Many analyses of this have been done. A study done by Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, Hal Roberts, and Ethan Zuckerman (2017) looked at 1.25 million stories published

online between April 1, 2015 and Election Day. This study is important as it follows both pro-Trump and pro-Clinton audiences and analyzes the sites these audiences primarily received news from. The study began looking at what sites people were most likely to share on social media. The group analyzed hyperlinking patterns and drew a map of media sources used to gain information. Breitbart, had become the center for those on the right, while Fox News, The Daily Caller, the Gateway Pundit, the Washington Examiner, and Infowars were other major sources people shared. The hyper partisanship which was viewed were similar on both sides of the aisle, however, what was amazing was the insulation of the partisan right-wing media from traditional journalistic media sources. Many sites attacked traditional media, including Fox News. Breitbart held that the frontrunner, Donald Trump, wasn't receiving the support from the networks. After the primaries, these conservative sites then turned to other media sources, which were viewed on social sites like Facebook and Twitter, and ultimately impacted the media agenda. In their analysis, Benkler et al. (2017) note that partisan sites were great at manipulating the media agenda by spreading disinformation to the masses, but this wasn't a new tactic. Instead, the partisan right-wing sites were also able to insulate themselves from traditional journalistic media sources to create their own web of sharing very similar interpretations of news events. They conclude: "Traditional media needs to reorient, not by developing better viral content and clickbait to compete in the social media environment, but by recognizing that it is operating in a propaganda and disinformation-rich environment" (Benkler et al., 2017).

What makes the new media environment more vulnerable to fringe movements manipulating the media agenda? Marwick has theorized three major factors that have led to this phenomenon. First, for many Americans, there is a lack of trust in traditional media. According to a September 2016 Gallup poll (2016), 32 percent of Americans say that they have a great deal

or fair amount of trust in the media, the lowest in the poll's history. Those on the right, are extremely distrustful of traditional media outlets, possibly a result of the "attacks" against Donald Trump during the 2016 election. Amazingly, only 14 percent of Republicans and right-wing respondents trusted the mainstream media. Second, there is a decline in local news as there has been a major shift to online news consumption. With the loss of traditional media business models such as newspapers, Internet users have been less willing to pay for access to journalism and publications. Instead, ad spending is being redirected to social media sites like Facebook and Google. These sites are also aggregators of news content from other sites. With the loss of local news and investigative journalism, scholars are worried about the loss of learning about civic engagement. Third, we are seeing the creation of what she calls an 'attention economy', whereas the most valued content today is what attracts the most attention and online traffic. Finally, a third reason Marwick discusses is the shift to an "attention economy." With the overload of information on the Internet, attention is a major resource that content creators are now chasing. Viral content is often sensationalized headlines which garners shares and retweets on social media. Since mainstream media is constantly competing with new forms of media, they gather sources directly from Twitter or will jump on a story that has been sensationalized in order to gain attention. Many alt-right personalities have used Twitter to their advantage to disseminate ideas and grow their following. Hyon Chu discusses what actors are trying to gain: an emotional response. Today, more emotionally evocative content is created, as according to Chu (2016). "This constant cycle of being more emotionally evocative and creating more content to fight for peoples' attention leaves people with less time to consider subjects rationally, to act largely on impulse and emotions." With the 2016 election, a lot of the stories that mentioned Donald Trump were a constant stream of scandals our outrageous statements. As a result, he was by far the most

covered candidate, and the messages and content that are presented through viral sharing make it much easier for trolls and alt-right factions to manipulate the media agenda.

Twitter, for example, was a massive tool that the alt-right used to reshape the discussion to their base. In a *New Yorker* piece by Andrew Marantz (2016), he interviews Mike Cernovich. Cernovich is an alt-right personality, who has a massive Twitter following, and serves as a great example of how Twitter has been hijacked by the alt-right. Cernovich is an alt-right personality who streams videos from his California home on an app called Periscope. During the election, he notoriously brought the questioning of Hillary Clinton's health to the mainstream media, mere months before the election. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, Clinton fainted after she left a memorial service at Ground Zero. Cernovich encouraged his Twitter following to visit a post he wrote titled the "Complete Timeline of Hillary's Health" and used the hashtag #HillarysHealth (Marantz, 2016). The post received two hundred and forty thousand page views and the hashtag had become a national trending topic on Twitter. In order to capitalize on this, *The Washington Post* wrote an article questioning whether or not Clinton's health would be a campaign issue. Later, an ultra-conservative site, *The Daily Caller's* Scott Green tweeted "Cernovich memed #SickHillary into reality. Never doubt the power of memes" (Marantz, 2016). Another aspect of Twitter that is problematic is the use of bots. Social bots are pieces of software that can create content on social media platforms and can even interact with real users. In a CBC analysis of bots on Twitter, they find bots created quite a "fuss" during the 2016 elections. They found that pro-Trump tweets outnumbered pro-Clinton tweets at a rate of four to one (Arsenault, 2016). In order to take advantage of something going viral, users will flood Twitter with several posts about a certain topic. American Right Now, a pro-Trump bot known for posting conspiracy theories, created 1,200 posts the day before the final presidential debate. The most notable real impact bots have

seen, is they have manipulated many users. Since bots are sometimes hard to distinguish from a real person, authenticity of a post can be lost. During the Pizzagate conspiracy theory, there was a combination of bots and bot-like accounts to make it trend. A theory created by 4chan users was soon being spread after a Reddit user posted a long document with evidence that the Democratic Party was running a child sex trafficking ring in a DC area pizzeria. According to a BBC news blog, the alt-right soon jumped onto this conspiracy theory and helped to jumpstart the “pizzagate” hashtag a few days before the election (BBC, 2016). The use of bots to legitimize a conspiracy theory and galvanize grass-roots activity is quite concerning. It even drove a person to storm the pizzeria with a gun to do his own investigation into the fabricated story.

Finally, how has the alt-right used hyper-partisan networks and misinformation to spread its ideas and enter the discussion of mainstream politics? As stated before, the majority of people on the right have a distrust in traditional media outlets. People once saw the Internet as an idealistic space which would improve democracy and give more people a voice. However, scholars are becoming more skeptical about this notion. One of the alt-right’s major tactics to build its base is by spreading misinformation through new and alternative outlets. With an easier way to enter the current environment, click-bait content is often paired with big letters and eye-catching headlines. Often, new sites on both sides of the aisle deliberately manipulate information to fit into a specific world-view. According to an article by James Hamblin (2014), mainstream publications are now regularly posting sensationalist and misleading headlines in order to increase article views. News sources are also likely to report on false information and false stories, which inherently gives these voices more exposure. Scholar Kathleen Hall Jamieson echoes these concerns as she was one of the founders of Factcheck.org. *Mother Jones* (2015) featured Jamieson in a 2015 article chronicling Jamieson’s concerns. An anecdote she discusses

is the misinformation campaigns against the science community. People who read a partisan article to fit a specific narrative may be less likely to believe that climate change exists. There is a substantial gap between what scientists and the general public think on a wide range of issues. In order to combat hyper-partisan manipulation of scientific coverage, Jamieson proposed a communication strategy to help identify misleading information called LIVA: “Leveraging scientific credibility (L), involving the audience (I), visualizing the data in a dynamic way (V), and creating relatable analogies for the reader (A)” (Hari, 2015). The same study finds that conservatives who used the LIVA method were able to identify the discrepancies between a Fox News article and scientific journalism. If a news outlet only presents you with one viewpoint or source, then its credibility may come into question.

To what extent are media sites like Facebook and Twitter responsible for spreading these ideologies? I don’t want to say that social media and other forms of media are responsible for creating the alt-right movement, but they definitely are responsible for increasing their voices. Eli Pariser’s (2011) *The Filter Bubble* discusses why algorithms are bad for a utopian vision of the Internet. Filter bubbles result from personalized web searches when algorithms decides what information the user should see instead of the user. An echo chamber is a metaphor that describes when ideas or beliefs are amplified by communication and repetition inside a media system. If we use his basic definition of echo chambers and filter bubbles, we can apply it to how social media and clickbait articles have given rise to the alt-right.

An interesting insight on growing partisanship is identified in a study done by Yariv Tsfati and Lilach Nir (2017), which looks at how selective exposure leads to “affective polarization”. They theorize that partisan media exposure will increase the likelihood of someone having affective partisanship, or the growth of mutual dislike between those on both sides of the

political aisle. Another effect of selective exposure is that those who read an increase in partisan news cannot recognize positive aspects of the other political aisle. (Tsfati and Nir, 2017, p. 316). This same kind of logic can be used to explain what Pariser has identified as a major problem with social media. Instead of people choosing what they want and don't want to read, sites like Facebook and Google are doing it for them. Pariser identifies as a progressive and shared similar content to his political views. What he noticed is that conservative points of view were blocked from his Facebook feed, and he had no control over this. Again, this filter bubble can be a way that affective polarization increases. This type of filtering only helps the alt-right, as people who have very conservative views and only share Breitbart will now only see similar posts on their social media. The same is true for Google: people's browser histories often determine their search results.

To summarize, it's important to look at how new media affordances have influenced the rise of the alt-right movement. With the ability of trolls and factions of the alt-right to manipulate the media agenda, their views became more widespread and recognized. Events like Gamergate and the attacks against Clinton's health were very influential for this movement. The affordances that alt-right members took advantage of during the 2016 election are what sparked an increase in coverage of the movement. This ability to pass traditional media gatekeepers allowed the far-right ideologies to leak into the current political discourse. Finally, social media platforms are a major reason these groups could grow almost entirely on the internet. When people can organize quickly and use the ills of social media platforms to their advantage, the outcomes will almost always be positive for the user. This inquiry into how the alt-right and trolling cultures permeated into mainstream culture is quite remarkable and should be studied and discussed further.

## **How are established right wing and conservative media covering the alt-right?**

This is a question I was wondering when I first started this project. Would more established conservative outlets reject the movement all together? Would they paint a different picture than left-leaning publications? Would they even go as far as to defend or accept the movement? To answer this, I did a narrative analysis of how *Breitbart* and the *National Review* have covered the rise of the alt-right. What I found interesting is that each outlet had its own distinct narrative of the alt-right. *Breitbart* was of most interest, as it was regarded as one of the most important sites that fully backed Trump during the 2016 election. The outlet even featured Milo Yiannopoulos, who became a poster child for the movement. Finally, I looked at the *National Review*, which tried to distance itself from Trump supporters and denounced a lot of his policies. I found that both publications took very different stances on the rise of the alt-right movement, and there are several themes that persist in the coverage from each outlet.

A narrative analysis approach is the method I used to analyze these sites and their coverage of the alt-right. Narrative analysis refers to a family of approaches to diverse kinds of texts, which have in common a storied form (Riessman, 2005). Social movements, organizations, and political actors often construct preferred narratives about events. Thus, storytellers interpret the world and experiences by creating their own sense of what an ideal world-view would be. The closest branch of narrative analysis I used is thematic analysis. In a thematic narrative approach, I look into what is told by the storytellers. How has a site like *Breitbart* covered an event like Gamergate or Hillary Clinton's condemnation of the alt-right? Can I point to a certain theme that has been constructed by an outlet? This is the answer I was most concerned with in this methodology. With partisan outlets, I found that they try to create a similar theme through their coverage of the alt-right. Here is what I found...

The first site that intrigued me was Breitbart News Network. Originally founded by Andrew Breitbart in 2007, a recent study published in the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Benkler et al., 2017) showed Breitbart.com to be central to the current conservative news ecosystem. One of the major themes the study found which coincided with my own analysis, is that Breitbart and other right-wing media attacked the integrity and professionalism of traditional media outlets. The main theme is the attack on establishment media and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. For my analysis I looked into Breitbart's coverage of the alt-right and certain events that gained massive coverage. I looked at how Breitbart covered Hillary Clinton's alt-right speech in 2016 and the online trolling and harassment of female gaming developers known as Gamergate. For this project, I looked at analyzed about twenty articles which covered either the alt-right or the events surrounding Gamergate.

One major theme I saw in Breitbart's coverage is they tried to frame the alt-right as a movement receiving attacks from the left. The outlet featured numerous articles claiming the "liberal" and "mainstream" media did not give the movement a fair and balanced assessment. Robert W. McChesney (2003) has chronicled the conservative argument that the mainstream media has a "liberal bias". Even though this study was published in 2003, I find it very relevant today, and particularly good for understanding Breitbart fourteen years later. McChesney accounts for why he believes that there is such dislike for mainstream journalism: "So why is the conservative critique of the liberal news media such a significant force in US political and media culture? To some extent this is because the conservative critique of the liberal media has tremendous emotional power, fitting into a broader story of the conservative masses battling the establishment media elite (McChesney, 2003, p.321). McChesney cites reason why the establishment media does not hold a liberal bias. One piece of evidence that some conservatives

latch onto, is that there is evidence that supports journalists for mainstream outlets do favor liberal candidates. However, this point doesn't settle the argument. Owners and operators of traditional media outlets overwhelmingly support Republican candidates. McChesney cites a study of press coverage between 1992 and 2002 and found that the reference to the "liberal media bias" outnumbers "conservative bias" by a factor of more than 17 to 1. McChesney theorizes the ability of conservatives to organize and create a plethora of repetition surrounding these claims is what brought the "liberal media" critique into mainstream culture. This notion is very similar to the rhetoric I saw coming from Breitbart's coverage of the alt-right. I witnessed themes that painted the alt-right as victims from an attack from the mainstream media.

First, I want to turn to the overall coverage of the alt-right on Breitbart's website. I went through the top search results with the tag "alt-right" or "Alternative Right." Most of Breitbart's articles will have a list of tags that redirects you to all other articles with similar mentions in the article. To get a feel for the coverage of the alt-right during the 2016 election, I had to start from the newest released article with the term "Alt-right" and work my way back. I decided to focus on articles that were trying to create its own interpretation of an event and leave out ones that were simply reports about a new alt-right development. From my search results, I decided to focus on two events in particular: Hillary Clinton's speech condemning the alt-right and the events behind Gamergate. I found these two events garnered the most coverage from *Breitbart*. Trolling culture in particular saw the most coverage during and after the Gamergate fiasco. For the Gamergate coverage, I decided to focus on articles which gave an opinion on the importance of Gamergate or articles which focused on certain developments that happened as a result of Gamergate.

A theme I constantly saw is that many of Breitbart's contributors came to the defense of the alt-right. This pattern can be seen clearly in Breitbart's coverage of Hillary Clinton's August 2016 speech condemning the alt-right as well as Breitbart.com. Following her speech, Breitbart published several articles condemning Clinton, her supporters, and the "liberal media". The most infamous contributor for Breitbart at the time was Milo Yiannopoulos, who served as Breitbart's senior tech editor. Before he resigned in February of 2017 for controversial comments regarding pedophilia, he was also banned from Twitter for starting a harassment campaign against *Ghostbusters* actress Leslie Jones (Ohlheiser, 2016). This sparked massive outrage from his Twitter following with the trending of #FreeMilo for several hours. I found several articles following Clinton's August speech which either feature Milo Yiannopoulos as a contributor or the focus of the article. I want to turn the attention to several of these articles in particular.

Yiannopoulos's first article criticizing Clinton's August speech was co-written with Alum Bokhari (Yiannopoulos & Bokhari, 2016b). "Hillary Clinton is About to Embarrass Herself on the Alt-Right" puts a direct target against many actors on the left. As per usual with Breitbart articles, the title is in all caps. This article attacks Hilary Clinton, BuzzFeed, and Black Lives Matter. It also discusses how Clinton failed to recognize the nuances of the alt-right movement. This piece not only frames the left as misunderstanding the alt-right, but it also comes to the movement's defense and plugs that Breitbart is the only major news site that has given "illuminating coverage to the alt-right." This article also plugs Yiannopoulos's and Bokhari's previous in-depth analysis of the movement in March of 2016 (Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016a). This article criticizing Clinton helps legitimize the movement by denouncing the small part of the alt-right that holds anti-Semitic and white supremacist views, but still defends the part of the alt-right that has latched onto Breitbart News. Yiannopoulos

contests that the left is trying to attack Breitbart and ignore its diversity: “The fact that *Breitbart* is an unapologetically pro-Israel site with a diverse staff will no doubt be conveniently ignored by Hillary Clinton. I expect the fact that the bulk of our alt-right coverage comes from a gay Jew and a half-Pakistani will also escape their notice” (Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016b). Finally, this article goes after the left as Yiannopoulos and Alum Bokhari view that the alt-right has threatened the Democrats’ youth constituency. According to Yiannopoulos, “The alt-right is very busy spreading the word to their fellow kids using the language of the Internet far better than anyone else in politics. The alt-right is re-energizing their parents, who are often times dispirited Tea Partiers, or proselytizing their democrat relatives who are recognizing a decade of presidential failure” (Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016b). To Yiannopoulos, the alt-right is re-energizing political thought among the youth. Breitbart, from Yiannopoulos’s perspective, is the only outlet being fair to the movement.

In another article featuring Yiannopoulos’s thoughts (Breitbart Tech, 2016), he even goes as far as to blame Clinton for spreading the reach of the alt-right movement. Breitbart Tech ran this on August 25<sup>th</sup> following Yiannopoulos’s reaction to Clinton’s speech. It chronicles what Yiannopoulos views the left is doing: destroying American culture and using leftist tactics to bring down things such as the police and freedom of speech. Yiannopoulos faults Clinton and the left for smears, name-calling, and finger-wagging. This, according to Yiannopoulos, is how the alt-right was created and how it has now become a major actor to calling out the left on these “culture wars.” Again, Yiannopoulos comes to the defense of the alt-right and critiques Clinton’s obsession with “ironic memes of dissident youth.” According to him, Clinton should be more focused on toxic rhetoric from Black Lives Matter calling on people to murder cops.

Yiannopoulos also believes that political correctness has gone awry and dictated too much of the

political discourse from those on the left. In his view, “The speech codes and political correctness of the Left are what has given rise to this vibrant new movement, what has given rise to Donald Trump’s extraordinary popularity, and what gives rise to me — and my fabulous headlines” (Breitbart Tech, 2016)! I find this as an important aspect of Yiannopoulos’s argument. If it weren’t for the Left pushing political correctness and what he calls “culture wars” then there wouldn’t be a need for the alt-right to exist and push back on these ideas.

A similar theme plays out in another article by Milo Yiannopoulos (2016), posted the day following Clinton’s alt-right speech. The headline: “A Swing and a Miss: How Triggered Hillary Screwed up Her Chance to take on the Alt-Right”, says it all. This attention-grabbing headline is accompanied by a laughing Pepe the Frog meme and a photo-shopped picture of Hillary Clinton with crossed-eyes, glasses, and what seems to be a prison shirt with Arabic writing. Again, Yiannopoulos frames Clinton as someone who attacks people who would identify with alt-right politics. He criticizes the speech and is appalled that Clinton would attempt to bring down Breitbart in her speech, asserting “Last night, geriatric Hillary took aim at *Breitbart*, the alt-right and me in an effort to smear Daddy Donald as a bigot” (Yiannopoulos, 2016c). Again, Milo continues to pick a fight with mainstream media and say that Breitbart is the only network that has given the alt-right “a fairer shake than anyone else in the media” (Yiannopoulos, 2016). Yiannopoulos also tries to frame Clinton as a conspiracy theorist for trying to associate Trump’s campaign as directly being influenced and modeled to fit the alt-right. I find this particularly interesting, as this is the first time we don’t see Yiannopoulos directly give the alt-right praise, but he still is nowhere near condemning the movement. He believes that Clinton had a chance to understand the nuances of the movement, but concludes she and her supporters ultimately failed.

The final article I want to discuss dealing with the Clinton speech was written by Joel B. Pollak (2016). This article claims that Andrew Breitbart would have been proud that Breitbart became Clinton's number one target. Pollak references the late Breitbart's autobiography, saying "Andrew recalled how he warned the Tea Party what lay ahead of them: "I said that they'd be labeled racists and hate mongers and violent criminals, that they'd be depicted as the dregs of society, people to be excluded from dinner parties because of their made-up closet KKK status. They were about to be targeted"" (Pollak, 2016). This is the case now according to Pollak the alt-right and those who support Donald Trump are being considered racists, hate mongers, and bigots. He then dissects several of Clinton's argument and frames them into a critique of establishment candidates picking a fight against conservatives. The most interesting "lie" he refutes is the claim that Breitbart has accepted "ideas on the extremist fringe of the conservative right." What's interesting from the angle he takes, is that he defends the organization without outright identifying whether or not there is an alt-right problem on the site. Instead, he goes on the attack and claims that the *Southern Poverty Law Center* has no credibility and argues it's biased against conservative thinkers. Again, we see a theme of blaming the "liberal media bias" for placing conservatives into one group and labeling it as a "hate group." These are the major themes we see when analyzing alt-right coverage by Breitbart following the Reno alt-right speech given by Clinton. Often, Breitbart came to the defense of the alt-right movement and even tried to frame it that they were the only media outlet giving it a fair assessment. Breitbart also tried to frame the alt-right as a response to the political correctness culture that the Left had created. It is interesting to see how Milo Yiannopoulos became a major contributor following his fame from Gamergate.

Next, I want to look at Breitbart's coverage of Gamergate, a major event of 2014. It was Gamergate that initially catapulted alt-right personality Milo Yiannopoulos into mainstream attention. Gamergate was a large campaign attack against women who wanted to see gaming culture change as many people latched onto defending gaming culture through starting harassment campaigns against specific female developers and activists. Like the coverage of the Clinton speech, I wondered if the outlet spun this coverage to fit its own view or if it tried to stay neutral. I chose to look at how and if the angle of Gamergate changed over the past three years since its beginnings. For this event, I also saw major themes that are almost identical to the coverage of the alt-right following the Clinton speech. The coverage Breitbart gave Gamergate is quite extensive, and stories go all the way back to the beginning of 2015. Because there is so much coverage on Gamergate, I want to highlight just a few articles that serve as examples for framing of Gamergate. I want to start my focus on an article from December of 2014 which saw the first references to Gamergate published by Breitbart. Breitbart featured a story titled "James's and Milo's Year in Liberal Stupid" (Delingpole & Yiannopoulos, 2014). The article features Yiannopoulos's perspectives on Gamergate. He frames the Gamergate controversy the same way he would later frame the Hillary alt-right speech. He concludes that the left created a culture war in the gaming community, and claims that the gaming community is one of the most inclusive "fandoms." However, the reasoning for the politicization in the community is because feminists created the hysteria by painting all gamers misogynistic. Yiannopoulos goes on to defend the gaming community by claiming it was people like Anita Sarkeesian who created the myth of gamers as misogynistic and even accused left-leaning journalists of creating smear campaigns against the community. According to Yiannopoulos, "Each of us should be grateful for the spirited and relentless but infectiously good-natured defence gamers have mounted against this

poisonous incursion into their culture” (Delingpole & Yiannopoulos, 2014). Similar framings of Gamergate continued on Breitbart’s website over the next year. Contributor Virginia Hale (2015) blamed the left for costing actor Adam Baldwin an invite to appear at an Australian comic and gaming convention. As a supporter of Gamergate, Adam Baldwin was disinvited after a fan started a petition that claimed female guests would feel unsafe. However, according to Hale, the real problem is that the left isn’t willing to accept different point of views and is wrongfully invested in “politicizing” video games as it serves no purpose. Hale also suggests that the real problem is the mainstream media: “Some of the mainstream media who have parroted the crude slander of GamerGate as a hate group really should really know better. To present it that way, rather than doing research into what it’s really about, just furthers untruthful, extremist propaganda” (Hale, 2015). Again, we see that Breitbart is creating “us” versus “them” mentality that anyone on the right is being targeted by the mainstream media’s “extreme political propaganda”. Fast forward to September of 2015. This is when we see the most extensive in-depth narrative of Gamergate from Breitbart’s Alum Bokhari. Bokhari was one of Breitbart’s most prolific tech writers at the time alongside Milo Yiannopoulos. The article starts off with his summary of what Gamergate was: “an online uprising of gamers against poor journalistic standards, political correctness, and moral crusaders in the world of video games” (Bokhari, 2015). He then features a long list of interviews Breitbart did with gaming developers, political figures, and even gamers to uncover the controversy a year later. Almost all of the people they interviewed were “pro-Gamergate,” meaning they supported the gaming and trolling culture’s backlash against the ethical dilemmas seen in video game journalism. Part of the argument, was that gaming reviewers were not being objective in their coverage of a game if it wasn’t “inclusive” and didn’t fit a particular agenda.

I want to highlight a few of the interviews as they are quite telling of the framing of the controversy. Gavin McInnes who would create the Proud Boys in 2016 was one of those featured. He framed it similarly as Milo and Virginia Hale had done previously. “Hell hath no fury like a nerd in front of a computer, and instead of conceding that video games are somehow immoral, the gamers unleashed a digital tsunami on the SJWs that left them permanently isolated” (Bokhari, 2015). Another interesting contributor is Ethan Ralph, who is a blogger and quite polarizing character. He was one of the major actors in Gamergate with a blog called *The Ralph Retort*. He too painted the mainstream media as hostile and trying to smear the gaming community. In his interview, he believes Gamergate was successful as it cleaned up gaming journalism and held the media accountable. On his blog, he has an extensive amount of blog posts on the topic. Some of the language is quite sickening as he continues discussion on people like Zoe Quinn and Anita Sarkeesian even in 2017. It is quite telling to see that these fringe-accepted contributors such as McInnes and Ethan be major focuses on the Gamergate theme from Breitbart. Very similar to the alt-right speech coverage, Breitbart claims conservatives and gamers are targets from the mainstream media. With a mentality of “us” versus “them” it’s important to note how Breitbart has created these narratives. They try to specifically misinterpret information to fit a specific world-view in the new partisan media ecosystem.

Moving forward, I hope to see other scholars use Breitbart as a focus of giving the alt-right more of a voice. I also really hope that the comments section in particular will be a focus of study. An analysis of Breitbart’s divisive and polarizing comments could become interesting, especially as Breitbart has now reached its own mainstream status and has definitely attracted a new generation of conservatives. I also think studies could continue the dialogue about Breitbart’s tactics of trying to frame other media outlets as going on the attack against Breitbart.

I found this in almost all of the articles I analyzed about the alt-right and Gamergate. I find that Breitbart, giving its interesting position in the new media ecosystem, can garner much further studies to better understand the themes

I now turn to my analysis on the *National Review's* articles published on its website. I found a completely different picture of the alt-right. For one, there were far fewer articles referencing the alt-right movement. To gather every article referencing "Alt-Right" or "Alternative Right," I used the Academic OneFile database as my tool. I read through the articles in my search results, and only focused on articles which had direct references to the movement and which gave a narrative or dialogue surrounding the movement. All together there were about fourteen or so articles that were published by the magazine. From here, I reconstruct the narrative put forward in *National Review's* coverage of the alt-right and demonstrate how it differed from Breitbart's.

First, let me offer background on how the *National Review* achieved its position as a leading outlet for "respectable" conservatism. Founded in 1955 by William F. Buckley Jr., the publication famously broke away from Robert Welch and The John Birch Society. In Nicole Hemmer's *Messengers on the Right* (2016), she describes the problems which led Buckley to denounce Welch and the John Birch Society. As a very far-right organization, the John Birch Society gave rise to many conspiracy theories regarding the extent to which the U.S. government was under control by undercover Communists. Welch would even go as far as to accuse President Eisenhower as being a Communist agent in 1961. Appalled by these extreme accusations, Buckley had to decide on whether or not he denounced the organization or stayed silent. He tried to have conversations with Welch and tone down his rhetoric. Unfortunately for Buckley, this came to no avail. In 1962 Buckley published "The Question of Robert Welch"

which “dissected Welch’s writings and assumptions, pronouncing them “false hoods” (Hemmer, 105). In order to distance himself from extreme views, Buckley and the *National Review* risked losing supporters and allies in order to take a stance. With this in mind, I wanted to analyze the publication and analyze how it covered the alt-right. Did the publication accept it as a legitimate conservative movement? Did the *National Review* condemn it, or did it completely ignore the alt-right?

From what I found, the alt-right was covered far less when compared to Breitbart. Using the search methods above, I only found a dozen or so articles that reference the fringe movement. Also, I found a lot of opinion articles that completely condemned the movement. Some called it out for being racist, and others denounced it as a conservative movement. The first article I found that focused on the movement was published in April of 2016. Writer James Kirchick (2016) profiles the Identitarian movement and focuses extensively on Richard Spencer and the National Policy Institute. Kirchick delves into the Identitarianism movement, its ties to the French far-right, and why they were so quick to jump on the Trump train. This piece goes into an extensive history of Spencer’s past experiences before joining the alt-right, and chronicles Kirchick’s time at an NPI rally in early 2016. This is when Kirchick’s opinion on the movement was solidified: they are a group of fascists. Kirchick also comments on their long-shot dream of seeing any success: “Spencer’s entire political program is based upon a flimsy sense of “white identity” — the sort of imagined community that cannot exist except in the minds of racists — which he speaks of in reverential, almost mystical tones” (Kirchick, 2016). He also expands on what he sees as disrespect to the constitution and values held by *real* conservatives. According to Kirchick, the alt-right should not be labeled “conservatives.” Instead, he believes there are more similarities with far-left activists than established conservatives, claiming “Identitarians

sometimes sound like hard leftists who have exchanged multiculturalism for white supremacy” (Kirchick, 2016). This is quite strong language as Kirchick is condemning the alt-right and stating that they should not be considered “conservatives.” This is the major theme I saw with my *National Review* research.

Ian Tuttle (2016) continues this pattern of denying that the alt-right is a *conservative* movement. This brief article discusses what Tuttle sees as the “moral rot” of the alt-right movement. He references Milo Yiannopoulos and Alum Bokhari’s long “apologia” or defense of the alt-right movement. He references the anti-Semitic and racist mobilization via the Internet. Tuttle even tries to diminish the size of the movement and questions the narrative they give of the establishment conservative movement:

“There are only a few of them, and nobody likes them anyways” (Tuttle, 2016). He then attacks Breitbart and their efforts to use these “disenfranchised” conservatives to attack the established right. “Conservatives, the *Breitbart* writers say, refused to defend “humanism, liberalism, and universalism” against “black and feminist identity politics” and “left-wing moral relativism.” They turned a blind eye to the rise of tribal, Identitarian movements on the Left while mercilessly suppressing any hint of them on the Right” (Tuttle, 2016).

In his analysis, the alt-right should not be covered because of its relatively small size when compared to the rest of conservatism. Tuttle also retorts that the Breitbart narrative is largely false, and denies that the Right merely allowed the Left to advance its agenda without a push-back from those on the Right. To be truly conservative is to be thrilled in a liberal democracy and not view it as a form of tyrannical government. He ultimately argues that the conservative

movement needs to wash out the voice of the alt-right. Also, every time the alt-right grows, the true conservative movement has failed.

A third article that was of great importance was written by David French in October of 2016. This piece is quite upsetting regarding French's own personal story. He describes the harassment he received from those in the alt-right for his decision to condemn Trump during the 2016 election. He begins by referencing an article he had published for the *National Review* calling out Ann Coulter for spreading white-nationalist rhetoric via Twitter. What ensued is quite disturbing. He recounts how he received death threats against his family when alt-right trolls sent him a barrage of pictures and message. "I saw images of my daughter's face in gas chambers, with a smiling Trump in a Nazi uniform preparing to press a button and kill her. I saw her face photo-shopped into images of slaves. (French, 2016). This personal narrative sheds light on the real dark side of some members of the alt-right and the trolling community. They were able to find his wife's blog and flood it with grisly images of executions and even created concern among his friends and neighbors as they were fearful for them. He then shares other conservatives' stories such as Erick Erickson of *RedState* and Bethany Mandel who opposed Donald Trump during the election and their stories of harassment. Erick Erickson received a lot of harassment after he dis-invited Trump from a *RedState* event. Several Trump supporters showed up to his house and even his kids were harassed when an angry Trump supporter heckled them in a store. He also mentions Ben Shapiro who has also received a lot of hate. Shapiro used to be a journalist for *Breitbart*, but left when *Breitbart* refused to support Michelle Fields, the woman assaulted by Trump's campaign manager Corey Lewandowski. As a Jewish man and someone who condemned the ideologies of the alt-right, he was the recipient of harassment. This story being featured in the *National Review* is quite telling of how they tried to pain the

movement: anti-conservative and pro-hate. Almost every article I read in the *National Review* condemned the alt-right movement. This includes Ben Shapiro's article condemning it for not being conservative and opposing constitutional democracy (Shapiro, 2016) and briefly mentioned in Luke Thompson's article condemning the group and calling on them to be excluded from the Republican Party (Thompson, 2016).

After investigating how Breitbart and the National Review covered the alt-right, we see two distinctly different narratives. Breitbart, used the attacks against the outlet as a way to defend its coverage of the alt-right. Milo Yiannopoulos was a prominent contributor on Breitbart who tried to legitimize the movement and allow his readers a taste of the movement. On the other hand, the National Review tried to distance itself from the movement, and published several articles condemning alt-right organization and trying to distance itself from its form of "conservatism". This is very similar to Buckley first distancing from the John Birch Society, as it was deemed too extreme by the publication. Nonetheless, I think that outlets such as the *National Review* have not done enough to distance itself from the movement. Even though they have featured articles which condemn the movement, it took a long time for them to address the existence of the movement. I also think that them trying to frame it as not under the *conservative* umbrella is an interesting approach. However, denouncing it as not conservative seems to frame it in such a way that shrouds the alt-right as a problem. I think the *National Review* should continue to condemn the tactics and beliefs of the alt-right, but they should also frame the discussion as a problem the Republican Party needs to address. This inquiry into how conservative outlets covered the alt-right is my final guiding question into my research on the alt-right movement, and one that should be looked at further by future scholars.

My project found some quite interesting conclusions. I discovered many nuances within the

movement, as many factions differed in ideology. However, many factions utilized new media technologies to their advantage. Events like Gamergate and the Birther movement brought trolling culture and many factions together to push back against mainstream media ethics. I also found that social media platforms and sites like 4chan and Reddit allowed for these toxic ideologies to fester and spread the overall message of the movement. Our new sensationalist and partisan media environment also allowed the alt-right to take advantage of these affordances and gain legitimacy within the American political discourse. Finally, I analyzed more established conservative media sites like *Breitbart* and *National Review*. I found that these outlets featured polar opposite coverage of the alt-right movement. *Breitbart* often came to the defense of the alt-right and framed the movement as under attack from the mainstream and liberal media. On the other hand, *National Review* tried to distance itself and condemn the alt-right. I hope this project can serve as one of many future studies which can be used to analyze the history and importance of modern counterculture of Internet trolls, media manipulators, and organizers in a hyper-partisan news and political environment.

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