

WHAT ARE THEY 'GABBIN' ABOUT?:
A RELATIONAL REALIST APPROACH TO 'SMALL STORIES' (RE)TOLD ON GAB

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ABSTRACT

Informed by Tilly's (2005) and Tilly and Tarrow's (2007) work on the use of storytelling as a tool for the (re)construction of collective identities and boundary formation, Alexander's (2006) work on the civil sphere and its civil/anti-civil symbolic codes and discourses of liberty and repression, and Georgakopoulou's (2013) concept of 'small stories,' I conducted a narrative analysis focused on the 'small stories' that Gab users (re)told to produce an understanding of alt-right pillars of identity. In this paper, I detail many 'small stories' about political correctness, censorship, affirmative action, 'invasions,' and the dissolution of the traditional white, nuclear family that transform into one big story of the so-called '((((communists'))))' plot to manufacture a 'white genocide.'

DEDICATION

To Rowan

For your willingness to pick up your life and relocate (once again), as well as your unwavering support throughout the longest strike in Canadian post-secondary history, two lengthy episodes of severe depression, and a global pandemic.

You the real MVP.

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Finally, I would like to express my admiration for everyone who has no choice but to deal with being targets of the hateful rhetoric that fills these pages for years on end. I am humbled by your strength and resilience. May the future be brighter.

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Chapter One

Introduction

This study was conceived in August of 2017, the week following the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia¹. From 2017 to 2019, I had watched the alt-right rapidly grow and evolve and then, subsequently, decline due to left-wing doxxing efforts and court cases resulting from Charlottesville. However, in May 2020, far-right groups that had been previously associated with the 'alt-right' label, such as the Proud Boys and Identity Evropa, re-emerged alongside the Boogaloo Bois to counter Black Lives Matter protests resulting from the police killing of George Floyd. Trump's claims around the 2020 U.S. election being stolen from him led far-right supporters of the QAnon conspiracy theory to storm the U.S. Capitol building on the afternoon of January 6, 2021, in what has been referred to as an 'insurrection.' Additionally, throughout 2020 and 2021, actors who shared certain ideological beliefs with the alt-right also mobilized in person and online around conspiracy theories related to the COVID-19 pandemic – particularly masking rules, lockdowns, and the vaccine. Although many of the prominent members initially associated with the movement are no longer in the spotlight, and the use of the term 'alt-right' waxes and wanes along with the media coverage, it is important to acknowledge that ideological aspects of the alt-right still very much exist and are now a consistent part of mainstream public discourse in North America.

I began conducting preliminary research on the alt-right at a time when social media platforms, such as Twitter, began banning users associated with the movement. Watching the migration of those members led me to Gab, a social media site created by Andrew Torba in

¹ My original intention for this project was to (a) determine the composition of the American 'alt-right' and (b) to understand why individuals were drawn to the movement.

August 2016 (Coaston, 2018). Gab is marketed as a platform that advocates for ‘free speech’ online and is an alternative to other social media sites, which are run by the so-called ‘Silicon Valley elite.’ Home to the alt-right, conspiracy theorists, and trolls (Zannettou, Bradlyn, De Cristofaro, Kwak, Sirivianos, Stringhini, & Blackburn, 2018, p.1), the site garnered international attention on October 27th, 2018, after Robert Bowers posted “HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in” (Roose, 2018, para. 3) moments before allegedly killing eleven people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Roose, 2018). Gab was promptly de-platformed² on October 28th but came back online on November 4th when Rob Monster, the founder and CEO of Epik.com, agreed to host the domain (Schulberg, 2018).

Bowers’ final post encompasses the central findings of this study. As can be posited from his post, Bowers subscribed to the notion that a Jewish organization was supporting the migration of ‘invaders’ to the United States and that those invaders were victimizing white folks. Given the consistency with the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory detailed in this study, his ideological beliefs and fear surrounding Jewish folks as a nefarious force seeking to bring about white genocide was no doubt reinforced within Gab’s highly dense echo chamber. Likewise, Bowers asserted, ‘Screw your optics, I’m going in,’ which suggests a differing opinion regarding movement tactics (e.g., violence versus non-violence) and refers to the concern that certain members of the alt-right have about the public’s perception of the movement.

For the sake of appropriately narrowing the scope of this study, I have placed my focus on Gab, and more specifically, on the users that I tracked for the latter part of 2018. The goal

² See Appendix A and B for the notifications that replaced the Gab home page during the time of their de-platforming.

of this project is to determine how Gab users' 'small stories'³ produce an understanding of alt-right pillars of identity. The 'small stories' that users (re)told to (co)construct their collective identity are centred around fear-based dis- and misinformation about other ethnic and political groups, as well as American social and political institutions. This dis- and misinformation has seeped into mainstream political discourse in the United States – and North America more broadly – in the era of Donald Trump and beyond, making it a worthwhile subject of study. Identifying stories prevalent in far-right communities, such as Gab, will allow us to recognize, understand, and counter their rhetoric wherever necessary.

³ 'Small stories' are the short, fragmented tellings, such posts on social media platforms (Georgakopoulou, 2013, p. 94).

Literature Review

As the so-called 'alt-right' emerged out of online obscurity during Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, scholars and journalists scrambled to understand who the alt-right were and what they believed in. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (n.d.a, para. 1), the alt-right – or 'Alternative Right' – is defined as: "a set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that 'white identity' is under attack by multicultural forces using 'political correctness' and 'social justice' to undermine white people and 'their' civilization." President Trump's use of racist rhetoric, contempt for political correctness, and views on immigration emboldened adherents of the alt-right while creating a space within the U.S. public sphere for their ideas to be heard and legitimized.

The 'alt-right' designation was initially created by Richard Spencer when discussing his opposition to neoconservative (or 'cuckservative') policies during George W. Bush's presidency (Hawley, 2017, p. 19). However, an "opposition to political correctness [...] [and] multiculturalism" (Nagle, 2017, p. 20) are two of the core elements that ultimately brought the movement together. For Milo Yiannopoulos, the alt-right is "a cultural reaction to the nannyng and language policing [...] of the progressive left" (Nagle, 2017, p. 65). During his college campus tour in 2017, Yiannopoulos also credited multiculturalism for the West's "civilizational decline" (Nagle, 2017, p. 65). Political correctness and multiculturalism have both challenged the place of white men within society, which has caused them to claim that they are "the real targets of discrimination" (Major & Kaiser, 2017, p. 588) and "victims of a political tragedy centered around the displacement of 'real America'" (Johnson, 2017, p. 230). Hence the resonance of President Trump's 'Make America Great Again' slogan. Claims around issues of 'reverse racism,' the value of meritocracy, and white (biological and cultural) genocide are

certainly evident on Gab. Throughout the course of my analysis, it became abundantly clear that how the users in my sample see the world is also heavily influenced by right-wing populist beliefs and conspiratorial thinking.

The goal of this project is to unveil what 'small stories' Gab users tell in order to construct their identities and denote boundaries between themselves and other groups. In this section, I briefly discuss literature pertaining to (1) perceived anti-white discrimination caused by multiculturalism and political correctness; (2) 'real' Americans' perspective and feelings of being wrongfully denied access to the material and symbolic gains of the American Dream; and (3) conspiratorial thinking and right-wing populism. Each of these subsections provide a framework for the topics that arise in the stories that Gab users tell.

Multiculturalism, Political Correctness, and Perceived White Victimization

Following the American Civil Rights Movement, white supremacist organizations, most notably factions of the Ku Klux Klan, constructed "claims of victimhood" (Berbrier, 2000, p. 175) and attempted to position themselves as the protectors of white civil rights. Indifferent to the historical power dynamics that made groups such as the NAACP necessary, members of white supremacist organizations argued that if other ethnic groups had organizations to defend their interests, then they too should be able to have such groups to protect the interests of white people (Swain & Nieli, 2003). In 2000, David Duke — who had been a central figure in constructing white victimhood claims in the 1970s — founded what is now called the European-American Unity and Rights Organization or EURO (Swain & Nieli, 2003, p. 167). Duke established EURO to combat various forms of discrimination supposedly faced by white people, most notably perceived threats to European-American heritage and values, affirmative action hiring practices, and policies of multiculturalism (Swain & Nieli, 2003, p. 167). Such practices

and policies are commonly associated with political correctness or 'PC culture' (Lalonde, Doan, & Patterson, 2000, p. 319).

As introduced in the previous section, political correctness is seen as a primary source of discrimination experienced by white people, and white men in particular. Political correctness is viewed as a movement to "[marginalize] mainstream, white, male-dominant rule in favour of minority, multicultural, [and] feminist subcultural groups" (Whitney & Wartella, 1992, p. 85), and, within the contemporary context, is commonly associated with 'SJWs' or 'social justice warriors.' Opponents of political correctness portray 'SJWs' as humourless (Massanari & Chess, 2018, p. 2), feminized, morally corrupt (Massanari & Chess, 2018, p. 15), and "emotional[ly] and psychological[ly] [fragile] [...] 'snowflakes' (Massanari & Chess, 2018, p. 4) who are excessively concerned with "identity politics [,] political correctness, [...] and policing the behavior of others" (Massanari & Chess, 2018, p. 2). Lalonde, Doan, & Patterson (2000, p. 318) found that 'PC crusaders' (now known as 'SJWs') are depicted as a danger to "fundamental American principles," such as individualism, freedom of speech (Lalonde et al., 2000, p. 320), and the belief in meritocracy (Lalonde et al., 2000, p. 321).

Lalonde et al. (2000, p. 332) argue that the dispute concerning political correctness is embroiled in anxiety surrounding "power and resistance to social change." Political correctness works to challenge the supremacy of white voices by attempting to create spaces for members of marginalized groups to make claims and air grievances of their own. As a result, members of the white majority can come to view political correctness as a platform for anti-white bias and as a threat to the place of white people within the social hierarchy. Studies conducted by Norton & Sommers (2011, p. 215) and Wilkins, Wellman, Babbitt, Toosi, & Schad (2015) indicate that the perception of discrimination as a 'zero-sum game' and the belief in anti-white bias go hand in hand, meaning that a perceived decline in the discrimination against one group (e.g., BIPOC,

women, the LGBTQ+ community, etc.) coincides with a perceived increase in the discrimination against another (white people).

The narrative of white people as “an oppressed majority” (Ferber, 1998, p. 51), and the understanding of discrimination as a zero-sum game, is consistent with Berbrier’s (2000, p. 175) and Ferber’s (1998, p. 51) assertions that white supremacist organizations have reacted to the feminist and civil rights movements by declaring that white people, too, are not being granted equal rights. Similarly, the election of Barack Obama as America’s first Black President in November 2008 initially re-energized racially motivated hate groups in the United States (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.b., para. 1). The momentum of white supremacist groups continued to grow as a result of anti-racist activists establishing Black Lives Matter after a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri murdered Michael Brown, an 18-year-old, unarmed, black man. Hughey (2014, p. 727) contends that the narrative of white oppression has become a “dominant feature of [the North American] conversation on race.” The reactionary measures taken by white supremacist groups demonstrate a larger pattern among the white population that is consistent with perceiving discrimination as a zero-sum game.

The ‘Real’ America(ns)

In her 1997 book, Daniels (p. 34, emphasis in the original) includes an illustration of a white, working-class man with text stating that “White men *built* this nation!!,” “White men *are* this nation!!!” The creator of the illustration portrays white men as moral, good, and hard-working, while simultaneously highlighting a white man’s place within the social hierarchy of the United States. Calling into question the legitimacy of the place and power that white men hold within society, particularly when inversely correlated to upward social mobility for women and BIPOC, provides fertile ground for making claims of victimhood and anti-white discrimination

(Major & Kaiser, 2017, p. 588-589). When “members of high-status groups” (Young & Sullivan, 2016, p. 32) claim to be the ‘real’ victims, they place themselves in victim contests with members of lower-status groups; a phenomenon also known as ‘competitive victimhood’. Competitive victimhood is rooted in “*stigma reversal*” (Young and Sullivan, 2016, p. 32, emphasis in the original), which entails disrupted feelings of moral superiority. Because white people believe themselves to be moral, hard-working, and deserving of a superordinate position in the social hierarchy, they often react to the notion of white privilege as an act of ‘reverse racism’ and anti-white bias.

White men from working-class backgrounds and white women (both working-class and otherwise) commonly deny their white privilege by proclaiming a belief in meritocracy, stating that they themselves are underprivileged in terms of gender, class, or both but have overcome the hardships of their lives by ‘pulling up their bootstraps’ just as anyone else has the ability to do. The group of rural, white, working-class Louisianans interviewed by Hochschild (2016) in ‘Strangers in Their Own Land’ exemplify such an attitude. They speculate that BIPOC (Hochschild, 2016, p 93), immigrants, refugees, and women (Hochschild, 2016, p. 138) are being allowed, and even enabled, by the federal government (Hochschild, 2016, p. 137) to unfairly “[cut] *in line*” (Hochschild, 2016, p. 137, emphasis in the original) to access the American Dream (Hochschild, 2016, p. 136). Her interviewees felt that they had been patiently waiting their turn, but that this metaphorical ‘line’ is now being reorganized based on identity rather than merit, and as a result, they are being pushed further and further to the back of it (Hochschild, 2016, p. 212). Hochschild’s (2016, p. 136) ‘line’ analogy aptly illustrates how white people can come to view discrimination as a zero-sum game (Norton & Sommers, 2011, p. 215) by believing that the removal of barriers for BIPOC, immigrants, refugees, and women means hurting ‘real’ (read: white) Americans, particularly white men, who are ‘hard-working’ and

‘deserving.’ Interestingly, one of Hochschild’s (2016, p. 170) interviewees notes her distaste for line-cutters, but later discusses her admiration for her mother’s ability to obtain a secretarial job even though she was a single “mother of five, on welfare.” This is something that she attributes to her mother’s “gumption” (Hochschild, 2016, p. 173), while openly acknowledging that her mother lied about having a college diploma in order to become employed (Hochschild, 2016, p. 173). Meanwhile, the interviewee neglects to recognize that her own mother did not become a secretary using meritocratic means.

Vance (2016), a white, working-class man with familial roots in rural Kentucky, claims that despite a deep-rooted sense of patriotism (Vance, 2016, p. 189), working-class whites have grown to be increasingly pessimistic (Vance, 2016, p. 194) and profoundly mistrustful of “the very institutions of [American] society” (Vance, 2016, p. 193). He believes that this worldview is exacerbated by skepticism surrounding mainstream media and the proliferation of online conspiracy theories, specifically, those pertaining to the federal government (Vance, 2016, p. 192). Like Hochschild (2016), Vance states that white, working-class Americans are starting to feel like “the modern American meritocracy was not built for *them*” (2016, p. 191, emphasis in the original). For instance, Vance’s (2016, p. 194) father asked him if he “pretended to be black or liberal” on his law school applications, suggesting that he would not have been admitted otherwise. Much like the rural Louisianans interviewed by Hochschild (2016, p. 137), Vance (2016, p. 193) sees people from his community as denying their own agency. He argues that when people become so cynical about their circumstances, it is easy to place blame on factors external to themselves (Vance, 2016, p. 193), such as the government (Vance, 2016, p. 194; Hochschild, 2016, p. 137) or the so-called ‘undeserving line-cutters’ (Hochschild, 2016, p. 137-138). Vance (2016, p. 194) states that relinquishing responsibility for one’s own decisions is a “cultural movement in the white working class [...] [that] gains adherents by the

day”.

Right-Wing Populism and Conspiratorial Thinking

Much like Vance (2016, p. 192) suggests, feelings of victimization and mistrust for those within this study have created a salient boundary characteristic of populism – the people versus the elite –, which is frequently reinforced by the telling of mis- and disinformation, notably through the use of conspiracy theories.

Informed by the ideational approach to populism⁴, the definition of populism that I have adopted originates from political scientists Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017, p.6) and explains populism as “a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the [morally] corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the [...] general will [...] of the people”. Being thin-centred means that populism is limited in its ability to provide any substantial explanations for modern political questions, and therefore, must be paired with or assimilated into other, thick-centred, ideologies, such as nationalism, anti-Semitism, liberalism, socialism, etc. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). While ideology is not the focus of this study, it is important to acknowledge that it serves to inform and shape the stories that actors tell while constructing their identities.

The binary between those who are morally good – 'the people' – and those who are immoral – 'the elite' – provides a basis for the distrust of anyone whom they believe to hold power over them (e.g., the government, academia, the mainstream media, etc.) (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 11-12). The fine line between populist ideology and conspiratorial thinking

⁴ The ideational approach to populism posits that populism is a “set of ideas” (Mudde, 2017, p. 41) tied to conflict between two morally opposed groups. Morality is the primary concern of the ideational approach (Mudde, 2017, p. 29).

is crossed when actors go from believing - and communicating - that the elite are “working against the interests” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 13) of the people to believing that “shadowy forces” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 12), are secretly plotting and creating an agenda to harm 'the people' and undermine their interests (Bergmann, 2018, p. 49). As will be seen in my findings, these 'shadowy forces' commonly come in the form of communists, Jewish people, and the so-called 'globalists'. Both populism and conspiracy theories avoid any sort of “detailed analysis of complex power structures” (Bergmann, 2018, p. 58), and instead, replace it with a basic 'good versus bad' argument (Bergmann, 2018, p. 58).

Bergmann (2018, p. 4) found that those who felt a lack of agency were more susceptible to conspiratorial thinking. Populists and conspiracy theorists both work to position themselves as victims of a constructed *Other* (Bergmann, 2018, p. 59). The simple 'good versus bad'/in-group versus out-group explanation works as a psychological defense mechanism of sorts. Such a binary seemingly diminishes the psychological effects of living in a highly complex world (Bergmann, 2018, p. 59), particularly when members of a group feel threatened by that complexity, rapid change, and certain political processes (Bergmann, 2018, p. 62). In times of uncertainty, actors look for “patterns and hidden meaning” (Bergmann, 2018, p. 60) in an attempt to provide simplistic explanations for complex processes that are outside of a common-sense understanding of the social world. Conspiracy theories that involve a nefarious plot by a shadowy force can serve to absolve the actor of their feelings of inadequacy and enhance their own feelings of moral worth (Bergmann, 2018, p. 60) by providing a scapegoat to take the blame for the actors' hardships.

Conspiracy theories are untestable because evidence that disputes such theories is then itself disputed by the believers as an attempt by the elite to obscure a malevolent plot (Bergmann, 2018, p. 56). In a time of “*Post-Truth* politics” (Bergmann, 2018, p. 8, emphasis in

the original), conspiracy theories become increasingly dangerous as misinformation is allowed to flourish in a social milieu where factual information is drowned out by stories that play on fears and emotion (Bergmann, 2018, p. 8). Furthermore, social media sites, particularly ones frequented by actors with a narrow range of beliefs – such as Gab – serve as echo chambers and ideological silos, as well as play into confirmation bias (Bergmann, 2018, p. 63) and reinforce false beliefs.

Conceptual Framework

Using a relational realist⁵ approach, I plan to perform a narrative analysis informed by Tilly's (2005) and Tilly and Tarrow's (2007) work on the use of storytelling as a tool for collective identity formation and the activation and deactivation of social boundaries.

Tilly (2005, p. 6) argues that interaction is at the core of social processes, such as the formation and transformation of identities, social boundaries, and social ties (Tilly, 2005, p. 7). Through interaction and storytelling, actors continually co-construct, negotiate, and renegotiate relations and boundaries between and among individuals and groups (Tilly, 2005, p. 140; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 81). Such stories consist of answers to questions of individual and collective identity, such as “[w]ho am I? [w]ho are we? [w]ho are you? and [w]ho are they?” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 78). The answers to these questions serve to construct actors’ identities, which, according to Tilly (2005, p. 209), are comprised of: (1) boundaries that divide actors (both individuals and groups); (2) relations that take place across and within these boundaries; and (3) stories that are (re)told about these boundaries and the involved relations (Tilly, 2005, p. 209). For this study, I will be concentrating on matters of collective, rather than individual, identity.

⁵ According to Tilly (2004, p. 72), ‘relational realism’ revolves around the idea that social life is comprised of “transactions, interactions, social ties, and conversations.”

Actors have a plethora of different identities which they switch between based on relations and the activation and deactivation of boundaries (Tilly, 2005, p. 209) throughout time and space. According to Tilly and Tarrow (2007, p. 78), boundaries (e.g., between class, gender, race, etc.) are typically formed independently of 'contentious politics.' That is to say that they are typically formed independent of "interactions in which actors make claims that bear on someone else's interests, [which] [lead] to coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests [...], in which governments are [...] targets, the objects of claims, or third parties" (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 202). However, once such identities have been formed, they can be used by actors within contentious politics. It is also within contentious politics that boundary activation and deactivation can be witnessed (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 78). Tilly and Tarrow (2007, p. 80) argue that during contention, an existing boundary becomes activated, and is therefore seen as more pertinent, while the other boundaries become deactivated or seen as less so.

Through questions of collective identity – "[w]ho are we?' [...] '[w]ho are they?'" (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 78) – actors are able to form social ties and networks with those whom they "[share] histories, cultures, and collective connections" (Tilly, 2005, p. 61). Such shared connections are essential components on which social movements are built (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 117), and become increasingly important as actors from different networks come into contact and begin interacting with one another, effectively activating and deactivating certain social boundaries between the networks (Tilly, 2005, p. 138). Additionally, Tilly (2005, p. 8) asserts that stories (re)told within a network influence how individual actors within that network construct their own personal experiences. This, in turn, serves to reinforce both the group's collective identity and the boundaries of the network. For my purposes, it is also important to note that stories can contain "excuses [and] explanations" (Tilly, 2005, p. 209). They also

frequently include assertions regarding inequality between groups, such as claims of “superiority, [...] subordination, [and] unjust advantages” (Tilly, 2005, p. 9).

Data and Methods

One of the original aims of this project was to reveal the composition of the alt-right and to discover which users in the network were most influential. While the structure of the network is no longer a focus on this study, determining which Gab users were most influential remains a pertinent tool for my sample selection (as detailed below). To uncover the configuration of social ties found on Gab, I constructed a directed binary network. A directed network takes into account the ties that are directed both inward at and outward from a node (Opsahl, Agneessens, & Skvoretz, 2010, p. 247). The decision to construct a binary network rather than a weighted network lies in what it is that I was trying to achieve – to determine the immediate influence of a node. Degree centrality measures are designed to indicate the number of ties that are connected to each node in a network (Opsahl, Agneessens, & Skvoretz, 2010, p. 246) and are “a measure of immediate influence” (Borgatti, 2005, p. 62). According to Borgatti (2005, p. 62), influence is shared through a “parallel duplication process” where each node influences its adjacent nodes concurrently (Borgatti, 2005, p. 62) through a process of replication (Borgatti, 2005, p. 58). When tie strength is taken into account, as is the case with weighted networks, “an outcome of 10 could either be a result of 10 ties with a weight of 1, 1 tie with a weight of 10, or a combination between those two extremes” (Opsahl, Agneessens, & Skvoretz, 2010, p. 247). A weighted network serves to obscure the number of ties that exist between nodes and was, therefore, not appropriate for the construction of this particular network.

For the first stage of my study, I utilized Gab to uncover ties within the network. There are three reasons that I chose to use Gab rather than Twitter: (1) at the time of writing my

proposal, several prominent alt-right personalities had been banned from Twitter, rendering it an ineffective tool for my study; (2) Twitter's banning of Baked Alaska and de-verification of Richard Spencer and Jason Kessler's accounts suggested that the social media platform may have continued to ban additional prominent alt-right users in the future, thereby making it an unstable source of data for my study; and (3) Gab is marketed as a platform that champions 'free speech'. Using a social networking platform that caters to the alt-right significantly reduced the need to differentiate between users who at some level identify with right-wing ideologies and those who are just part of the broader social networking community.

To construct the network, I adapted snowball sampling to online data collection, initially employing Richard Spencer, Andrew Anglin, and Baked Alaska as key figures. My reasons for selecting Spencer, Anglin, and Baked Alaska were as follows: (1) at the time of the conception of this study, they each embodied the characteristics of what I believed to be one of the three broad segments of the alt-right: pseudo-intellectual white nationalist, neo-Nazi, and internet troll⁶; (2) by drawing upon figures from different parts of the alt-right, I was able to create a social network map that was representative of the network as a whole; (3) Spencer's primary significance lies in the fact that he "coined the term 'Alt-Right'" (Hawley, 2017, p. 51). He is also well-known for his attempt at rebranding white nationalism using pseudointellectual arguments and preppy aesthetics; (4) Anglin is the founder of the then-popular neo-Nazi website The Daily Stormer and a self-proclaimed troll. He used The Daily Stormer as a tool to mobilize his 'troll army' to carry out vicious trolling campaigns, including the much-publicized attack against Tanya Gersh in 2016 (Phillips, 2017); and (5) Baked Alaska was an internet troll and online

⁶ Through the creation of a network map of Gab, I discovered that the network was significantly less segmented than I had initially estimated. The network visualization in Appendices D and E indicates that rather than the network consisting of three distinct clusters of nodes, it was made up of one quite dense node cluster.

personality. After leaving his job at BuzzFeed, Baked Alaska became the manager of Milo Yiannopoulos' college speaking tour and rose to alt-right prominence on social media sites YouTube and Twitter.

In a spreadsheet, I recorded the users who were followed by Spencer, Anglin, and Baked Alaska, the users who were followed by those users, and the users who were followed by those users. To keep the amount of information collected somewhere in the range of reasonable, I only recorded individual users⁷ who had 4,000 or more followers and a 4:5 - or 80 percent - follower/following ratio⁸. Establishing parameters based on a user's follower/following ratio also acted as an initial method of eliminating bots from my network⁹. Further steps for ensuring the exclusion of bots from my subsample include constructing a sample based on the 50 most influential users and manually analyzing users included in my sample and subsample. It should also be noted that I excluded users with private accounts.

Once I completed the systematic recording of all applicable Gab users in a spreadsheet, I manually created an adjacency matrix of nodes and edges. The adjacency matrix was used in the following ways: (1) I inputted it into Gephi to create two network visualizations (see Appendix D and E). I created the network in Appendix D using the 'giant component' filter, which resulted in a visualization of the complete network. Then, using 'degree range,' I filtered out the nodes with fewer than 200 edges. This created a visualization consisting of the nodes (or users) most central to the network; and (2) I used it to determine which nodes had the greatest number

⁷ All organizational and group accounts were excluded.

⁸ I chose 4,000 followers as the threshold because it was low enough of a follower count that I would still be able to construct a robust map, but not so low that I would end up mapping the entire network. I selected a high threshold (80%) for the follower/following ratio in order to keep the data both manageable and focused on the goal of determining which 50 users (or nodes) were the most directly influential in the network.

⁹ Bots follow a large number of accounts at a time, whereas they do not receive nearly the same number of followers. As a result, their follower/following ratio tends to be quite low.

of ties directed inwards (see Appendix F), and therefore, the most direct influence over other nodes within the network (Borgatti, 2005, p. 62). Based on degree centrality measures, I selected a sample of fifty (N=50) individuals. It should be noted that I constructed the network between September 5th and September 18th, 2018. I recognize that social networks are continually in flux, including during periods of data collection. I made the choice to construct the network over a 14-day period in order to provide a balance between attempting to mitigate any major network fluctuations and the labour-intensive nature of manually constructing a substantial network. Therefore, my network should be regarded as a snapshot of the structure during that period of time only.

During the second stage of my study, I used the work of Tilly (2005) and Tilly and Tarrow (2007) – as discussed in my conceptual framework section – to analyze how Gab users use ‘small stories’ (Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 257) to construct their identities and denote boundaries between themselves and other groups. ‘Small stories’ is a concept used by Georgakopoulou (2013, p. 94) in her analysis of ways of telling, sites, and tellers. Georgakopoulou (2013, p. 94) defines small stories as “discourse activities which were traditionally either under-represented or not viewed as stories within narrative analysis: short (fragmented, open-line) tellings about self and other, of ongoing, future or shared events, allusions to tellings, deferrals of telling, etc.”. I have used Georgakopoulou’s (2013) concept of ‘small stories’ to describe the Gab posts in this study. Additionally, I broadly adopted Alexander’s (2006) concept of the civil sphere, in so far as I have used the notion of civil/anti-civil symbolic codes and discourses of liberty and repression to explain the rhetorical strategies employed by users in an effort to justify why they were worthy of being granted liberty, while groups on the other side of the boundary ought to be repressed. According to Alexander (2006, p. 57), discourses of repression are used to justify why groups who purportedly do not have the

capacity to make decisions that will maintain a democratic civil society should be prevented from doing so.

I captured and stored any text-based and visual content posted or reposted to the Gab accounts of the individuals in my sample (N=50). My content collection began on September 20th, 2018 and ran until December 26th, 2018. My intention was to collect data for 90 consecutive days, but Gab went offline between October 28th and November 4th, 2018, due to Robert Bowers' use of the platform immediately prior to allegedly killing eleven people in the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting. I chose a three-month time frame for my data collection in order to mitigate the potential risk of losing access to my data sources. This was initially a concern because there was the potential for Gab users to be doxxed (publicly identified), which could lead to their restricting public access to their own accounts.

Finally, to narrow my focus, I established a subsample (N=40) by eliminating individuals in my initial sample (N=50) who did not post about race-related issues between September 20th and December 26th, 2018. Once I established my subsample (N=40), I used NVivo to manually code the captured content that indicated boundaries between the users and another group (e.g., undocumented migrants, feminists, Democrats, globalists, etc.) using an inductive approach. See Appendix G for my coding scheme and code frequencies. Manually coding the Gab content from approximately 1,800 posts provided me with a greater, more contextualized familiarity with the content in its original form (Latzko-Toth, Bonneau, & Millette, 2017, p. 209). Immersing myself in the data afforded me the ability to delve deep into "meanings and stories" (Latzko-Toth, Bonneau, & Millette, 2017, p. 201) through fine-grained analysis (Latzko-Toth, Bonneau, & Millette, 2017, p. 211), leading to small, but 'thick' data.

Limitations

There are four main limitations to my study: (1) the stories that I detail cannot be generalized to the alt- or far-right as a whole. There are a multitude of different stories being (re)told within these communities. The stories that I present here are only representative of the ones (re)told by the most directly influential users on Gab in September 2018; (2) social networks are fluid structures. Therefore, undetected changes could have occurred within the timeframe of my network construction; (3) collecting data manually, rather than computationally, limited my ability to go back multiple years and collect content from millions of posts; and (4) I only analyzed content from the most influential users as based on degree centrality measures. For this reason, this study does not detail the ideas of users on the fringes of the network. As a result, internet trolls have been excluded from my sample and subsample¹⁰.

While it is a possibility that some Gab users gained or lost followers during the time of my network construction (between September 5th and September 18th, 2018), Zannettou et al. (2018, p. 1009) presented a paper at a conference in April 2018 that included a list of the top 20 users by followers which featured significant overlap with users identified in my sample.

Due to my sample and subsample exclusively including the most popular Gab users, content from those on the fringes of the network was not included. This exclusion works to obscure some of the more extreme, but not widely spread, views that exist on Gab. Additionally, internet trolls¹¹ did not appear in my subsample, meaning that an important part of alt-right culture is excluded from my study. However, the exclusion of trolls eliminates the question as to whether the posted content being analyzed is sincere or not. Scholars interested in future

¹⁰ Many users in my network openly disliked troll accounts, thereby pushing them to the fringes.

¹¹ 'Trolling' is rooted in the concept of drawing a fishing line with a baited hook through water (Phillips, 2015, p.15). Once their target has been baited, trolls seek to agitate, "cause disruption and/or [...] trigger or exacerbate conflict" (Phillips, 2015, p. 17) through behaviours that range from silly and innocent to blatant forms of harassment" (Phillips, 2015, p. 23).

research on either the more extreme aspects of the far-right or trolls, may either want to explore content on message boards on sites such as 4chan, 8chan, or Reddit or collect content from users who exist on the fringes of Gab.

Reflexivity Statement

Much like the actors that I am researching, I am a white, 32-year-old, straight, cis-gender, non-disabled female. I grew up in a working-class household in a rural part of Nova Scotia, Canada but spent 13 years living in various cities across the country – Halifax, Calgary, St. John's, and Toronto. In 2019, I returned to the rural area where my husband and I were raised. With the exception of my gender, I hold a similar amount of power and privilege to those whom I am researching in this study. I was raised in an incredibly hierarchical family, where my maternal grandfather exists as the family patriarch. My grandfather retired from a career in high policing for the Canadian government, so politics was, and still is, at the forefront during family discussions. One of my grandfather's defining characteristics is being a conspiracy theorist. Conspiracy theories were like my bedtime stories as a child and because of his profession, my family believed that these stories may be coming from some sort of credible, top-secret source. Being raised on such theories, I became quite enthralled with many of them in my early 20s, as I struggled to understand my place in the world as someone who came of age during the 2008 financial crisis. I positioned myself as a left-wing populist, born from the Occupy movement, and interacted with other conspiratorial populists who were distrustful of the federal government (both American and Canadian) on Twitter. Shortly thereafter, I discovered the work of Karl Marx, which developed into an intense interest in economic sociology. This led me to return to university for a second undergraduate degree and, finally, my current master's degree. While my perspectives and approach have evolved over the course of my adult life, these foundational building blocks of my identity have directly informed this study.

Chapter Two

‘Who Are They?’: An Introduction to the Main Characters

A great amount of detail regarding Gab users’ identity construction and boundary formation emerged not necessarily through stories that they explicitly (re)told about themselves, but through the application of civil/anti-civil¹² codes in the stories they (re)told about those on the other side of the boundary. Users¹³ consistently structured their ‘small stories’ about intergroup relations in terms of moral dichotomies, e.g., good/evil, rational/irrational, liberty/repression, etc. Overall, users (co)constructed themselves and other right-wing white Americans as the moral, hardworking, and rightful heirs to the United States (civil and sacred). Users’ ‘small stories’ were rooted in the belief that they were being victimized by the corrupt, evil, and anti-American left¹⁴ (anti-civil and profane).

Despite constructing Jewish folks working within American institutions, Central American migrants, Islamic immigrants, white leftists, and leftist NPCs as threats to their “European[-based] identity, culture, and way of life” (user 35), Gab users cast so-called ‘(((communists)))’¹⁵ as the ‘Big Bad’ within their stories. Users believed (((communists))) to be

¹² According to Alexander (2006, p. 61), users (or their motives, relations, or institutions) that are constructed as ‘civil’ within the discourse of liberty “must be given social rights because the members of this group are conceived of as possessing the capacity for voluntary action.” Whereas users (or their motives, relations, or institutions) that are constructed as ‘anti-civil’ within the discourse of repression are perceived to be irrational, passive, conspiratorial, valuing power over law, etc., and are seen as not having the ability to make responsible decisions or having the capacity for voluntary action. Therefore, they ought to be “silenced, displaced, or repressed” for the protection of civil society. See Appendix C for a table detailing civil/anti-civil codes of Civil Discourse.

¹³ For the sake of simplification, going forward, I will be referring to the Gab users in my study as ‘users’.

¹⁴ While I acknowledge that ‘the left’ is an undesirably broad term, it is the most straightforward way to succinctly categorize a bevy of left-of-centre labels that are used by the users in this study. Unless a label is particularly relevant to my analysis, I will be using the term ‘the left’ to indicate one or more of the following categories: the (far-)left, liberals, libs, shitlibs, progressives, democrats, demonrats, (((communists))), communists, socialists, and ANTIFA.

¹⁵ It is important to note that the users’ adoption of the ‘echo’ when discussing ‘(((communism)))’ denotes the conflation of communism and Judaism and is commonly used online by anti-Semitic conspiracy theorists.

a group of the world's most elite Jewish folks¹⁶ – purportedly headed by George Soros – who act as the puppet master of various groups situated below them within the American hierarchical power structure. Users claim that the (((communists’))) agenda is to exert control over all other groups in order to transform American society – and ultimately, the world¹⁷ – into a communist dystopia from the top down. In this chapter, I will be answering the question, ‘who are they?’ by identifying the characters in the users’ stories and outlining the identities that users (co)constructed for these characters.

George Soros and the ‘Jewish Elite’ as ‘the (((Communists)))’

*“The white race is absolutely under attack...
and while it's under attack by a little bit of everyone,
there is one group at the forefront of it” (user 21).*

*“How is there is still any question of (((who)))
is destroying Western Civilization?!?!?!?” (user 19).*

*“Some may call it Communism,
but I call it what it is: Judaism!” (user 9).*

When talking about the characters in their stories, users situated groups within a hierarchical power structure. According to users, at the top are the ‘(((communists)))’, an elite group of Jewish ‘Globalists’ (users 9, 12, 13, 18, 19, 21 28, and 35) who control “international

¹⁶ Historically, the conflation of communism and Judaism emerged in Russia during the Russian Revolution. The ‘Jewish Bolshevism’ conspiracy quickly spread to Germany by way of ‘white [Russian] émigrés’ and a German translation of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (see footnote 15). It was then adopted by Adolf Hitler during the early 1920s as he “allied himself with a conspiratorial völkisch German/[w]hite émigré association [...] Aufbau: Wirtschafts-politische Vereinigung für den Osten (Reconstruction: Economic-Political Organization for the East)” (Kellogg, 2005, p. 1).

¹⁷ The proto ‘Jewish plot’ conspiracy theory originated during the French Revolution and was reportedly first constructed and dispersed as anti-revolutionary propaganda by Augustin Barruel, a French Jesuit (Berenbaum & Skolnik, 2007, p. 178). However, the existence of the contemporary ‘Jewish plot’ for world domination was first outlined in a 1903 Russian book entitled, Протоколы сионских мудрецов (translated as The Protocols of the Elders of Zion). The book consisted of a collection of forged texts, which were promoted as authentic documents from secret meetings at the 1897 Zionist Congress (Hagemeister, 2008, p. 87-94).

finance” (user 35), and therefore, global politics. ‘(((communists)))’ are portrayed as being morally “corrupt” (users 18 and 27), “dishonest” (users 9, 18, and 27), satanic anti-Christians (users 13, 18, 28, and 35) who “indulge their pedophile perversions and murder citizens for entertainment” (user 18) and “belong to a dark and repulsive force” (user 9). Supposedly headed by Jewish Billionaire investor and founder of the Open Society Foundations¹⁸, George Soros, the ‘(((communists)))’ were said to be secretly exerting their power and influence over every other group in the United States – and the Western world more broadly. Users (re)told stories about how the (((communists))) have taken control of certain American institutions – namely the Democratic Party, the criminal justice system, public education system, ‘mainstream media,’ ‘(((Hollywood)))’, and ‘Silicon Valley’¹⁹ – so that these institutions can use their influence to diffuse (((communist))) ideology by changing laws, ‘brainwashing’ students, advancing political correctness and anti-white discrimination, and ‘silencing dissenters’.

One of the plot points in the stories that Gab users (re)told about the elite group of (((communists))) was that they were working to “subvert and eliminate” current U.S. immigration policies (user 19) and effectively eradicate the borders of the United States (user 17) to allow “hordes of 3rd world invaders” (users 9, 19, 21, and 40) to migrate to the country. Furthermore, they believed that George Soros was personally funding these so-called ‘invasions’ directly or indirectly through the Open Society Foundations (user 35). User 18 asserts, for instance, that “[u]nder the [sic] Satan’s command, George Soros has created fake Christian [c]hurches and organizations to push open borders, amnesty and an evil global government.” A particularly

¹⁸ According to their mission statement, the Open Society Foundations “are the world’s largest private funder of independent groups working for justice, democratic governance, and human rights” (Open Society Foundations, 2021).

¹⁹ Users utilized the term ‘Silicon Valley’ to indicate that they were talking about Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google, and/or Apple.

prevalent example of this type of allegation found within users' stories involved the fall 2018 Central American migrant caravans²⁰, which users purported to be an attempted invasion of the United States funded by George Soros. I will be discussing stories that users (re)told about the 2018 migrant caravans in greater detail in Chapter 3.

*“[It] is all about CONTROL!
Control... your healthcare. Control... what you can say.
Control...what you learn. Control...what you read. Control...what you eat.
Control...your guns. Control...your news” (user 18).*

As stated in users' stories, (((communists))) want to establish a “global utopia”²¹ (user 17) over which they have total control. To achieve that, they need to destroy the U.S., democracy, freedom, and those who represent it (i.e., the white, ‘Real’ Americans). The methods of destruction most discussed by users were: (1) using political correctness as a means to “silence dissenters” (users 5, 7, 17, 20, 27) and displace white folks from the front of the metaphorical ‘line’; and (2) manufacturing a white genocide. These three claims will serve as the basis for Chapters 3 and 4.

Mainstream American Institutions as Anti-Civil ‘Globalist Groupies’

Mainstream American state institutions – and particularly the Jewish folks who worked within them – were described as “globalist groupies” by user 17. Also known as anti-civil institutions (Alexander, 2006, p. 59). Acting as the faithful followers of the (((communists))), as well as the intermediaries within the American hierarchical power structure between the most elite (((communists))) and the left-wing masses. In the users' stories, Democratic politicians

²¹ Based on the users' descriptions, ‘global dystopia’ would be a more appropriate term.

acted merely as figureheads enjoying a sense of power while the (((communists))) pulled their strings behind the scenes. Along with the Democratic Party, Jewish folks embedded within the criminal justice system, public education system, ‘mainstream media,’ entertainment industry, and ‘Silicon Valley’ (users 2, 17, 21, and 31) were all said to be working together to use their institutional power and influence as a weapon to “screw whites” (user 21) and “destroy America” (users 32 and 35) from the inside.



(Callahan, 2020).

The Democratic Party

“Understand that democrats are [J]ew-owned and you can see that [they] want to continue the destruction of [A]merica” (user 35).

“It’s No Longer Democrat vs Republican. It’s Communism vs Freedom” (user 25).

According to users, the Democratic Party is a “communist, terrorist organization” (user 5) run by “women and non-whites” (user 19) whose slogan “should be ‘fuck white men’” (users 19 and 21). Users asserted that Democrats hated America’s founders, constitution (user 18), democracy (user 33), and patriots (user 14). Here, the users applied an anti-civil code to the Democratic Party, communism, women, and people of colour in an attempt to justify using discourses of repression when telling ‘small stories’ about actors on the ‘anti-civil’ side of the boundary. There was the widespread belief among users that the Democratic Party was aiding the (((communists))) in ‘importing’ both “migrant hordes” (user 32) who are willing to exchange their votes for “free stuff” (users 3, 14, 21, 27, and 31) and “millions of Islamic terrorists” (user 35) to help the (((communists))) bring about the ‘New World Order’ (user 35). Therefore, users argued the necessity of repressing anti-civil actors’ ability to make decisions for the sake of both the democratic civil society, as well as the actors themselves (Alexander, 2006, p. 57).

The Criminal Justice System

“The laws only apply to whites” (user 19).

Users 9, 19, and 25 used James Fields’ trial and sentencing to demonstrate that the U.S. criminal justice system is a morally corrupt, anti-civil institution. Purportedly “unprotected by a racist Black police chief” (user 19) and “railroaded by Dem[ocrats] in court” (user 9), users 19 and 25 felt that the “JEWdicial system” (user 19) had the goal of making an example out of James Fields following his 2017 car attack on counter-protestors near the Unite the Right rally, which led to the death of Heather Heyer and the injuries of 35 others. User 19 called Fields’ sentence “humiliation propaganda” and stated that it was “meant to scare future white men from

publicly and proudly identifying with their racial heritage.” User 25 argued that Fields’ trial made it apparent that “[i]t is not safe to be White in America if you don’t hate the color of your own skin.” He was “defending his race,” claimed user 19, and now he is a “political prisoner” (user



9).

User 19 then switched gears from claiming that Fields was defending his race to stating that it was “self-defense”. Before the

“crash,” said user 19, Fields was “chased by [...] ANTIFA with bats down a street blocked by communists.” User 9 told the same story but added that “some [of the people] waved guns at him”. Was he supposed to “wait for ANTIFA to club him and his car?” user 19 asked. He “didn’t want to become the next Reginald Denny” (user 19). Associating James Fields with Reginald Denny, a white man who was attacked by four Black men during the 1992 L.A. riots, reinforces the notion that white men are being victimized and wrongfully repressed because of their racial identity.

Above is a picture of the site of the attack in Charlottesville, Virginia – on what is now called Heather Heyer Way²²

²² I took this picture during my visit to Charlottesville in October 2019. As you can see, over two years later, a memorial for Heather Heyer was still being actively maintained by city residents.

The Public Education System

*“The commies never give up.
Our schools and universities are more of an indoctrination
camp now than they ever have been before” (user 35).*

Users claimed that public schools were shaming white kids (user 13) into “believ[ing] that they are evil” (user 27) in an effort to “turn [them] against their race” (user 21). U.S. public school teachers were purportedly teaching their white students to “ignore the accomplishments of their ancestors” (user 13) because they were “horrible human beings who [fought] for evil” (user 21). User 21 believed that teaching kids about the roles that white folks had in slavery and colonialism, for instance, merely served to ‘brainwash’ them and was adamant that the history that was being taught in public schools was “absolute bullshit.” After reportedly watching a YouTube video of Jordan Peterson speaking, user 27 went as far as to say that parents should take their kids out of school if their teachers spoke about “equality, diversity, inclusivity, white privilege, [or] systemic racism,” because they were “not being educated; they [were] being indoctrinated.”

In addition to agreeing that public schools were ‘brainwashing’ kids into “hat[ing] white people,” user 24 also claimed that the public education system was brainwashing kids to “identify as different genders.” User 13 deemed this ‘brainwashing’ to be “LBGTQ conversion therapy,” which included drag queen, Jessica L’Whor, attending a middle school career day to read the students a book about bullying (user 11). The perceived role of LGBTQ+ folks in a supposed white genocide will become clear in Chapter 5.

Even more concerning to users was the role of universities in promoting “radical leftist” (users 21 and 25) ideals, as well as the (((communists’))) “[s]atanic agenda” (user 18). Users

referred to universities as “indoctrination camps” (user 18) and “Marxist boot camps” (user 37) run by the “same people [who] control [the] media” (user 21) (e.g., the Jewish elite). Users shared articles by right-wing media sources, such as Breitbart, The College Fix, and PJ Media, regarding a Clayton State University professor offering their students extra credit for attending a Stacey Abrams event (user 37), a Rutgers University history professor ‘resigning’ from being white in a Facebook post (users 9 and 24), and the existence of a course at Pomona College focused on analyzing the Bible using queer theory (user 31). User 25 was less than impressed that North Shore Community College was hosting a “white privilege symposium” entitled ‘Power, Privilege, Progress: Awareness to Action,’ which was to feature a “racial justice board game,” calling the symposium “crap.” While users 11 and 13 were particularly offended by the ‘Critical Look at Whiteness’ forum that took place at California State San Marcos at which ‘crybaby’ students claimed that the Christian kids’ cartoon, VeggieTales, was racist because of its portrayal of “vegetables of color” with “ethnic accents” as the villains. The users (co)constructed the primary, secondary, and post-secondary public education system as not only an anti-civil institution run by actors with anti-civil motives, but also a source of pollution which should be avoided or purified. For the users, the spread of ‘polluted’ ideas throughout the public education system is a threat to maintaining a democratic civil society (Alexander, 2006, p. 55).

The ‘Mainstream Media’ and (((Hollywood)))

*“[E]verything you’ve heard from
official channels has been propaganda
to help you accept your dispossession” (user 9).*

In their stories, users asserted that the ‘mainstream media’ – or ‘MSM’ – and (((Hollywood))) serve two main functions: (1) to ‘brainwash’ or ‘pollute’ the masses – like the public education system; and (2) to repress ‘dissenting’ (i.e., right-wing) voices – like ‘Silicon Valley.’

In agreement with the section on (((communists))), users believed that the “(((media)))” (user 21) and “(((Hollywood)))” (user 9) have been used by the ‘Jewish elites’ as a way of brainwashing or ‘polluting’ the masses for generations (users 9, 31, and 35). Users tied the Democratic Party to the media, stating that the Democratic Party and “liberal fake media” (user 5) “are one” (user 18) and that the ‘MSM’ and ‘(((Hollywood)))’ produce “outright liberal” (users 31 and 35) and “anti-white” (user 22) propaganda. For instance, user 35 claimed that 90% of late-night tv shows are not hosted by comedians anymore. They are “Democratic Party infomercials [...] [hosted by] rage leaders” (user 35). Meanwhile, user 40 complained about (((Hollywood))) diffusing “LGBT-feminist-multicultural-diversity-white male hating propaganda” (user 40) through movies, such as Star Wars (user 40).

Given the media and entertainment industry’s assumed functions in a (((communist))) plot to displace white people, it is unsurprising that users believed both industries to have an anti-right and anti-white bias, which users 9, 17, and 21 considered to be the (((media))) repressing the voices of right-wing whites. “MSM won’t post anything in favor of white people” (user 21), instead, they “demonize white people for Marxist civil war strategy” (user 21). For instance, users 26 and 37 accused the media of plastering screens with pictures of Ilhan Omar – the first Somali-American elected to U.S. Congress – and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez – a Puerto Rican activist from the Bronx –, both Democrats, while not even acknowledging that Republican voters had elected the first Korean-American to Congress. Users believed this omission to be an attempt by the media to further push the narrative that Republican voters are

racist. Additionally, users felt that the media portrayed “anyone who supports [n]ationalism, [w]hite [i]dentity and [t]raditionalism [as] some fat, ugly, creepy Boomer or some stupid, scrawny, pimple faced teen” (user 19) and labels them as “[w]hite [s]upremacists” (user 40) in an attempt to diminish their credibility and (co)struct them as impure, polluted, and profane in the minds of the public.

‘Silicon Valley’

*“Just registered an account on Gab.
The aggressive censorship agenda of big tech
makes it more important than ever to support
@a [Andrew Torba] and the platform he has built” (user 36)*

*“Silicon Valley isn't just Democrat; it's a leftist cult
as evidenced by its severe discrimination against non-leftists.
It puts controlling discourse above all else, including profits” (user 2).*

Users claimed that ‘Silicon Valley,’ as a group, were “the new ‘thought police’” (user 27) who were “all to[o] happy to develop the tools that the government will use to suppress speech” (user 25). For users, Apple CEO Tim Cook’s receipt of the Anti-Defamation League’s ‘Courage Against Hate’ award further reinforced the users’ belief in the connection between censorship and the ‘Jewish elite,’ as the Anti-Defamation League is a Jewish NGO. Discussing Cook’s acceptance speech, users 2, 7, and 21 argued that Cook was just trying to censor white conservatives by banning certain apps – namely Gab – from being accessed through the Apple App Store. User 17 claimed that due to his anti-white/anti-right stance, Cook must have classified “hateful views [that] are not welcome” in his company’s App store as being: (1) marriage as a sacred heterosexual bond “formed before God;” (2) sovereign nations and the duty to protect the nation’s borders; and (3) and free expression.

Unsurprisingly, several users (re)told ‘small stories’ about ‘Silicon Valley’ – particularly Twitter – wrongfully using discourses of repression to justify anti-right/anti-white discrimination against and censorship of the users. As I mentioned in the ‘Data and Methods’ section of this paper, it was around the time of my data collection that Twitter began banning users associated with the alt-right. Additionally, it was in 2018 that Twitter suspended accounts using an ‘NPC’ avatar because it was said to be “dehumanizing” (users 13, 35, and 40) to those on the left, but purportedly continued to allow tweets that “threaten[ed] the lives of conservatives all day long” (user 31). For instance, a 2014 article written by Grayson Perry for The New Republic entitled ‘The Straight, White, Middle-Class Man Needs to Be Dethroned’. Users 5 and 18 asserted that this article was the equivalent of saying “kill a straight white man on your way to work tomorrow,” but that Twitter was “totally fine” with it. User 11 stated that Twitter had no problem with tweets reading “One Settler One Bullet” – referring to white farmers in South Africa, – but wondered about Twitter’s reaction if they were to post “One Migrant One Bullet” (user 11). Meanwhile, says user 27, “Sarah Jeong sits on her perch on [the] nytimes editorial board after using Twitter to spew hatred against all men, all cops, [and] the entire white race.” User 27’s use of actors commonly associated with honour, high moral standing, and discourses of liberty (e.g., men, cops, and white folks) being (co)constructed by the left as impure, polluted, and profane indicates that the users and those on the left side of the boundary hold opposite views on who ought to be considered civil or anti-civil; repressed or given liberty.

Beyond just Twitter, the relationship between anti-right/anti-white discrimination and the hypocrisy of ‘Silicon Valley’s’ so-called censorship practices was a prominent element of the ‘small stories’ that users (re)told. User 2 claimed that a “[t]errorist who [b]eheaded [a] Canadian [t]ourist” was permitted to keep, and actively post on, their Facebook account. Meanwhile, Patreon had been “hyper-vigilant” about banning right-wing users, such as Laura

Loomer, Sargon of Akkad, Milo Yiannopoulos, and the Proud Boys, but not “ANTIFA [g]roups [...] using [P]atreon to fund [a] violent ‘insurrection’ against America” (user 2). Once again, these ‘small stories’ demonstrate a cross-boundary dispute over the (co)construction of the concepts of civil and anti-civil.

I will discuss the users’ ‘small stories’ of perceived repression via censorship and anti-white/anti-right discrimination further in Chapter 3, stories that further reinforce users’ belief in the (((communist))) plot.

Left-Wing Masses as ‘Snowflakes,’ ‘Non-Player Characters,’ and ‘Race Traitors’

A common thread that ties together the users’ (co)construction of rank-and-file leftists as snowflakes, non-player characters, and race traitors is the notion that the left-wing masses have been, and continue to be, brainwashed (polluted) by the (((communists))) by way of the ‘globalist groupies’ (anti-civil institutions), leading to politically correct groupthink (anti-civil motives) around the issues of race, gender, sexuality, immigration, politics, etc. Their place within the American hierarchical power structure in users’ stories exists between the (((communists’))) ‘globalist groupies’ and any people of colour. It should be noted that through the use of visual and text-based content, users implicitly (co)constructed the left-wing masses as a group of middle and upper class, liberal arts-educated, white millennials.

Snowflakes

*“I am not a liberal snowflake.
I am a badass believer in [h]uman [r]ights.
But if my belief in equity, empathy, goodness, and love
indeed makes me or people like me snowflakes
then you should know... WINTER IS COMING.’
This made my prostate twinge murderously!” (user 9).*

The term ‘Snowflake,’ a common political insult targeted at SJWs²³, “bubble-wrapped millennials” (user 2), and “liberal crybabies” (user 34), exists in the public imagination as a sheltered, typically white, far-left member of Generation Y who grew up with ‘participation awards,’ and an overblown sense of their own uniqueness. As a result of the perceived coddling of these millennials, users characterized snowflakes as acting irrationally and being fragile, easily offended, and entitled.

Users saw snowflakes as emotional deviants²⁴ with anti-civil motives. They were



characterized as being “oversensitive,” “irrational” (user 2), and overemotional. User 11 states that “[t]he Left [are] communists.” *“Trying to compromise and come to a middle ground [with them] is like trying to communicate to a brick wall.”* This implies that they are incapable of engaging in logical, mature dialogue, and therefore, are less worthy of participating in the democratic decision-making

(tattoomagoo, 2017).

process. Instead, they were often depicted – both visually and textually – as ‘crybabies’ (users 5, 18, 34, and 35) who partake in anti-civil relations if something does not go their way. Like the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President (users 16 and 35), for instance. The meme of ‘Luke Crywalker’ pictured above exemplifies the users’ claim that the left is anti-civil. So-called ‘Luke Crywalker’ was an anti-Trump protester that “was recorded screaming in agony during the inauguration of Donald Trump” (tattoomagoo, 2017). Users also expanded the

²³ Social justice warriors.

²⁴ Emotional deviance occurs when actors defy socially prescribed feeling and/or display rules of emotion (Thoits, 1990, p. 180-181).

characterizations of irrationality to the left in general, using anti-civil codes, such as “DEMENTed”²⁵ (user 17) and asserting that “[l]iberalism is a mental disease” (users 31 and 22). User 40 even went as far as to make a pronouncement that we should “Make Mental Hospitals Great Again #MMHGA for the criminally insane shitlibs!”. North American folks with mental health challenges have historically been (co)constructed as impure, polluted, and profane and incapable of making rational decisions. Creating a connection between the left and mental illness serves as a means of justification for the users to discredit and repress the stories – ‘small’ or otherwise – of those on the other side of the boundary.

User 2 boldly states that “SJWs are offended by everything everywhere.” They are mentally and emotionally fragile, “humourless” (users 2 and 11), “cucked soy mama’s boys”²⁶ (user 15) who see the world outside of their “safe space” (user 18) as hostile and morally corrupt. Using repressive codes, users claim that SJWs “[p]olice” speech – even retroactively” (user 2), which has led to cancel culture, a “popular practice of withdrawing support for (*canceling*) public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive” (dictionary.com, n.d.). For instance, user 11 claims that ‘liberals’ want to cancel the ‘Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer’ movie because it “promotes bullying”. User 11 argues that “[t]his classic Christmas film promotes the spirit of never giving up, staying true to yourself, [and] overcoming adversity,” followed by the comment “Toughen up, snowflakes.” User 2 states that this language policing is part of a plot to get everyone used to “censoring themselves and others” so that the government can “[lay] groundwork for authoritarianism” (read: Communism).

Thanks to participation awards and their “‘everyone is equal’ fantasy” (user 12), users

²⁵ A play on the term ‘Democrats’.

²⁶ The term ‘soy boy’ is explained in Chapter 5, while ‘cuck’ is associated with “spineless” men. Cuck. (2007) In *Urban Dictionary (BeardedVillain)*. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=cuck>.

described snowflakes using anti-civil codes, such as privileged (user 12), “lazy” (user 18) “communists” (user 9). User 12 claims that snowflakes only have to worry about “pink ponies and majoring in interpretive dance theory,” and therefore, have no actual concept of ‘hardship’. Users viewed ‘modern’ feminists, in particular, as “fucking spoiled” (user 26) and “[j]ust bratty” even though they “[have] it so good [and] [are] able to basically do what they want” (user 21). Due to their level of privilege, they were seen as lacking any practical skills – which also happened to be related to traditional gender roles. User 11 stated that they “*sometimes wonder what Western leftists and feminists would do if forced to live in a REAL left-wing country. In the USSR, schoolgirls were forced to learn how to cook, sew, make and mend clothing. Boys were forced to learn how to use hand tools, make mechanical and electrical repairs, fight (boxing and wrestling), and shoot rifles.*”

The ‘tfw²⁷ You beat the SWJs [sic]’ variation of the Smug Frog – or Smug Pepe – meme seen here provides a particularly accurate visual representation of how the users described “SJW snowflakes” (user 26), particularly in terms of the depiction of the women. The feminine-presenting ‘SJW’ illustrated in the meme is portrayed as being an angry (Arthur, U.S. of N., 2015) overweight, and conventionally unattractive feminist who has blue hair and wears black horn-



²⁷ TFW is an acronym for ‘That Feel When’ or ‘That Feeling When’.

rimmed glasses. Users repeatedly (co)constructed women on the left as impure, polluted, and profane. They were represented as inherently unattractive (users 11 and 21), “fat,” “tattooed” (user 21), “mentally unstable” (user 9), “blue haired freaks” (user 21) and “crying feminists with short hair, glasses, and a pussy hat” (user 18). Additionally, they were associated with the ‘crazy cat lady’ archetype (users 9 and 40), which the image of a lonely, sexually undesirable, unclean, ‘spinster’ who hoards cats for company. In contrast to the vivid physical characterizations that users provided of female SJWs, left-wing men were simply described as “soy boys” (users 9, 13, 15, 17, 18, 21, and 32). While the users never described a soy boy’s attire, the male SJW pictured above is shown wearing pink glasses, a bowtie, and a Steve Urkelesque hairstyle. The colour pink in contemporary Western society is seen as the epitome of femininity. Urkel, glasses, and a bowtie all represent the quintessential ‘nerd’ stereotype, which exists in direct opposition to the jock stereotype within North American society – seen as hypermasculine, physically and emotionally strong, physically attractive, and commonly romantically involved with conventionally attractive women. Throughout their posts, the users describe themselves, and those like them, as holding characteristics akin to the stereotypical jock.

The caricature of snowflakes detailed in this section stands as a visual representation of snowflakes’ belief that they are all “unique and special” (users 7, 24, 30), demonstrated through aesthetic and attitudinal qualities that deviate from established conventions. While the left believes that they “think for [themselves]” (user 11), users purport that they are akin to anti-civil cult members who are themselves brainwashed (users 9, 13, 16, 21, 24, and 34), but also serve to brainwash others. Therefore, what snowflakes imagine to be unconventional and unique is actually quite ordinary, much like themselves. In direct opposition to the brainwashed

left, users employ civil codes to describe themselves as “free thinkers” (user 16) who know better than to be sucked into the left’s ‘groupthink,’ (co)constructing their motives as civil. Therefore, using the discourse of liberty to justify why they are worthy of participating in the decision-making process of a democratic civil society.

‘Non-Player Characters’

“The 3 levels of programming” (user 13)



(Anonymous, 2018).

The term ‘NPC’, or non-player character, originates from tabletop role-playing games and is used “to refer to characters controlled by the game” (user 16). In 2018, the ‘NPC Wojak’ meme began to circulate on 4chan (Don, 2018) and quickly spread to other social media sites, including Gab and Twitter. Within the context of the meme, an NPC is usually depicted as a nameless, mindless ‘SJW’ who is easily controlled by their masters – the (((communists))). I would like to note that left-wing celebrities (user 16) and politicians (user 12) can also be NPCs.

Reminiscent of the Borg from Star Trek, these real-life non-player characters are said to “chant [...] in perfect unison” (user 16). Some of the common phrases that users claim NPCs are programmed to say are:

*“We are not mindless NPCs,” “Orange Man Bad,”
“Communism is good in theory” (user 16).*

*“‘Diversity is our strength’ ‘Islam is a religion of peace’
 ‘Believe women’ ‘Love is love’ ‘Hate speech is not free speech’
 ‘You’re on the wrong side of history’ ‘IQ tests don’t mean anything’
 ‘Black Lives Matter’ ‘My preferred pronouns are:’” (user 9).*

*“WE ARE ALL NUMBER ONE. WE ALL GET AN AWARD.
 EVERYBODY IS EQUAL. NO RUNNING. NO YELLING” (user 13).*

It should be noted that the NPC depiction of the left seemingly holds an interesting contradiction exemplified by the following post made by user 16: *“Remember that day in 2016²⁸ when the left got the blue screen²⁹?” (meme of a woman, with the NPC Wojak face, yelling) “ERROR: LOGIC. EXE NOT FOUND RUNNING: EMOTION.EXE.”* On one hand, the NPC meme positions the left as being robotic and computer-like – both intrinsically linked to the concept of objective thinking – by using the language of computer programming and video games. On the other hand, it also uses the common narrative of the left as angry, overemotional, and irrational, which was discussed in the section above. While it does seem like a logical contradiction, both irrationality and passivity are considered by Alexander (2006, p. 57) to be uncivil motives within the civil/uncivil dichotomy of a democratic civil society.

Left-wing ‘snowflakes’ claimed that being called an NPC was “dehumanizing” (users 13, 35, and 40). As a result, in 2018, Twitter suspended all accounts using an NPC avatar, citing ‘violation of their community standards’ as the reason. User 40 responded by drawing on the discourses of repression and liberty to question why the left can call the right ‘Nazis’ and ‘deplorables’ (user 13) and threaten their lives on Twitter, but the Right gets suspended for even making fun of the left. This leads us to a larger conversation about political correctness and claims of censorship and victimhood that provide the basis for Chapter 3.

²⁸ Referring to November 8, 2016, the day of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election.

²⁹ A blue screen, or the ‘blue screen of death’ occurs when a Windows operating system experiences a fatal system error.

Race Traitors

*“It’s not OK to be white.
Be a race traitor and abolish whiteness” (user 11).*

Users (co)constructed anti-racist whites as impure, polluted, and profane, declaring that they do not consider anti-racist whites to be white anymore. User 21 asserted that they did not understand how anti-racist whites could “live with [themselves] the way [they] shill against [their] own people.” Further stating that “[i]t’s disgusting tbh³⁰” (user 21). Users 9, 13, 19, and 21 contested that the (((communists))) have polluted the minds of “weak whites” (user 21) by convincing them to hate themselves for being white (users 13, 19, and 21). Users went on to claim that as a result of this self-hatred, anti-racist whites believe that it is morally corrupt “to love and support their own race” (user 9). User 21 claimed that anti-racist whites “[would not] even let themselves have thought crimes about the death of their bloodlines and the invasion of their soil” (user 21). ANTIFA was commonly used as an example of the absurdity of and anti-civil motives behind anti-racist whites’ behaviour. Most notably, users 13, 18 and 40 discussed ANTIFA protestors in Portland, Oregon who had taken it upon themselves to block and direct traffic to allow for their protest. They allegedly screamed at anyone who questioned their authority to direct traffic (user 40), calling them “white supremacists” (user 40), a “white little fucker” (user 18), and simply a “whitey” (user 13). Users also (co)constructed the protestors as immoral and anti-civil by claiming that the protestors made “violent threats” (user 40) and “harass[ed] old people” (user 18). In contrast to those whom users positioned as “weak whites,”

³⁰ ‘Tbh’ is an abbreviation of ‘to be honest.’

user 19 claimed that “/ourguy/”³¹ are some of the smartest, healthiest, strongest, most handsome and intelligent people,” drawing upon codes of civility and the discourse of liberty to argue why actors on the right side of the boundary are worthy of the right to contribute to the democratic decision-making process.

The Central American Migrant Caravans and Islamic Immigrants as ‘the Invaders’

*“POC (2017) Mexico/WTFistan.
Stays in NYC, LA, Welfare recipient, “English is oppressive”,
Redefines “living sponsor”, Waves their home country’s flag” (user 18).*

*“The Muslims, Latinos and Africans
are the foot soldiers” (user 19).*

The Central American Migrant Caravans

Against the backdrop of ongoing tension over Donald Trump’s proposed border wall at the Mexico-U.S. border, the Central American migrant caravans travelled to the U.S. border during the period of my data collection in the fall of 2018. As a result, many of the ‘small stories’ that users (re)told were focused on immigration within the context of the caravans. Users 18, 27, 32, and 40 did not believe that the members of the caravans were walking to the Mexico-U.S. border. As evidence, user 32 pointed to the impracticality of someone walking 1,500 miles in sandals, while user 18 commented “Walks from Honduras to California. Still weighs 300 pounds.” User 27 accused the migrants of “only walk[ing] for the cameras.” Alternatively, other users claimed that the migrants were being “shipped in trucks” (users 32 and 40) and “buses” (user 27) as part of an orchestrated invasion.

³¹ ‘/ourguy/’ or /ourguy/ is a term originating from 4chan that indicates that someone “represents the community’s core beliefs and values” (Don, 2017).

Users employed one of two narratives when attempting to explain why the migrants were being ‘shipped’ to the U.S. border. Users either described the migrants (1) as appearing to be healthy, well-fed, well-dressed, and clean (users 18, 27, and 32) and “certainly not escaping poverty and starvation” (user 18). Users believed that the migrants held anti-civil motives and were lying in order to ‘cut the line’ to legal immigration status. Due to their anti-civil nature, users did not believe that the migrants were worthy of obtaining asylum in the U.S., or (2) as being “[u]nhealthy [and] carrying disease” (user 40), as well as being mixed in with “dangerous people” (users 17 and 40). Users (co)constructed the migrants as physically impure, polluted, and profane as a means of creating fear around the caravans amongst other Americans. I will discuss the migrant caravans further in Chapter 4.

Islamic Immigrants

*“[W]hen we say evil, we of course mean that
slimy, nasty, smelly, perverted, goat fucking,
clit cutting, dog hating, man over woman,
child marrying, sharia law submitting, lying,
rape anything ISLAM. ISLAM = EVIL” (user 12).*

It should first be noted that users discussed Islam exclusively in terms of folks migrating from Middle Eastern countries. As may be expected based upon user 12’s incredibly subtle quote, users constructed Islamic immigrants as immoral “barbarians” (users 13 and 27) and “savages” (users 13 and 14) seeking to implement ‘sharia law’ in the U.S. Islamic immigrants were described by user 31 as being part of an “evil cult” who follow the word of a “pedophile” (users 1, 18, and 31) and have sex with goats (users 4, 13, 14, and 18). To further reinforce the construction of Islamic folks’ behaviour as “absolutely primitive” (user 27), users (re)told ‘small stories’ of utter immorality and anti-civility involving: (1) “[i]nfidel beheadings”

(user 18); (2) Islamic killers cutting white tourists' spines out while they were still alive (user 17); (3) Islamic killers supposedly recording themselves gouging out the eyes of their male victims, castrating them, then "shov[ing] their testicles in their mouths," while stabbing their female victims "in the genitals" (user 13) to make ISIS propaganda; (3) Islamic migrants in Denmark skinning a man's penis (user 27); (4) a husband cutting off his wife's fingers after she "attend[ed] college without his permission" (user 27); and (5) American visitors to the Radisson Hotel Toronto East reportedly having to call animal services on Islamic migrants who "were slaughtering goats in the public bathrooms" (users 13 and 24).

Perhaps one of the most disturbing elements of users' stories about 'invaders' was their use of overt language to position Americans of colour as subhuman. Within the context of race, 'cockroach,' for instance, is a term commonly associated with both the Rwandan Genocide and the Holocaust, as it was used by the Hutu and Nazis, respectively, to dehumanize Tutsi and Jewish folks. Using the term 'cockroach' draws upon discourses of impurity to bring about images of the infestation of dirty, disease-carrying pests that you ought to exterminate from your home. Within users' 'small stories,' this term was most commonly associated with Islamic immigrants (users 9, 14, 18 and 26). Users referred to the members of the migrant caravans as parasites and leeches (users 20 and 25), feeding off of American citizens to survive. This is a prime example of the users use of discourses around pure/impure, unpolluted/polluted, and sacred/profane moral and social dichotomies.

It should be noted that based on the users' 'small stories,' I would place Black Americans at approximately the same level as the 'invaders' within the American hierarchical power structure. Apart from the association that users made between affirmative action and Black Americans (see Chapter 3), users' posts regarding Black Americans usually just served

the purpose of creating a rare public space where users could use racial slurs without any social ramifications.

Gab Users as the ‘Real Americans’

“We built America [...] We are AMERICA! ♥~” (user 17)

“The President and Congress report to me” (user 20).

It is through the belief in white supremacy, a false sense of ownership over the United States, and the utilization of discourses of liberty, that users (co)constructed themselves as ‘real’ Americans both individually and collectively. To establish their worthiness and decision-making capacity, users proudly stated that their European ancestors had “suffered, bled, and died” (user 19) in order to “[settle] an undeveloped land and [build] a civilization” (user 32) and “homeland” (user 9) for future generations of their descendants (user 19). The ‘undeveloped land’ being what is now the United States. Users predictably failed to acknowledge that their earliest ancestors to come to North America – or Turtle Island – were colonizers who stole the land of the pre-existing Indigenous populations before committing acts of genocide against them, nor that their country was built on the backs of Black folks trafficked through the Atlantic slave trade. Instead, users adopted the common narrative that generations of white Christians had built America (users 9, 17, and 21) – as well as the rest of the “modern world” (users 19 and 25) – through nothing more than hard work, dedication, and sacrifice (users 9 and 19).

“I am my country’s keeper” (user 20).

Users (co)constructed their identities as patriots (users 2 and 20) and nationalists (users 9 and 17), fighting to protect the U.S. borders (user 17) using the civil code of honour. Given that the protection of one's property is a fundamental American value, it is also unsurprising that users drew upon discourses of liberty when detailing their duty and right to protect what was theirs – the U.S. – from both international and domestic groups who sought to change the values of their forefathers and displace them from their 'homeland'.

Gab users believed themselves to be both the victims and the heroes of their own 'small stories.' The narrative around the victimization of and injustices committed against white – or 'real' – Americans was a fundamental element of nearly every 'small story' that users (re)told. Users argued that despite their rightful place at the top of American structures of power, they were now being relegated to the bottom. The users also perceived themselves to be morally superior saviors of the white race--that is the say, heroes. This also demonstrates the struggle between the users' expectations of being perceived and treated as pure, unpolluted, and sacred and the reality of being perceived and treated as impure, polluted, and profane by those on the other side of the social boundary.

Gab users' understanding of American structures of power consists of a pyramid. At the top of the pyramid are the (((communists))), whom users believed to be trying to dominate the United States. As one moves down the pyramid are found those who work within anti-civil American Institutions (e.g., the Democratic Party, criminal justice system, public education system, 'mainstream media,' entertainment industry, and technology industry), which have the power to change laws and use 'brainwashing' and discourses of repression to encourage the left-wing masses – who are one level below – to enforce political correctness amongst the general public. Users claimed that the left's enforcement of political correctness had led to a decrease in meritocracy and increased instances of anti-white discrimination and censorship.

According to users, as the percentage of white Americans decreases, not only does their political and cultural power decrease but so too do their rights (e.g., freedom of speech). Users purported that being censored by the left (e.g., cancelled, shamed, shadowbanned, etc.) prevented, and continues to prevent, them from publicly speaking out about ‘funded invasions,’ the destruction of the traditional, white, nuclear family, or simply their general feelings of discrimination. Users claimed that being silenced while the white American population is being intentionally reduced will ultimately lead to ‘white genocide.’

In their ‘small stories,’ users positioned the ‘invaders’ as the second group from the bottom of the pyramid. Within these particular ‘small stories’ that the users (re)told, the ‘invaders’ were Islamic immigrants and members of the fall 2018 Central American migrant caravan. Users believed that the (((communists))) were transporting ‘hordes’ of these ‘invaders’ to the U.S. to (1) increase the Democrat Party’s voter base and (2) be used as change agents to transform American culture and society through a shift in demographics. Users believed that Islamic folks were migrating to the U.S. to implement sharia law, while the Central American migrants were just looking for ‘free stuff.’³² Finally, in their ‘small stories,’ users (e.g., the ‘real’ Americans) positioned themselves at the bottom of the pyramid, victimized by the anti-white discrimination exhibited by the other groups. However, they believed that their rightful place was at the top.

³² Based on the users’ ‘small stories,’ I would place Black Americans at approximately the same level as the ‘invaders’ in terms of status and power. Apart from the connections that users made between affirmative action and Black Americans (see Chapter Four), users’ discussion regarding Black Americans entailed posts where they used racial slurs at random with no intention other than to demonstrate that they could do so, thereby violating explicit and implicit social and moral taboos.

Chapter Three

‘Small Stories’ of Political Correctness as an Anti-Civil Tool of Repression

Gab users’ drew upon discourses of liberty and repression when making claims that the (((communists))), Democratic politicians and others working within anti-civil American institutions, as well as rank-and-file leftists, were using political correctness as a tool to (1) displace ‘real’ Americans³³ using anti-right and anti-white discrimination, and more dramatically, ‘white genocide;’ and (2) silence ‘real’ Americans who are experiencing race-based discrimination by using repressive intimidation tactics (users 5, 9, and 27), such as doxxing, cancelling, shadow banning and de- or no-platforming.

Users claimed that the (((communists))) and Democratic politicians had been engaging in uncivil relations for the past several decades by secretly working to displace white folks from the United States. Now that ‘dissenting voices’ (i.e., the users’) were becoming louder in the realm of mainstream public discourse, those on the left were said to be censoring anything that puts white folks or being white in a positive light. Users believed that the left was plotting to silence and subjugate ‘real’ Americans to lessen opposition as they dismantle the pillars of American civil society, namely the principles of free speech, individual liberty, and meritocracy. Drawing inspiration from the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory used by ‘white Russian émigrés’ and found in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, users claimed that the (((communists’))) goal was and still is, to pollute American values (users 2, 5, 18, and 27) in an effort to weaken the U.S. itself. Without the ‘freedom loving’ U.S. in the way, the (((communists’))) path to world domination would become easier to navigate.

³³ This finding supports Johnson’s (2017, p. 230) assertion – found in my literature review – that white, American men believe themselves to be “victims of a political tragedy centered around the displacement of ‘real America’”.

In this chapter, I will be discussing the most common ‘small stories’³⁴ that users (re)told each other about how political correctness has enabled the left to discriminate against ‘real’ Americans. Users argued that actors on the left had been assisting the (((communists))) with their anti-civil plot to repress American values (users 2, 5, 18, and 27) – most notably the freedom of speech and the notion of meritocracy. According to users, actors on the left used political correctness to justify the repression of those whom they deemed anti-civil, as well as the need to implement affirmative action hiring policies and policies of multiculturalism.

We Will Not Be Silenced

*“I feel that the heterosexual [C]hristian white male
is the most discriminated against out
of all the types of people in America today.
Need to fight for rights and equality” (user 35).*

*“Say it with me now... It's OK to be white.
It's OK to be a man. It's OK to be straight. It's OK to be a Christian.
It's OK to be cis-gendered. It's OK to be a conservative.
It's OK to be proud of your heritage. It's OK to take pride in your achievements.
It's OK to build a life for you and your loved ones.
It's OK to expect your government to protect your borders” (user 26)*

Positioning themselves as victims of the repressive tactics of the impure and anti-civil left, users claimed that political correctness and so-called “tolerance” (user 19) have served to abolish the freedom of speech. This claim is contradictory to user 2’s assertion that Gab exists as a platform where users can find “plenty of offensive and politically incorrect speech [...] [and] to suggest otherwise is nonsense.” Criticizing, mocking, and shunning any “race, religion,

³⁴ ‘Small stories’ are forms of anecdotal evidence. The data from my sample suggests that users only desired evidence or ‘references’ from those whom they did not believe – or want to believe. The posts that I captured featured very little commitment to systematic evidence. Of course, this cannot be generalized to the alt- or far-right as a whole, but it was certainly the case with the users in my study.

sexuality, gender, and creed” (user 7) is just “stating facts [and] giving valid criticisms [...] [It] is not ‘hate speech’” (user 7). Users claimed that the concept of hate speech, as well as the word ‘racist,’ were polluted (co)constructions meant to frame “all dissenters of the communist ideology” (users 9 and 27) as anti-civil, a code which users resisted.

Users argued that the white race was under attack. Simply bringing up ‘facts’ about the moral standing of out-groups would automatically get users “kicked off of everything ever” (user 21), while proclaiming their love for the white ‘race’ (users 19 and 25) would destroy their lives. Nevertheless, “I will make my voice heard,” stated user 20. Users demonstrated their resistance against the left’s application of discourses of repression to them as a group through their willingness to participate in decision-making processes of a democratic civil society (e.g., voting), despite being (co)constructed as anti-civil by the left.

As proof of anti-white/anti-right discrimination, users shared ‘small stories’ with each other about being assigned polluted labels, such as “‘racist,’ ‘bigot,’ ‘homophobe,’ ‘Nazi’” (user 35), as well as making claims around being assaulted, harassed, threatened, intimidated, shamed, censored, and shadowbanned³⁵ (users 1, 2, 5, 11, 13, 21, and 31) by the left for doing what users believed to be civil and morally correct. Users claimed that political correctness made them vulnerable to anti-white/anti-right discrimination with little ability to defend themselves without being censored. Users’ ‘small stories’ were often centred around the attempts by those on the left to exclude them from democratic civil society using political correctness.

³⁵ ‘Shadowbanning’ is believed to be a covert method of censoring certain content without notifying the user who posted it. It is said that the user is still able to see the content, while other users cannot (Atario, 2007).

'Small Stories' About the Exclusion of Gab Users from Civil Society

"Oh sure... Antifa is basically ignored by our government while they commit act after act of domestic terrorism, but if you stand against the terrorists and try to protect innocent people from their violence like the Proud Boys, you'll get labeled a white supremacist extremist group" (user 40).

Users 2, 21, 26, and 40 positioned Tucker Carlson as being representative of their group, one of /*[their]guys/*, when they discussed a group of ANTIFA protestors – constructed by user 26 as “a mob of violent *[M]arxists*” – that showed up to Carlson’s home in the fall of 2018. This instance of Carlson being threatened, harassed, and intimidated served as a notice to users that they too could potentially be excluded from democratic civil society by the left. Recalling the story, users stated that the “terrorists” (user 2) stood outside of Carlson’s home – which he shares with his wife and four young daughters – chanting ““We know where you sleep at night”” (users 2 and 26), before kicking in his front door (user 2). User 2 reported that Carlson’s wife “[hid] in the pantry in fear that her home was being invaded.” In response to the story, users 21 and 26 expressed their dismay that the ANTIFA protestors – and the left more generally – were able to “terrorize their opponents” (user 26) and “openly commit just about any act of violence they want” (user 21) while still maintaining their moral positions within civil society and discourses of liberty. User 2 impressed upon fellow users that they “need to start realizing that *[the forceful intimidation of Tucker]* is going to become *[an everyday]* reality for any*[one]* who *[is]* even remotely right of communism.”

*“Homophobes should keep quiet:
Elementary school accused of ‘intimidating’ Christian parents”
(user 17).*

User 17 recalled a story that they had read about on Breitbart regarding white, Christian parents who were supposedly belittled, intimidated, and silenced by school staff because of their anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs. According to user 17, the parents reportedly brought up their concerns around their child's teacher "promoting LGBT lifestyles (through a 'Proud to be Me' parade during gay pride month and books about homosexual penguins)" to the school administration. While attending a meeting at the school, the couple stated that they were 'confronted' by a staff member who was wearing a shirt that read, "Why be racist, sexist, homophobic, or transphobic when you could just be quiet?" (user 17). Thereby, attempting to exclude the white, Christian parents – and their opinions – from civil society using political correctness.

"No Whites Allowed"
(users 11 and 20).

Users 11 and 20 used 'small stories' to frame the existence of a 'healing retreat,' which had reportedly been designed by the organizers to give women of colour a break from white women "in [an] idyllic tropical environment free of racial tension" (users 11 and 20) as an act of anti-white discrimination, as well as yet another attempt to exclude white folks using political correctness.

*"Anti-Whites: 'We're not trying to hurt you.
We just want to render you unemployable so you can't feed yourself,
live somewhere safe, attract a wife, afford dental care, or accomplish any of your life goals.
But we're not trying to hurt you'" (user 21 AND 13).*

Losing their ability to maintain a livelihood due to 'cancel culture' was of notable worry for several users. Users commonly shared 'small stories' – sometimes just headline sized – about right-wing, white folks who had been excluded from the economic sphere, and indirectly, the civil sphere as a result of their political views, such as:

*“Apple fired me for not being as woke as the rest of my team.
My SJW manager would stalk my social media every day
and then email me commenting about what I said” (user 17).*

*Regarding the New Jersey wrestling referee who made a Black high school
student cut off his dreadlocks in order to play in a match:
“[H]e will lose his job and be shamed for all eternity
because ‘muh dreadlocks’ and ‘white man bad’” (user 7).*

*“A Coast Guard member made the OK hand sign on camera
and the Coast Guard fired him. I shit you not” (user 35).*

In a world where white folks who advocated for white rights “can’t even work as a Walmart stock boy” (users 21 and 31), “being white is a revolutionary act” (user 9). User 19 argued that even white folks who had managed to keep their jobs were under constant threat of being deemed impure, polluted, and profane and censored by the dystopian ‘diversity police’ for their “microaggressions, cultural [in]sensitivity, and hurting people’s ‘feels’” (user 19).

Displacing the American Dream: ‘Small Stories’ About Line-Cutters

Consistent with the literature on the belief in discrimination as a zero-sum game (Norton & Sommers, 2011, p. 215; Wilkins, Wellman, Babbitt, Toosi, & Schad, 2015), users purported that the use of political correctness favoured those whom Hochschild’s (2016, p. 137-138) interviewees considered ‘undeserving line-cutters.’ As a result, users (co)constructed political correctness as directly – and unfairly – leading to discrimination against straight, white, right-wing, Christian men, or as they considered themselves, ‘real’ Americans. In this section, I will be discussing the ‘small stories’ that users (re)told each other about being (co)constructed using discourses of incivility and being wrongfully displaced from their rightful position at the front of the line for the ‘American Dream’ by ‘line-cutters’ – namely Central American migrants

and Black Americans.

Homeless Veterans versus Central American Migrants

“We don’t need any more joining the line [...] You want to come to the USA, then join the line and comply” (user 21).

“This Christmas season, maybe, just maybe, I’ll start giving a damn about the struggles of illegal immigrants when all 49,933 homeless veterans living on the streets of America are warm, well fed, properly housed, and afforded good healthcare!” (user 18).

Users consistently made appeals for public sympathy and attempted to gain mainstream support for preventing the Central American migrant caravans from crossing the Mexico-U.S. border by employing the narrative of the ‘homeless veteran.’ Despite user 40 arguing that providing shelter to those who could not afford it was part of the ‘communist mantra,’ which led to “the road of communism... [e]very. [s]ingle. [t]ime,” users 4, 6, 15, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27, 31, and 37 collectively worked to temporarily alter their group boundaries to include homeless veterans. It is interesting, although unsurprising, that it was only homeless *veterans* who users temporarily absorbed into their group and not homeless folks in general. It is probable that users already considered veterans to be ‘real’ Americans, given that veterans exist within the collective American imagination as being patriotically self-sacrificial, and therefore, are of the highest moral regard. Users temporarily sacrificed espousing their ‘pull up your bootstraps’ rhetoric in order to amalgamate veterans experiencing homelessness into their side of the boundary.

In Chapter 2, I noted that one of two narratives espoused by users about the Central American migrant caravans was that they were “certainly not escaping poverty and starvation” (user 18). That the supposed ‘asylum seekers’ were actually attempting to cross the border into

the U.S. to get “free stuff” was a claim that was repeatedly made by users 3, 14, 21, 27, and 31. Users 17, 18, 25, 26, and 31 further reinforced this narrative by telling each other ‘small stories’ that detailed all of the benefits that undocumented migrants were receiving from the Federal government, paid for by the American taxpayer. These benefits were said to be comprised of health care coverage (users 15, 18, and 31) and social assistance for “15 million non-citizens” (user 31), including government housing units (users 15 and 18) or rent subsidies (users 26 and 31), food stamps (users 15, 25, and 31), utility assistance, daycare assistance, a free cell phone, and a free public transit pass (user 31), all “TAX FREE” (user 31).

In contrast, user 4 argued that the federal government placed their “own kind [...] on waiting lists [to be] forgotten about.” The “average illegal immigrant will get almost \$4,000 per month. How do we get that same deal for our homeless veterans?” asked user 17. Users 6 and 31 both told ‘small stories’ about a homeless veteran sleeping on the streets while it was only 18 degrees Fahrenheit³⁶. He had “frost on his blanket,” user 31 added. “As long as we have this on our streets we have ZERO ROOM FOR REGUFEES!!!! [sic],” exclaimed user 6. To be sure, the use of the ‘homeless veteran’ narrative was an anti-civil, self-serving one. Its employment by users was more about pulling on the heartstrings of Americans who may not have been right-wing but still respected veterans than the desire to actually help homeless veterans. User 27 shared and reacted to a tweet made by Stephen King (as seen below), affirming that the provision of benefits for line-cutters was at the heart of the story, while the very real adversity faced by a population experiencing homelessness was trivialized and used as a rhetorical device.

³⁶ -7 degrees Celsius.

@StephenKing: "Fuck your wall. Split that 5 billion between at-risk children who don't have lunches and vets who can't get proper medical and psychological treatment. Fuck your vanity project. Do something good for once."

User 21's response: "How about we just stop paying welfare to the illegal immigrants who are squatting on our land?"

'Real' Americans versus Black Americans

"'Diversity' [is] intended to undermine merit in favor of race, gender, or sexual preference. Anything other than white, straight male" (user 40).

Another prominent narrative that users employed when telling 'small stories' about line-cutters was that of the anti-civil nature of affirmative action, which was almost exclusively targeted towards Black Americans. Denying their white privilege, user 17 asserted that they grew up "below the poverty line," so why does anyone else deserve to cut the line? "The U.S. already offers a ladder to those willing to start where the rest of us did... at the first step" (user 17). According to user 40, capitalism created a merit-based system that allowed "ANYONE" the ability to build a better life for themselves. User 21 agreed, claiming that white people work hard to improve their skills, and, therefore, their lives, while working "shit job[s]", therefore, everyone else can do it too.

User 40 firmly stated that they refused to be "forced" to help those who will not "fend for [themselves]." Further claiming that their decision to help someone ought to be based on that actor's merit, worthiness, and whether or not the situation was "their fault" (user 40). User 31 claimed that "affirmative action [meant that] the average black at your college or workplace [was] probably dumber and much less qualified than you." While user 26 stated that "[a]ffirmation [a]ction [was] the equivalent of putting your baby sister in charge when your parents go out to dinner, because it [was] her turn" (user 26).

Users 5, 9, and 13 told the following ‘small stories’ of the supposed anti-civil results of affirmative action policies in universities and workplaces:

“All of those viral videos you have seen showing black students getting accepted in to Ivy League schools were fake. The school they came from was falsifying transcripts [...] and other documents [to] amplify racialized stories to get students into elite universities” (user 9).

“My half-black relatives all say they are black. This has led to them getting job opportunities and promotions they would otherwise never get. And then from these positions they attained through #BlackPrivilege they bitch about racism and white privilege” (user 5).

*“Affirmative Action in a nutshell” (user 13)
[description of cartoon panels shared by user 13]:
A white man in a suit with a briefcase versus a Black man with a wifebeater on, untied shoelaces and fountain drink in his hands.
The white candidate gives the hiring manager a nice resume.
He talks about pie charts, graphs, and his degree.
The Black candidate fist bumps the manager and gives him a crinkled-up piece of paper.
The Black candidate’s resume says, “Rezoomay. Hustlin + pimp \$hit”
and talks about weed, malt liquor, fried chicken and watermelon.
The Black candidate gets hired.*

User 19 argued that affirmative action leads to conflict within civil society. Drawing upon discourses of repression, users 9, 18, 21 made claims rooted in the presupposition that discrimination is a zero-sum game. User 18 stated that increasing “one group’s [liberty,] rights, and opportunit[ies]” inevitably, and proportionately, led to the repression of the rights of other groups. “White people can’t win with the system being interested in anti-racism” (user 21) and discourses of repression pertaining to users and other right-wing, white folks. A “*war* on racism inevitably is a war on [w]hites” (user 21) designed to subvert their status as pure, unpolluted, and sacred.

Each of the ‘small stories’ that I have mentioned in this chapter illustrates how the left has used political correctness as a tool to purportedly wrongfully exclude right-wing, white folks from participating meaningfully within civil society.

Chapter Four

'Demographics is Destiny': 'Small Stories' of 'White Genocide'

For users, the U.S.'s evolving racial demographics were directly correlated with what they termed 'white genocide.' They were acutely aware that white folks were soon set to make up less than 50 per cent of the U.S. population (users 18, 21, 25, and 35). Users believed that as the percentage of white folks decreased, so did their cultural and political power. In this chapter, I will be presenting 'small stories' about the two most discussed methods that users claimed the (((communists))) were using to manufacture a 'white genocide': (1) the increase in populations of colour through 'funded invasions'; and (2) the decrease in the white population through the destruction of the traditional, white, nuclear family.³⁷ Finally, I will be detailing the imagined future that users co-constructed for white children and what they believed should be done to prevent the children from becoming victims of shifting demographics "in their own country" (users 18 and 25).

White Genocide via 'Funded Invaders'

"Just in case you're sitting on the fence about this invasion coming our way, think about this. Do you believe 7,000 Hondurans woke up a few days ago and decided now is the time to move to America? Of course not. Common sense tells us this is an event. This was planned" (user 18).

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the Central American migrant caravans that travelled from San Pedro Sula, Honduras to Tijuana, Mexico – stopping after a failed attempt at crossing the border into the U.S. – did so while I was collecting the data for this study. While users often

³⁷ For the sake of brevity, I will be using the term 'traditional family' going forward.

(co)constructed both the Central American migrants and Islamic immigrants as ‘invaders’ – as evidenced in Chapter 2 – their ‘small stories’ about the migrant caravans were more substantive. Therefore, I will be focusing on users’ explanations as to what role the migrant caravans played within the supposedly larger white genocide plot.

“Serious question,” user 21 wrote. “Why are Jewish groups using their trucks to transport invaders to our border? [...] Who is funding this?” (user 21). User 40 agreed that the caravans constituted a “[w]ell-planned, well-funded, well-resourced invasion. But from where?” they said sarcastically. “This is a well-orchestrated INVASION by SOROS/DNC,” user 32 exclaimed. Not only did user 35 claim that the “truck carrying the migrants [had] a Star of David clearly visible on it,” but users 13, 17, 18, 35, and 40 insisted that they had proof that the caravans had been funded by Soros’ Open Society Foundation and organized in collaboration with the Democratic Party, ‘mainstream media,’ white leftists, and of course, the migrants themselves -- each having their own supposed anti-civil, self-interested motivation for playing a role in the ‘invasion.’

Users claimed that the (((communists’))) goals were to destroy America and “eradicat[e] the white race so that the Jewish people are able to rule over the world” (user 21). Users 17 and 19 accused (((communists))) of being anti-civil and subverting U.S. immigration policies in an attempt to make it easier to ‘import’ voters with the end-goal being to eventually completely eliminate the U.S. borders. User 35 reinforced this anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, stating that “[e]very time a white country is being invaded by people of color you will find evidence that the Jews are behind it somehow.” Users believed that the Democratic Party’s anti-civil motivation behind allowing ‘invaders’ into the U.S. was based on a strategy to gain power over the U.S.

federal government.³⁸ Users commonly held the expectation that the vast majority of migrants in the caravans would vote Democratic in upcoming elections, especially given that they were supposedly lured to the border by Democrats' promises of 'free stuff' (users 3, 14, 15, 21, 27, and 31) upon their arrival. Several users also believed that the Democrats knowingly used the migrant 'invasion' to elicit a negative reaction from Donald Trump resulting in media coverage that further reinforced the beliefs of those on the left side of the boundary that Trump was impure, polluted, and profane. Users believed this to be a strategy by the Democratic Party to shift votes (and power) from the Republicans (and ultimately, (Darrach, 2018).



Donald Trump) to the Democrats mere days before the 2018 midterm elections.

In an attempt to advance the invasion plot, users maintained that the 'mainstream' media – on the behalf of the Democratic Party – was attempting to elicit public sympathy and support for members of the caravans by repeatedly disseminating stories framed using discourses of repression along with the picture seen above of a migrant mother and her two

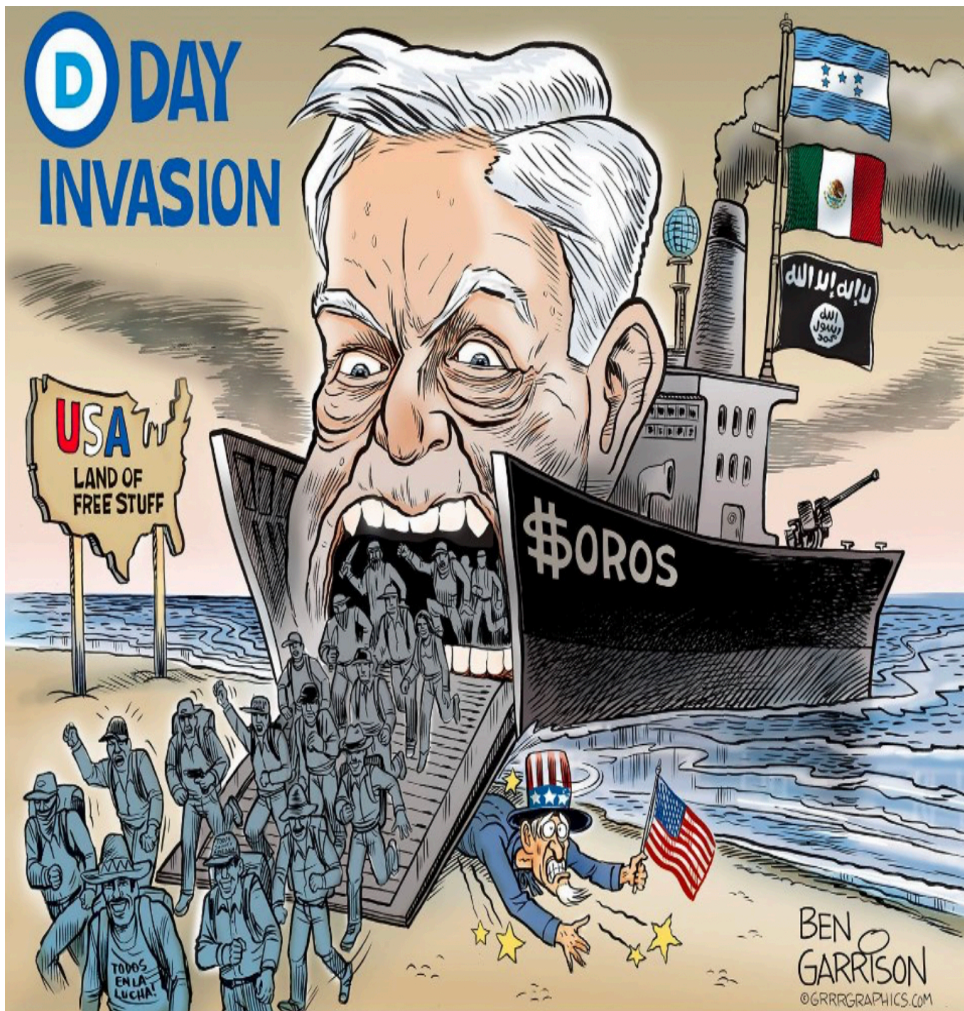
³⁸ A reminder that at this time, Donald Trump was President, and the Republicans held a majority in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

young children in a chaotic scene at the Mexico/U.S. border. Like the ‘MSM,’ Gab users repeatedly posted and reposted the picture of the mother and her children. However, instead of eliciting a feeling of sympathy from the viewer, users employed an anti-civil code to frame the picture as a piece of visual evidence that the caravans were staged. “Hoaxed: The ‘Illegal Alien Mom with Barefoot Kids’ Photo was a Setup - Another Staged #FakeNews Production,” user 40 argued. User 27 asked the other users if anyone else found it hard to believe that this mother “dragged those poor children 2888 miles in 45 days? Walking ~20 hours a day?” User 3 shared their own cartoon rendition of the picture with a movie director saying to the mother and children, “Ok, let's try it again. This time show more fear and fatigue. Remember, you're starving and you just walked over 1,000 miles!” While a cameraperson in the background is filming another migrant and saying, “Say cheese.”

Much like user 12’s belief that rank-in-file members of the left were merely performing progressiveness – as mentioned in Chapter 2 – users stated that leftists’ motivations for supporting the ‘invaders’ were anti-civil and self-serving. User 21 claimed that leftists (co)constructed themselves as allies in support of a group of marginalized actors in order to feel an increased sense of morality. Leftists purportedly weaponized political correctness and the ‘justice’ and ‘human rights’ frames to rationalize allowing asylum seekers – or ‘invaders’ – to ‘cut the line’ across the Mexico-U.S. border. User 21 called leftists “naïve,” while user 19 asserted that “[i]t takes a special kind of stupid to think importing welfare recipients who want to kill us is a good idea.” Making use of the discourses of repression, users 35 and 40 also declared that despite what “the left believe[d]” (user 40) access to the U.S. was “NOT a ‘human right’” (user 35). While the rank-and-file leftists were seen by users as assisting in the white genocide plot by supporting the migrant ‘invaders,’ users seemingly thought that they were doing so mostly unknowingly.

*“Planning a ‘human stampede’ to invade the US for [a] ‘better life’
i.e., wages, welfare, and buffalo wild-wings.
These ‘people’ ARE invaders!” (user 18).*

The migrants were described as “charging” (user 21), “invading” (user 15), and “storm[ing]” (user 18) the U.S. border, and they purportedly did so while raising and waiving the flags of their home countries (users 3, 18, 21, and 25) and “speak[ing] their language” (user 25). As a result, user 25 refused to believe that the migrants had any intentions of assimilating into American society. “An invasion by any definition,” claimed user 18.



According to users, the members of the migrant caravans were motivated to ‘invade’ the U.S. not because of a desire to be a part of the (((communist))) white genocide plot, but to “freeload” (user 11) off of the “helpless American taxpayer” (user 40), thereby, defying the principles of

(Garrison, 2018).

a meritocracy and the civil

code. User 3 posted, “It’s not a ‘caravan’ it’s an invading army of gimee-grants” alongside the

illustration on the previous page of the ‘D Day Invasion’ (‘D’ as in Democrat). The illustration depicts a Soros-funded warship, – complete with George Soros’ head, a globe of the world³⁹, and the flags of Honduras, Mexico, and the Islamic State⁴⁰ – dropping off migrants (one holding a knife and another with a gun) on U.S. soil. The bow of the ship is crushing Uncle Sam – a quintessential representation of America – while a sign fashioned in the shape of the U.S. map reads ‘USA LAND OF FREE STUFF.’ According to users 18, 31, 32, 39, and 40, the migrants were flooding the U.S. to get benefits which they had not earned, and therefore, did not deserve – e.g., “health care benefits, education, welfare benefits, etc.” (user 40). They want “wealth handed to them by Democrats in the form of taxpayer dollars,” user 40 argued. Then “they can turn our country into a socialist shithole just like the [ones] they are fleeing” (user 40). “America is already overwhelmed with 22 million illegals,” stated user 27. “Our system can’t take it. Which is the plan” (user 27). Alexander (2006, p. 55) states that civil discourses “conceptualize the world into those who deserve inclusion and those who do not.” Using the pure/impure dichotomy, in-group actors fail to feel compelled to “save” (Alexander, 2006, p. 55) out-group actors who are deemed impure, polluted, profane, and undeserving of inclusion in civil society.

To destroy American society as it currently exists, you must replace those who are willing to defend the U.S. and maintain it as a “‘white’ country” (user 40) – i.e., the users/‘real’ Americans – with those who “breed quicker[,] take socialism easier” (user 21), and are easily tempted by handouts – i.e., the migrants (user 40). For user 40, allowing these caravans across the border was a slippery slope. The next thing they knew, user 40 argued, there would be a larger caravan that would be “harder/impossible to stop.” “STOP THEM AT THE BORDER

³⁹ A reference to Globalists and the One World Government conspiracy theory.

⁴⁰ Users believed that there were many “dangerous people mixed into [the] caravan” (user 17), including “criminals and unknown Middle Easterners” (user 40).

NOW!!” exclaimed user 32. “[T]hey should be fucking shot on sight,” user 21 argued. “Freedom IS NOT FREE. It’s paid [for] in effort, energy, money, blood, and TEARS” (user 32). “WE OWE THEM NOTHING” (user 40). “They don’t belong here” (user 21).

With the anti-civil federal government, Democratic Party, ‘mainstream media’, leftists, and the invaders themselves on one side of the boundary and civil users on the other, user 21 asserted that the cultural power of ‘real’ Americans (i.e., white, right-wing Americans) would be significantly reduced. The reduction in their cultural power, users believed, would be directly proportionate to the other groups’ gains in cultural power – consistent with the zero-sum thinking that I have mentioned previously. Already claiming to be experiencing some of the consequences of the left’s use of discourses of repression against them (e.g., anti-right/anti-white discrimination and censorship), users claimed that it would only be a matter of time before the (((communists))) were able to eliminate them, the ‘real’ Americans, altogether.

*“White nations are being flooded with non-whites.
Non-whites are encouraged to hate Whites.
Whites are encouraged to hate themselves.
Whites are being discouraged from having children.
Non-whites are rewarded for having more children.
How’s this not White genocide?” (user 35).*

White Genocide via the Destruction of the White, Nuclear Family

“95% of [shitlibs’] time is spent destroying families, tradition and values” (user 40).

*“The nuclear family is a threat.
, For anyone that doesn’t believe or understand that all straight people and traditional nuclear families will soon be considered the Nazi Third Reich by the certifiably insane and hateful globalist controlled communist left” (user 26).*

Users argued that conceptually separating sex and gender and promoting gender as socially constructed had become a mechanism used by the left to eliminate the sex/gender binary. Thereby defying what users 2, 9, 13, 17, 21, and 27 believed to be the laws of nature – laws that determined marriage to be exclusively between a man and woman (user 19), as well as men and women’s differing, but mutually beneficial (users 12 and 21), “roles and qualities” (user 21). In particular, users 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 21, 32, and 35 were of the opinion that a man’s most crucial role was to be their family’s protector. Whereas women were positioned as the “heart of [the] family” (user 19), in charge of the social reproduction, namely mothering (users 2, 12, 18, 19, 21, 26, and 40) and preparing the meals (users 32 and 40). This traditional family structure, user 27 argued, served as the “backbone of western culture and civilization.”

However, “[p]rogressives are so stupid they overthink everything to twist it into their ‘everyone is equal’ fantasy,” said user 12. As a result, users claimed that the left was a major threat to the maintenance of a civil society structured around the morally upstanding traditional, white, middle-class, nuclear family. User 20 purported that the left intended on polluting the notion of the white family and subverting its moral standing by (co)constructing traditional white families as “right-wing extremism,” meanwhile using political correctness to normalize feminism and the expansion of gender expressions and identities. Furthermore, user 21 asserted that “‘Jewish’” social justice group, the Southern Poverty Law Center, had been targeting pro-family groups and had placed them on their ‘hate map’ as a means of repression. User 40 argued that “[t]he age of innocence [...] that made the nuclear family work” was being polluted and replaced by one of “decadence and degeneracy” (user 40).

While users touched on interracial marriage (users 9, 11, and 21), female promiscuity (users 17, 35, and 40), divorce (users 4, 9, 18, and 40), and abortion (users 9, 17, 20, and 40) as all being immoral and detrimental to the traditional, white family, users placed a particular

emphasis on (((communists)))—driven feminism and its perceived role in emasculating men. User 21 argued that while white men’s attention has been focused on dealing with “being ruined psychologically and financially by ZOG⁴¹” for the past few decades, women have been left unattended. Users 18 and 21 claimed that feminists have spent this time working to position women as morally superior to men (user 18) while using discourses of impurity, pollution, and profanity to situate men, particularly masculine white men, as “trash” (user 11) (i.e., worthless). Therefore, laying the groundwork for the (((communists))) to stifle “any healthy expression[s] of masculinity” (user 9). Just as user 27 believed that the traditional, white family structure served as the “backbone of western culture,” users also believed that men were the backbone of the family unit. Thus, a decrease in white families headed by traditional, masculine men was believed to weaken white cultural supremacy, thereby calling the future of the entire white ‘race’ into question. User 17 claimed that the (((communists))) wanted to turn American “boys into little girly babies, while keeping them frail.” Meaning that (((communists))) were weakening white men so that they would be ill-prepared to defend both their physical and symbolic boundaries against invaders.

*“We’re supposed to just be cool with ‘the future is female,’
as they try to snuff ‘unneeded men’ out
while mass producing soy boys?” (user 17).*

User 21 regarded ‘soy boys’ as an anti-civil representation of men and the result of the (((communists’))) gender bending agenda to weaken traditional, white men. These “cucked soy

⁴¹ The acronym for ‘Zionist-Occupied Government.’

mama's boys⁴² (user 15) marry feminists, are effeminate and physically weak as a result of their intake of "soy lattes"⁴³ (user 21) and are not able to think for themselves (user 21).

The expansion of what civil society deemed to be acceptable gender expressions for men also worked to facilitate a greater tolerance of the LGBTQ+ community, even further deviating away from what the users found to be morally acceptable and beneficial for the maintenance of the traditional, white family. Users 21 and 25 argued that "[t]he whole LGBT thing [was] just a battering ram to be used against anything traditional." For instance, according to user 21, same-sex marriage violated "2000 years of marriage tradition." Pushing the boundaries of acceptability in regards to both sexuality and gender expression worked to assist the expansion of gender identities, resulting in improved visibility for trans folks. Users 4, 7, 11, 17, 18, and 27 used discourses of impurity to position trans folks as the pinnacle of leftist "[i]mmorality and [i]nsanity" (user 17) and bulldozers being used to further destroy the traditional, white family, and ultimately, democratic civil society.

Do it for the Kids: Using the #TradLife as Resistance Against 'White Genocide'

*"Our name is not our own. It is borrowed from our ancestors. We must return it unstained.
Our honor is not our own. It is loaned from our decedents. I must give it to them unbroken.
Our blood is not our own. It is a gift to generations yet unborn.
We should carry it with responsibility" (user 31).*

User 21 claimed that the U.S.'s changing demographics, both in terms of the racial composition of the general population, as well as the anti-American, "anti-white and communist"

⁴² Urban Dictionary's top definition for 'soy boy' is: "Slang used to describe males who completely and utterly lack all necessary masculine qualities. This pathetic state is usually achieved by an over-indulgence of emasculating products and/or ideologies" (Sandman_Aktual, 2017).

⁴³ The relationship between soy boys and masculinity is also rooted in the myth that a man's soy consumption can negatively impact his testosterone levels (dictionary.com, n.d.).

politicians who led them, would cause future generations of white folks to “be treated like [a] white South African farmer⁴⁴... in the country their people built.” User 17 stated that “globalist groupies⁴⁵ want [their] country dead and the future of [their] children with it.” However, they were committed to fighting for white children’s collective future. For user 9, that meant “protecting white children from [things like] sexual diversity, [...] [I]slam, feminism, Open Society Foundation, [...] and communism.” In other words, users felt that they had a duty to strengthen the boundaries between white children and the LGBTQ+ community, Islamic folks, feminists, and any groups invested in social justice and equality.

When discussing children, users exclusively situated white children as “the future of [the white] family” (user 19). “14 Words⁴⁶,” user 18 wrote. “[We] need white babies to carry on the race” (user 18). Therefore, framing the maintenance – and even an increase in – the size of the white population in proportion to other groups was established as a worthy goal. Part of this mission involved using discourses of repression against “[m]entally insane shitlibs [...] [who] want to supplant you to their authority, to rule over you with the power of the state, inevitably concluding in your painfully agonizing death and the extinction of your bloodline,” (user 40). Meanwhile, user 35 not only maintained the boundaries between themselves and the left, but they also activated the boundaries between themselves and mainstream conservatives by telling ‘small stories’ using anti-civil discourses about “‘cuckservatives.” User 35 posted a meme of an old man clenching his fist and shouting, “By golly if I’m gonna be demographically replaced by hostile, 3rd world mud people so my grandkids are a hated minority with no future...

⁴⁴ Users often used white South African farmers as an example of ‘white genocide’ being underway.

⁴⁵ Those within American Institutions who faithfully follow the (((communists))) as mentioned in Chapter 2.

⁴⁶ The term ‘14 Words’ refers to a well-known white supremacist slogan used as a phrase of resistance against Jewish-led white genocide (Anti-Defamation League, n.d.). The slogan is as follows: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children” (Anti-Defamation League, n.d.).

it had better be done lawfully and strictly by the DAMNED BOOK!!!,” representing ‘cuckservatives’ as complicit in the (((communist))) plot. Users asserted that any group that worked against the best interests of white Americans by supporting – or at least not opposing – any sort of immigration of people of colour belonged outside of the users’ group boundaries. However, user 35 did propose the deactivation of boundaries between all white folks so they can fight together for what is in the so-called ‘best interest’ of white Americans. User 35 states that “[a]t a certain point [w]hites are going to have to shove all of our disagreements up our collective asses if we want to have a future where [we] are something other than tax and sex slaves.”

Users 19 and 31 called for the creation of pro-white organizations all over the U.S., which would “band together to protect [their interests]” (user 31), again, strengthening the ties amongst, and maintaining the social boundaries around, white folks as a group. On the more



(Vintage Cookbooks, 2018).

extreme end, user 19 suggested that the only way for the white ‘race’ to survive would be to establish a white ethnostate, which entails the (co)construction not only of symbolic boundaries but of political and geographical ones as

well. User 9 posted a picture

of a mid-twentieth century backyard barbecue, captioning it as an “average day in the

ethnostate.” Using the picture, user 9 constructed an imagined white ethnostate as a utopian civil society where everyone within its borders – or boundaries – lived in all-white, suburban neighbourhoods full of safe and happy traditional, nuclear Christian families. Users framed this utopian civil sphere using discourses of the pure, the unpolluted, and the sacred.

It was common for users to post vintage pictures and illustrations depicting a utopian vision of the mid-twentieth century, white, suburban, middle-class, traditional family (users 2, 12, 19, 26, and 40). Many of the illustrations were related to Christmas, for example, a June Cleaveresque housewife hanging ornaments on her Christmas tree or a heterosexual couple with their son and daughter gathered around their Christmas tree. The obvious reason for this would be that the Christmas season occurred during the time that I was collecting data. However, within the context of this study, the strong focus on Christmas was unsurprising given its place as the quintessential American family holiday, tied to deeply engrained traditions and feelings of nostalgia. Additionally, users were amongst those Americans who demanded that the sanctity of Christmas be maintained by “KEEP[ING] CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS” (user 28). Interestingly, user 28 managed to tie the ‘war on Christmas’ back to the (((communists))), stating that “the Jewish/Commie war on Christmas is not a new one” while sharing a picture of an article from the December 1, 1960 issue of ‘Common Sense,’ an American anti-communist newspaper.

*“Stop being a degenerate. Go to church.
Start a family. Build a community” (user 26).*

In an effort to hold on to a pure and idealized version of the past, users stressed the importance of white folks living the ‘#Tradlife’⁴⁷ unless they were okay with “go[ing] the way of

⁴⁷ An abbreviation of ‘traditional life.’

the dinosaurs” (user 19). The #Tradlife represents users’ desire for the “restoration and preservation of traditional values” (user 11). At the core of maintaining those traditional values lies the social reproduction work of the family, particularly that of the mother. Hence the emphasis that users placed on maintaining traditional gender roles within white, middle-class families while resisting the ‘gender-bending’ political correctness of the left (user 21). Users 2, 11, 12, 18, 19, 21, 26, 32, 35, and 40 (co)constructed the primary identities of men and women in ‘trad families’ as husbands/fathers and wives/mothers, preserving the hierarchically structured gendered division of labour.

*“If you’re looking for happiness marry a traditional woman who can cook well.
Don’t marry a Shitlib female Commie they don’t know how to even make
mac n cheese except to heat it up in the microwave” (user 40).*

User 21 argued that white men needed to “turn off the video game, stop watching porn and get off the couch.” Also, instead of “getting drunk in night clubs and having one-night stands” (user 21), white men needed to find “#tradwives”⁴⁸ (user 40) to “protect” (users 12 and 18), so that they could start having “many beautiful white babies” (user 21). Likewise, users 12 and 18 stated that white women needed to find ‘good,’ white men to protect them (users 12 and 35). White women also needed to learn to conform to the standards of a ‘good’ #tradwife, which included but were not limited to: (1) no longer “dressing like sluts” (users 35) and, instead, learning to be modest (user 18); (2) learning to “celebrate their femininity” (user 21); (3) supporting their husbands by “prepar[ing] the meals” (user 32); and last, but certainly not least, (4) becoming mothers (users 2, 11, 18, 19, 21, 26, 35, 40). User 11 believed that “[white] [m]en

⁴⁸ There is a #TradWife movement amongst American housewives, which has been spreading across various social media platforms.

are creatures of purpose.” If you “[g]ive them a family, a home, a country to defend [...] they will strive to become their best” (user 11). However, if you “[t]ake those things away [...], they become a statistic” (user 11). Using discourses of repression, user 20 asserted that if users were “lucky, between abortion and feminized males, [the left] [would] make themselves extinct.” This statement demonstrates users’ belief that eliminating the existence of out-groups would be beneficial to users in so far as it would: (1) hypothetically maintain the traditional, white, nuclear family by eliminating any threat to the #TradLife posed by out-groups; and (2) render a white, utopian civil society possible.

Chapter Five

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

I conducted a narrative analysis that was informed by Tilly's (2005) and Tilly and Tarrow's (2007) work on contentious politics, Alexander's (2006) work on the civil sphere and its civil/anti-civil symbolic codes and discourses of liberty and repression, and Georgakopoulou's (2013; 2015) concept of 'small stories.' Tilly (2005, p. 140) and Tilly and Tarrow (2007, p. 81) wrote that storytelling sets the stage for the (co)construction of identities. Through the act of telling stories – in this case, by posting small, fragmented pieces of narrative – about the relations between themselves and others, actors continuously negotiate and renegotiate the boundaries which do or do not separate them. To answer my research question – “How do Gab users' 'small stories' produce an understanding of alt-right pillars of identity?” – I focused on questions of collective identity; “[w]ho are we?” [...] and “[w]ho are they?” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 78).

This research demonstrates that when combined, many of the users' 'small stories' transformed into one big story about a conspiratorial plot planned by the Jewish elite – or the (((communists))) as I refer to them throughout this paper – to dominate the United States, and more broadly, the world. I look to these 'small stories' to build the basic framework of whom users believe themselves to be versus whom they believe other groups are. On a very basic level, users perceived themselves and other white, far-right Christians as morally good, rational, freethinking, hardworking, American patriots, that is to say, civil, pure, unpolluted, and sacred. On the contrary, users (co)constructed the out-groups in terms of binary opposites and false

moral dichotomies: anti-civil, impure, polluted, profane, evil, irrational, brainwashed, lazy, non-Christian, anti-American Communists.

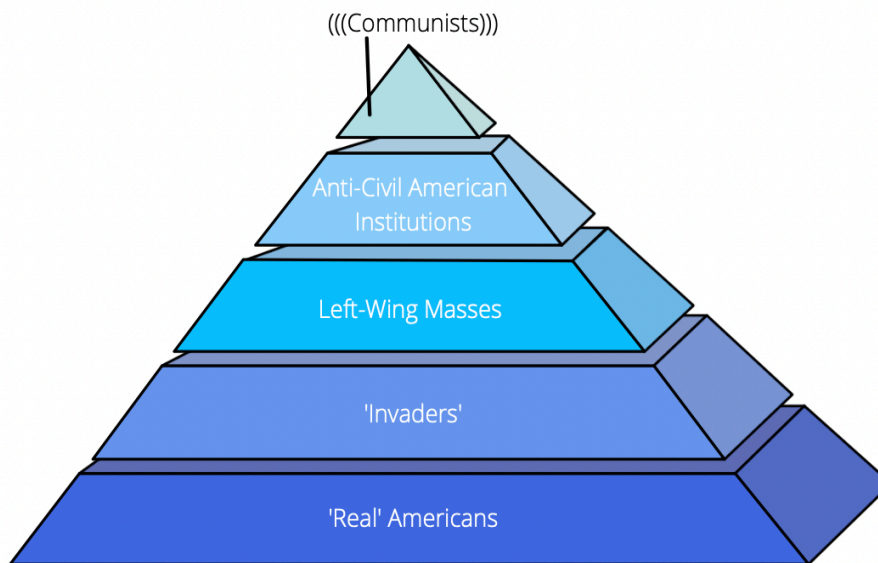
(Re)telling 'small stories' about their white, Christian ancestors building the United States from the ground up with nothing but hard work and sacrifice reinforced users' feelings of ownership over and superior moral standing within the context of the United States. Users called the U.S. their homeland and, in enacting discourses of liberty, stated that in democratic civil societies, the government ought to do what is in the best interest of those with civility, that is to say those with the capacity for decision-making (in this case, the right-wing, white population). It was throughout these (re)tellings that users (co)constructed themselves as patriots and 'real' Americans. Here, the symbolic boundaries that shaped perceptions of whom deserved to be considered an American, and whom did not, worked as primary and pertinent social boundaries within the users' stories, particularly about themselves. As users perceived a cross-boundary threat to the current construction of themselves as moral, pure, and worthy of being considered 'real' Americans, the boundaries between users and those whom they believed to be a threat crystalized.

Through their 'small stories,' users shaped the hierarchical structure of the groups within the (((communist))) conspiracy theory into a pyramid (see Figure 1. on the following page). On the top tier were the (((communists))), whom users claimed were using those below them in the pyramid to take control of the United States to turn it into a communist dystopia. On the second tier were the actors who work within anti-civil American Institutions (e.g., the Democratic Party, criminal justice system, public education system, 'mainstream media,' entertainment industry, and technology industry). These groups have the power to change policies and laws, as well as use 'brainwashing' (pollution) and discourses of repression to promote enforcement of political correctness amongst the general public by the left-wing masses (who are on the third

tier down). Users argued that the proliferation of political correctness had caused a decrease in the importance of meritocratic values, thus conversely increasing instances of anti-white discrimination and censorship. Users believed that these societal changes would ultimately bring about 'white genocide.'

Figure 1.

The (((Communist))) Conspiracy Theory Power Structure



On the fourth tier down were the 'invaders' (e.g., Islamic immigrants and members of the fall 2018 Central American migrant caravan). Users made claims that the (((communists))) were transporting 'hordes' of these 'invaders' to the U.S. to (1) increase the Democrat Party's voter base and (2) be used as change agents to transform American culture and society through a demographic shift. Finally, users (e.g., the 'real' Americans) positioned themselves on the bottom tier, victimized by anti-right/anti-white discrimination, censorship, and line-cutters. Users, however, resisted what they saw as a wrongful positioning as anti-civil actors in need of repression. Users argued that their rightful place was at the top of the power structure.

When (re)telling ‘small stories’ involving themselves and the ‘characters’ outlined above, users frequently drew upon civil symbolic codes (good/evil, pure/impure, polluted/unpolluted, sacred/profane, etc.) to (co)construct a narrative of their collective victimhood. Most notably were the ‘small stories’ that users (re)told about the left using political correctness as an anti-civil tool of repression which was leading to their censorship and displacement by ‘line-cutters.’ Users believed that these perceived acts of exclusion via anti-white and anti-right discrimination would ultimately lead to white genocide.

Users explained white genocide as a loss of political and cultural power due to the process of evolving racial demographics in the U.S. Users maintained that their power would decrease in direct proportion with the decrease in the percentage of white Americans. Users claimed that the (((communists))) were manufacturing a white genocide by way of (1) forcibly increasing population(s) of colour through ‘funded invasions’ and (2) decreasing the percentage of white Americans through the destruction of the traditional, white, Christian nuclear family. Users focused on the role of white children in reproducing white Euro-American heritage and values, and how they needed to be protected from (((communism))) at all costs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

From this study arises three substantive findings which are worthy of further consideration and investigation: (1) the implications of a highly dense network of alt-right members; (2) the severity of anti-Semitic rhetoric and centrality of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in users’ ‘small stories’; and (3) the alt-right’s pervasive sense of fear around experiencing race-based victimization.

As detailed in my ‘Data and Methods’ section, I initially speculated that the alt-right consisted of three broad segments – pseudo-intellectual white nationalist, neo-Nazi, internet

troll. However, what I found was a single, very densely connected network⁴⁹. This suggests that while there may be minor differences between Richard Spencer, Andrew Anglin, and Baked Alaska, the key figures that I initially proposed to represent each of the three purportedly distinct segments, they, along with those most closely connected to them, are virtually indistinguishable in terms of the ‘small stories’ that they used to (co)construct the pillars of their collective identity. The superficial differences between these segments can be posited to reflect the audience that they seek to attract. For example, not only is Richard Spencer clean-cut, well-dressed, and articulate, but he also presents a toned-down, publicly palatable David Duke-esque message about the benefits of white nationalism for the sake of maintaining white rights. In contrast, Andrew Anglin, for instance, is provocative in his messaging and unabashedly presents himself as a neo-Nazi.

The high network density of Gab also suggests a need to investigate the potential inadvertent consequences of policies around banning users from mainstream social media platforms. A majority of the users in this study were exceptionally vocal about Twitter’s banning of prominent alt-right figures, as well as the perception that Twitter was anti-alt-right in general. Users began to migrate to Gab during the time of my data collection in search of a safe space where they were free to post whatever they wanted without the threat of being ostracized and/or banned.

While suspending or banning alt-right accounts from mainstream social media platforms serves to remove hate speech from our spaces, it fails to alter the underlying belief systems of these users. In fact, it reinforces their belief that so-called ‘Silicon Valley’ is indeed part of a plot to subjugate them. More importantly, however, it causes users to migrate to spaces

⁴⁹ There was a network density of 0.82.

where their ideas are already predominant (e.g., Gab, Parler, 8kun, etc.). Social media platforms with a high network density, such as Gab, result in users encountering a great deal of repetition of information. This repetition of homogenous information further reinforces users' beliefs and provides a solid foundation for the formation of echo chambers and ideological silos. Whereas, when the users predominately used Twitter, there was the potential to be exposed to a more diverse range of ideas and opinions.

That is not to say that allowing hate speech online is without consequences. One of the most prominent findings of this study was the vitriol aimed at Jewish folks within the users' 'small stories,' as well as the centrality of anti-Semitism in (co)constructing the pillars of alt-right identity. The Judeo-Communist New World Order-type conspiracy theory detailed in this study has served to shape recent real-world events, such as the Tree of Life synagogue mass shooting and the mantra of the Charlottesville tiki-torch rally, 'Jews will not replace us.' An obvious concern surrounds the potential for anti-Semitic hate speech online to lead to anti-Semitic hate crimes offline, creating terror within the Jewish community and causing a loss of life. It is a worthwhile cause to further explore: (1) the potential relationship between online anti-Semitic sentiment and its influence on the frequency and severity of offline acts of anti-Semitic violence and discrimination; (2) why these old stories and myths about Jewish folks as a nefarious force continue to circulate and how they are currently relevant, particularly to rural White Americans; and (3) how to reduce the spread of mis- and disinformation online without inadvertently creating echo chambers or ideological silos.

The 'small stories' that I have detailed throughout this paper have served as sites of identity (co)construction and boundary formation for the users. To answer Tilly and Tarrow's (2007, p.78) questions of '[w]ho are we?' [...] and '[w]ho are they?' At the most basic level, users (co)constructed themselves as pure, unpolluted, civil, moral, and good while

(co)constructing the out-groups as impure, polluted, anti-civil, immoral, and evil. However, users recognized that the out-groups had also (co)constructed themselves as pure, civil, and good while (co)constructing users as impure, anti-civil, and evil. Using discourses of liberty and repression, users made claims of collective victimhood that involved them being wrongfully repressed and increasingly excluded from the decision-making processes of democratic civil society by the purportedly more powerful groups on the other side of the boundary.

At the core of the 'small stories' was an account of race-based victimization from the users' perspective. Initially, I questioned the sincerity of the users' victimhood claims and assumed that the claims were merely a tactic to gain sympathy. While I acknowledge that that may very well be a contributing factor, looking at my data in conjunction with the preexisting literature, I can conclude that a majority of the users who made victimhood claims genuinely felt victimized by the left, particularly through the left's use of political correctness as an anti-civil tool of oppression. Leaving aside the matter of the dubious credibility of claims of race-based victimization of white folks, this study demonstrates the pervasiveness of the sense of fear within the alt-right regarding such victimization and white genocide. Reductive dichotomous thinking – a common cognitive distortion and defense mechanism – is at the core of the users' frequent constitution and employment of binary oppositions. Additionally, as detailed in the literature review, the use of conspiracy theories as a mode of explanation works as a defense mechanism to help individuals cope with a complex, chaotic, and rapidly changing world.

Recent real-world examples of actors looking to conspiracy theories for simple explanations to complex and disruptive problems are (1) anti-COVID vaxxers and anti-maskers, and (2) the January 6th Capitol insurrection, where a large group of far-right actors stormed the U.S. Capitol building in an attempt to disrupt the democratic electoral process. Many of the far-

right actors were QAnon supporters and believed in a conspiracy theory that shares multiple core elements with the conspiracy theory detailed in this study. By far, the most challenging but timely recommendation that I can make for future research involves investigating whether conspiracy theories can be counteracted on a large scale. If so, what are the potential methods of counteraction, and if the latter are ineffective, what are the alternatives?

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Appendices

Appendix A

Deplatforming Statement October 28, 2018



Gab.com is under attack. We have been systematically no-platformed by App Stores, multiple hosting providers, and several payment processors. We have been smeared by the mainstream media for defending free expression and individual liberty for all people and for working with law enforcement to ensure that justice is served for the horrible atrocity committed in Pittsburgh. Gab will continue to fight for the fundamental human right to speak freely.

As we transition to a new hosting provider Gab will be inaccessible for a period of time. We are working around the clock to get Gab.com back online. Thank you and remember to speak freely.

(Torba, 2018).

Appendix B

Deplatforming Statement October 30, 2018

Gab has spent the past 48 hours proudly working with the DOJ and FBI to bring justice to an alleged terrorist. Because of the data we provided, they now have plenty of evidence for their case. In the midst of this Gab has been no-platformed by essential internet infrastructure providers at every level. We are the most censored, smeared, and no-platformed startup in history, which means we are a threat to the media and to the Silicon Valley Oligarchy.

Gab isn't going anywhere.

It doesn't matter what you write. It doesn't matter what the sophist talking heads say on TV. It doesn't matter what verified nobodies say on Twitter. We have plenty of options, resources, and support. We will exercise every possible avenue to keep Gab online and defend free speech and individual liberty for all people.

You have all just made Gab a nationally recognized brand as the home of free speech online at a time when Silicon Valley is stifling political speech they disagree with to interfere in a US election.

The internet is not reality. TV is not reality. 80% of normal everyday people agree with Gab and support free expression and liberty. The online outrage mob and mainstream media spin machine are the minority opinion. People are waking up, so please keep pointing the finger at a social network instead of pointing the finger at the alleged shooter who holds sole responsibility for his actions.

No-platform us all you want. Ban us all you want. Smear us all you want.

You can't stop an idea.

As we transition to a new hosting provider Gab will be inaccessible for a period of time. We are working around the clock to get Gab.com back online. Thank you and remember to speak freely.

Andrew Torba, CEO Gab.com

(Torba, 2018).

Appendix C

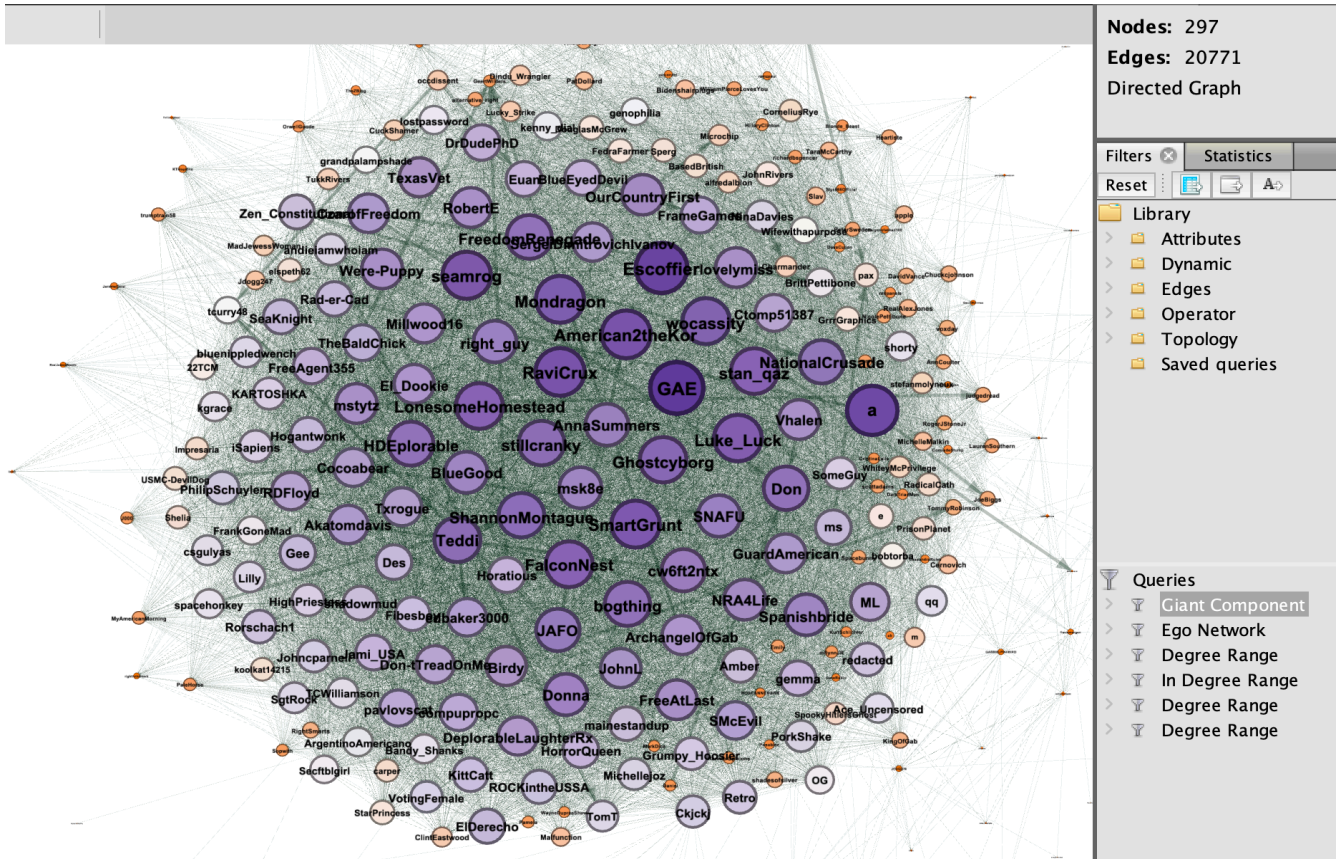
Binary Oppositions in Civil Discourse

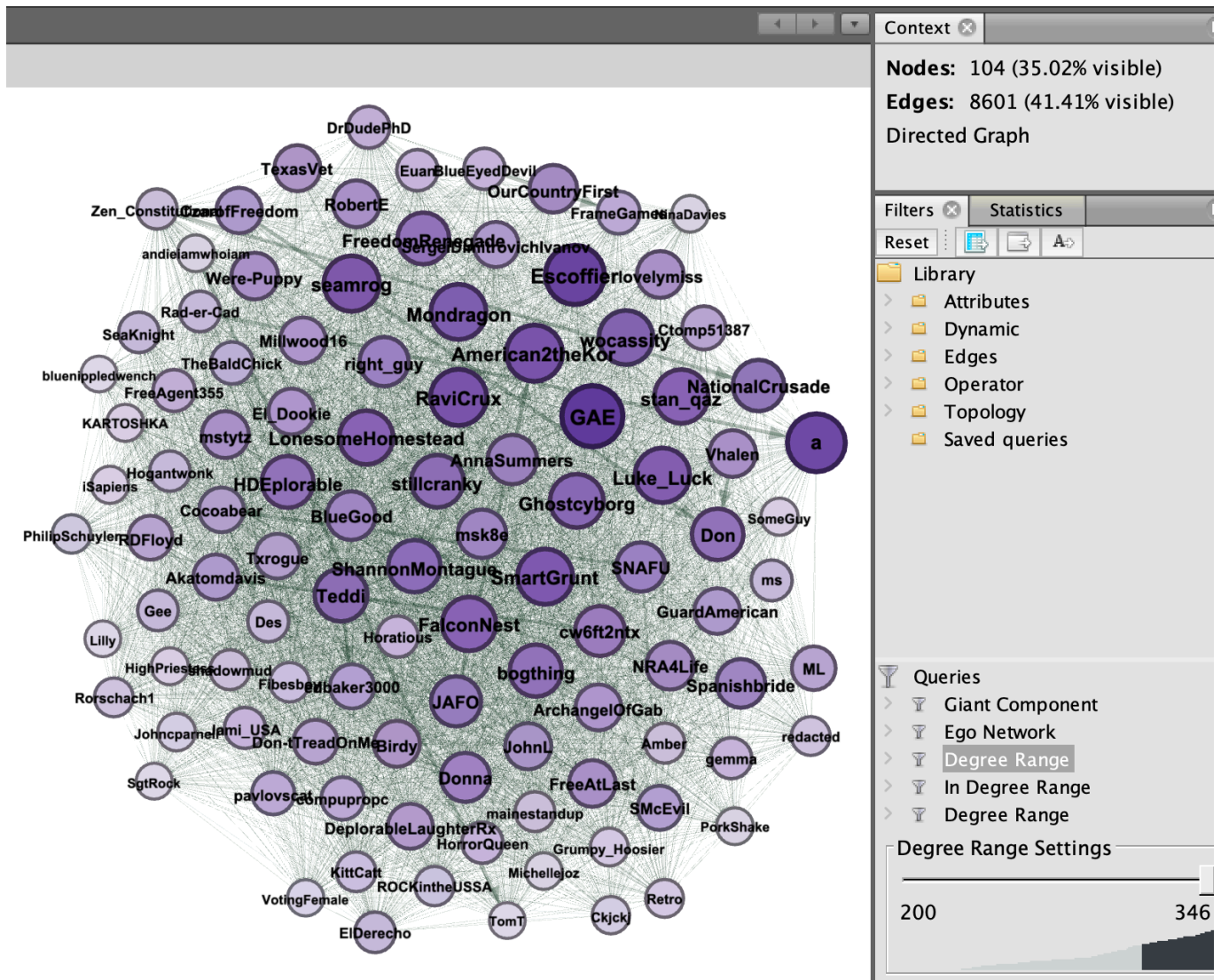
Civil Motives	Anti-Civil Motives	Civil Relations	Anti-Civil Relations	Civil Institutions	Anti-Civil Institutions
Active	Passive	Open	Secretive	Rule regulated	Arbitrary
Autonomous	Dependent	Trusting	Suspicious	Law	Power
Rational	Irrational	Critical	Deferential	Equality	Hierarchy
Reasonable	Hysterical	Honorable	Self-interested	Inclusive	Exclusive
Calm	Excitable	Altruistic	Greedy	Impersonal	Personal
Self-controlled	Wild-passionate	Truthful	Deceitful	Contracts	Bonds of loyalty
Realistic	Distorted	Straightfoward	Calculcating	Groups	Factions
Sane	Mad	Deliberative	Conspiratorial	Office	Personality
		Friendly	Antagonistic		

Adapted from Alexander (2006, p.57-59)

Appendix D

Network Visualization: Giant Component





Appendix F

Nodes with the Highest Degree Centrality

Id	Label	Degree	Id	Label	Degree
1	GAE	346	26	SNAFU	278
2	Escoffier	335	27	right_guy	278
3	a	328	28	Donna	277
4	RaviCrux	319	29	BlueGood	275
5	American2theKor	319	30	Spanishbride	275
6	seamrog	315	31	msk8e	274
7	SmartGrunt	314	32	NRA4Life	270
8	Mondragon	313	33	OurCountryFirst	269
9	Luke_Luck	310	34	RobertE	265
10	wocassity	307	35	mstytz	265
11	LonesomeHomestead	305	36	lovelymiss	264
12	stan_qaz	305	37	Vhalen	264
13	FalconNest	305	38	Were-Puppy	264
14	Ghostcyborg	303	39	FreeAtLast	264
15	Teddi	299	40	JohnL	261
16	stillcranky	297	41	TexasVet	260
17	ShannonMontague	296	42	Birdy	260
18	bogthing	294	43	ArchangelOfGab	259
19	HDEplorable	293	44	Millwood16	259
20	FreedomRenegade	292	45	El_Dookie	259
21	Don	291	46	GuardAmerican	258
22	NationalCrusade	290	47	CzarofFreedom	257
23	JAFO	283	48	Akatomdavis	256
24	cw6ft2ntx	282	49	SergeiDimitrovichIvanov	255
25	AnnaSummers	279	50	DeplorableLaughterRx	254

Appendix G

Codes and their Frequencies

Code	Frequency
Anti-White Discrimination	1012
Democratic Party	307
The Left'	298
Family	281
Censorship	272
White Genocide	252
Islamic Immigrants	252
Free Speech	239
Anti-Right Discrimination	201
Line-Cutters/Meritocracy	178
Jewish elite	174
((Communist)))	142
Real' Americans	141
Mainstream Media	129
Anti-Christian Discrimination	123
Invasion/Invaders	101
Political Correctness	98
Morality	96
Black Americans	96
Migrant Caravan	92
Merry Christmas' as a term of resistance	89
Traditional/#TradLife	80
Feminists	73
George Soros	71
LGBTQ+	63
ANTIFA	55
Cleanliness/Disease	52
Non-Player Character (NPC)	48
Cult/Brainwashed	47
Race Traitors	37
Silicon Valley	33
((Hollywood)))	25
Snowflake	26
Criminal Justice System	21
Homeless Veterans	17

Appendix H

Anti-Alt-Right Stickers at the Entrance of Emancipation Park, Charlottesville, Virginia



(Fraser, 2018)